

Adolescents in protracted displacement: exploring risks of age- and gender-based violence among Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the State of Palestine

Elizabeth Presler-Marshall, Bassam Abu Hamad, Sally Youssef, Nicola Jones, Sarah Baird, Agnieszka Małachowska

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Introduction

Palestine refugees, of whom there are nearly 6 million, primarily live in the countries surrounding the land that is now recognised by most UN member states as the State of Palestine (UNRWA, 2021a). Displaced since 1948, when the birth of the Israeli state forced 80% of the Palestinians living in the area to abandon their property and flee, they are the longest-displaced group of refugees in the world (ibid). Palestine refugees are largely excluded from labour markets, due to blockades and national laws (depending on context), and subsequently have high rates of poverty. Most depend on services and support delivered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its governmental and non-governmental partners for survival. Already moved out of the limelight by the Syrian crisis, which has diverted international attention and funding for the last decade, support for UNRWA – and Palestinians – was further complicated in 2018, when the Trump administration withdrew US funding that constituted a third of UNRWA's budget (Aljazeera, 2018). It was tested again in 2020, when the covid-19 pandemic led to an explosion of need (UNRWA, 2020a).

Palestinian adolescents, whether they live in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank and are enduring repeated bouts of conflict with Israel; in Jordan and are coming of age in the midst of the social and economic upheaval following the influx of Syrian refugees over the last decade; or Lebanon and are witnessing the collapse of the government and the economy, face myriad threats to their well-being. These include age- and gender-based violence and exploitation in the home, at school and in the community (Jones et al., 2021; UNFPA, 2021; Abou-Zahr, 2021; Nilsson and Badran, 2021; El-Khodary et al., 2020, 2018; Chabaan et al., 2016; PCBS, 2015; Tiltne and Zhang, 2013). With the world's attention elsewhere, however, most of those threats remain largely invisible. This report draws on data collected by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme to begin addressing evidence gaps and exploring the protection risks facing Palestinian adolescents. Where possible, it pays attention to how the pandemic has amplified and shifted those risks.

Background

In 2018, of the approximately 13 million Palestinians living around the globe, 5.7 million were formally registered with UNRWA as refugees. Of these, 42% live in the State of Palestine (25% in Gaza and 17% in the West Bank), 39% live in Jordan, 11% live in Syria and 9% live in Lebanon (UNRWA, 2021a; PCBS, 2019) (see Figure 1). Across countries, roughly half of all Palestine refugees live in one of 58 recognised camps, which UNRWA provides with services but does not administer; the rest live in host communities (UNRWA, 2021a).

The State of Palestine is comprised of two territories, with different governments and markedly different trajectories. The Gaza Strip is less than a quarter of the size of London – and yet home to more than 2 million people (66% of whom are registered as refugees). Since 2007, when Hamas gained control of Gaza's government and Israel imposed a blockade, the area has been in continual decline. It has suffered recurrent conflict with Israel (most recently in May 2021) and has a staggeringly high unemployment rate (43% in 2019) (UNRWA, 2021b). Refugees in Gaza, 80% of whom depend on international aid for survival, live in host communities or one of eight formal camps (ibid.). The West Bank is home to nearly 900,000 Palestine refugees. It is largely under Israeli control, despite the fact that it forms the bulk of the territory of the State of Palestine and is ostensibly administered (at least in part) by the Palestinian Authority (UNRWA, 2021c). There are 19 formal camps in the West Bank. Child marriage is common in Palestine; it remains legal in Gaza and while a 2019 law made it illegal in the West Bank, exceptions are still allowed (Ragson, 2019; Abu Hamad et al., 2021a; Presler-Marshall et al., 2020). Of women aged 20–24, 15% were married before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, 2021). Of girls aged 15–19, 7.9% are already married (PCBS, 2021).

UNRWA (2021d) reports that nearly 2.4 million registered Palestinian refugees live in Jordan, which has struggled to absorb over 1 million refugees from Syria over the last decade. About 80% of Palestinian refugees living in Jordan have Jordanian citizenship and as such have access to both the labour market and government services. The remainder, most of whom live in one of 10

recognised camps, lack citizenship and its attendant benefits (including opportunities to pursue professional work). They are disproportionately likely to be unemployed and poor (Tiltnes and Zhang, 2013). Palestinian girls living in Jordan – especially those living in camps – are at high risk of child marriage (Abu Hamad et al., 2021a; Presler-Marshall et al., 2020). At the time of the last survey with Palestine refugees, 12% of 15–19-year-old girls living in camps were already married (Tiltnes and Zhang, 2013; see also UNICEF and ICRW, 2017a).

Lebanon, which hosts the highest number of refugees per capita globally, is home to approximately 183,000¹ Palestine refugees – about 18,000 of whom fled to Lebanon from Syria in the early 2010s (CSA and PCBS, 2018). UNRWA (2021e) estimates that 45% live in one of 12 extremely overcrowded formal camps, the largest of which (home to over 54,000 people) is Ein el-Hilweh (see also Anera, 2021). That camp, located in Saida, south Lebanon, has been overrun by worsening violence for more than a decade, as rival political factions have jockeyed for control in the absence of active policing by Lebanese authorities (UNRWA, 2017; Anera, 2020).² Palestine refugees living in Lebanon are excluded from well-paid professions and are prohibited from owning property. Although these restrictions have long led to high rates of unemployment and poverty (the poverty rate was 65% in 2015) (Chabaan et al., 2016), the collapse of the Lebanese economy, beginning in 2019, has exacerbated Palestinians' vulnerability. Food insecurity and violence have skyrocketed alongside inflation, which was estimated at nearly 85% in 2020 (Khraiche and Goyeneche, 2021). Child marriage is common among Palestinians living in Lebanon, which continues to lack a national law regarding the minimum age for marriage and instead allows girls to marry as young as nine, depending on their religion. Nationally, of Palestinian women aged 20–24, 12% were married before the age of 18 (UNICEF and ICRW, 2017b).

Pandemic-related repercussions have been especially severe for Palestine refugees, owing to the pre-existing fragility of economies, services and populations of the countries in which they live. In the State of Palestine, the World Bank (2021a) estimates that the poverty rate has increased to 30%. Gaza, already in collapse, was especially

hard hit – with a predicted poverty rate of 64% in 2020 (World Bank as cited in Al Jazeera, 2020). In Jordan, where the national poverty rate was expected to climb by 11% due to the pandemic (on a base of 15.7%) (World Bank, 2021b), UNRWA (2020b) found that half of Palestinian households had had their work disrupted and that two-thirds were worried about food security. In Lebanon, where UNICEF (2021) estimates that the extreme poverty rate has tripled since the start of 2020 and that 55% of the Lebanese population is now living below the poverty line, impacts on Palestinians are reported as particularly dire – but have not been measured. Critically, for adolescents, access to education has been severely disrupted (Banati et al., 2020). In Palestine, schools have been largely online since the pandemic was declared. Although students have returned to the classroom several times, they have been sent home again just weeks after each reopening (Abu-Hamad et al., 2021b). In Jordan, schools were closed between March 2020 and August 2021,³ with education delivered online and via TV (Abu Hamad et al., 2021c). In Lebanon, students returned to the classroom for six weeks in late spring 2021, and the Minister of Education has announced that schools will reopen in mid October 2021 but given the ongoing crisis the feasibility of this remains unclear. This is in part due to the pandemic and in part due to the economic collapse, which has left households without the means to afford school supplies and transport and more critically left schools without electricity and heat (Arab News, 2021; The National, 2021).

Across operational fields, UNRWA – which was established by the UN in 1949 specifically to provide relief for refugees from Palestine – delivers education, health, mental health and survivor services, alongside emergency cash and food support. As noted above, it does this with funding that has been depleted in recent years by shifting political winds and ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen that have diverted focus from longer-term needs. In 2018, the Trump administration withdrew all US funding for UNRWA, leaving it with a 30% funding gap in its US\$1.2 billion budget (Aljazeera, 2018). Although President Biden has announced a restoration of funding (UNRWA, 2021f), UNRWA's budget gap is still expected to be large in 2021, in part because Gulf states (including the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain)

1 There are over 470,000 Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in Lebanon. The most recent census of Palestine refugees, however, found markedly fewer still living in the country. It reports just over 165,000 Palestinians from Lebanon and just under 18,000 Palestinians from Syria (CSA and PCBS, 2018).

2 Government authority inside of camps is limited due to a historical – and now defunct – agreement between the Government and Lebanon and the Palestine Liberation Organization (UNHCR, 2016).

3 Classrooms opened several times for the youngest students – only to shutter again. Older students were kept at home.

Figure 1: Where do Palestinian refugees live?



Source: adapted from mapchart.net

(Hatuqa, 2021) have drastically reduced their contributions and in part because the pandemic has increased the need for healthcare and emergency relief (UNRWA, 2021g). As of August 2021, only about half of its budget had been confirmed (UNRWA, 2021h).

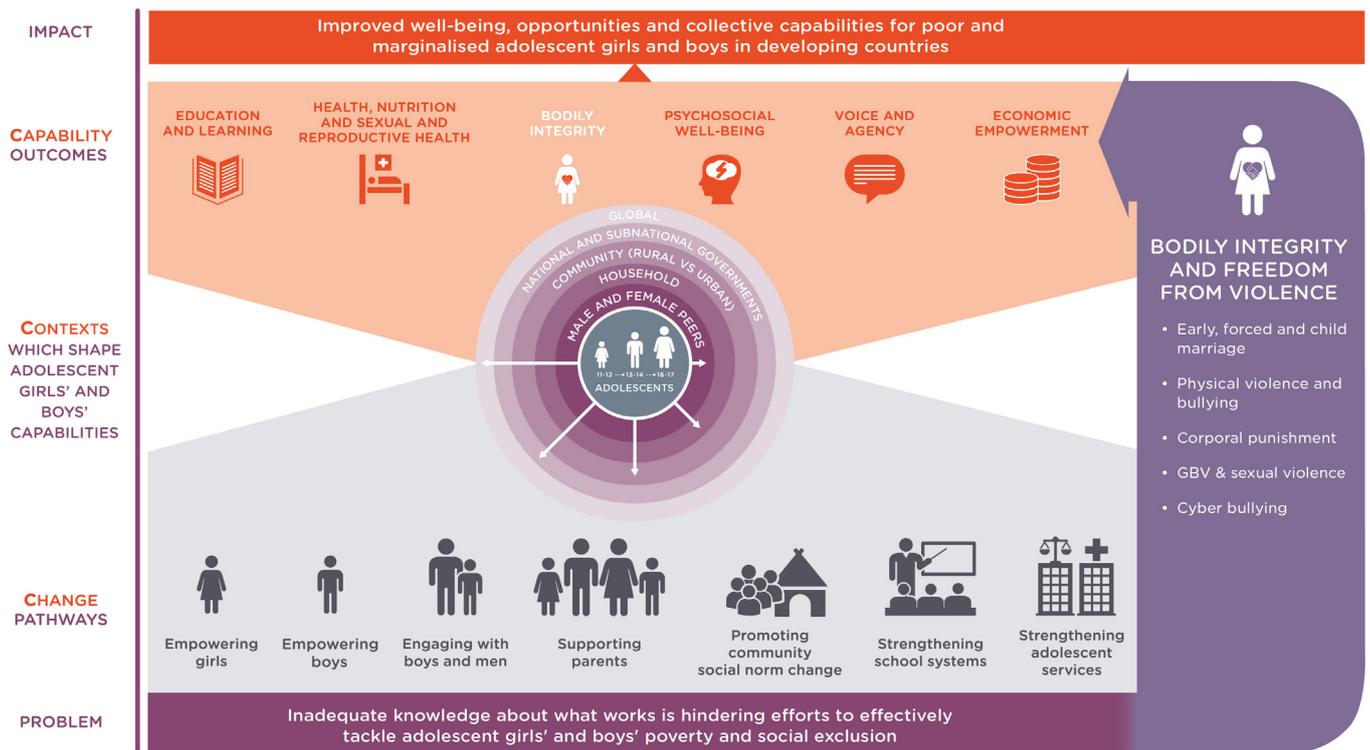
Conceptual framing

Informed by the emerging evidence base on adolescent well-being and development, GAGE's conceptual framework takes a holistic approach that pays careful attention to the interconnectedness of what we call the '3 Cs' – capabilities, change strategies and contexts – to understand what works to support adolescent girls'

development and empowerment, both now and in the future. 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 to improve adolescent girls' capabilities.

The first building block of our conceptual framework is capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1984; 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,

Figure 2: GAGE’s framing of bodily integrity



Source: GAGE consortium, 2019.

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 girls with diverse trajectories, including the most marginalised and ‘hardest to reach’ such as those who are disabled or are already mothers.

The second building block is context dependency. Our ‘3 C’s’ framework situates girls socio-ecologically and recognises not only that adolescent girls at different stages in the life course have different needs and constraints, but that these are also highly dependent on girls’ contexts at the family/household, community, state and global levels.

The third and final building block of our conceptual framework – change strategies – acknowledges that girls’ contextual realities will not only shape the pathways through which they develop capabilities but also determine the change strategies open to them to improve their outcomes. Our ecological approach emphasises that to nurture transformative change in girls’ capabilities and broader well-being, potential change strategies must simultaneously invest in integrated intervention

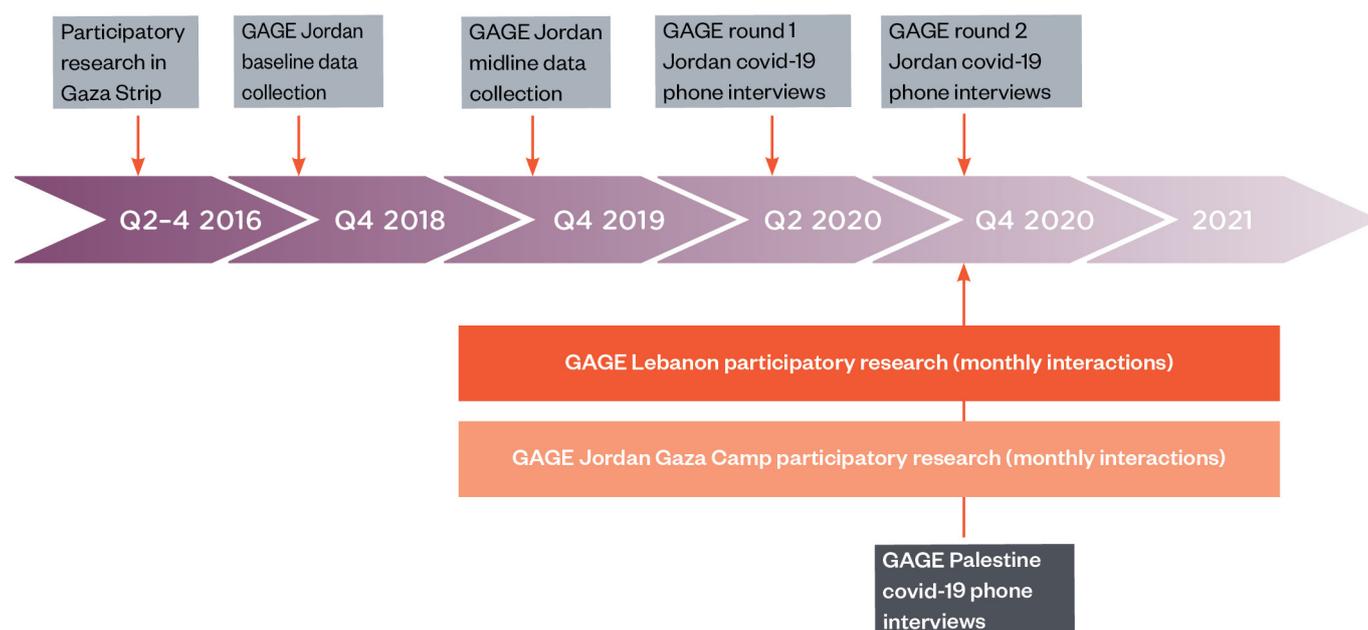
approaches at different levels, weaving together policies and programming that support girls, their families and their communities while also working to effect change at the systems level.

GAGE’s broader work focuses on six core capabilities: education and learning; health, sexual and reproductive health, and nutrition; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; economic empowerment; and bodily integrity and freedom from age- and gender-based violence. This report – which is focused on child protection – includes the last of these capabilities and also attention to child labour (see Figure 2).

Methods

The broader GAGE programme is the world’s largest study focused on adolescents in the Global South. It is following 20,000 young people – in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia – over the course of nine years as they transition into, through and out of adolescence (into early adulthood). In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, GAGE’s sample and methods vary by context. Each country has different workstreams – each of which has pivoted in different ways to accommodate the covid-19 pandemic (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Timeline of GAGE data collection before and during the covid-19 pandemic in MENA



In Jordan, GAGE is using mixed methods (see Table 1). Baseline quantitative and qualitative data was collected in late 2018 and early 2019. Our total quantitative sample includes 4,100 adolescents (and their female caregivers) from two different age cohorts, the younger aged 10 to 12 and the older aged 15 to 17. Of those adolescents, 304 are Palestinian. Our total qualitative sample includes 230 adolescents (and their female caregivers). Of those, 45 are Palestinian. We also interviewed dozens of community members, service providers and key informants. Although 80% of Palestinians living in Jordan are Jordanian citizens, nearly all of the Palestinians taking part in the GAGE study live in Gaza Camp and lack citizenship – which means that adults have restricted access to the labour market and children attend UNRWA-run schools rather than government schools. GAGE’s midline data collection was scheduled to take place in the spring of 2020 but was disrupted by the covid-19 pandemic. Instead, we have midline qualitative data and two rounds of phone surveys (conducted with a subset of the broader GAGE sample), aimed at exploring the ways in which young people’s lives and pre-existing vulnerabilities have been shaped by the pandemic. Phone surveys, which were completed by 2,951 adolescents, were complemented by virtual interviews, which were completed by 36 adolescents and 10 key informants.

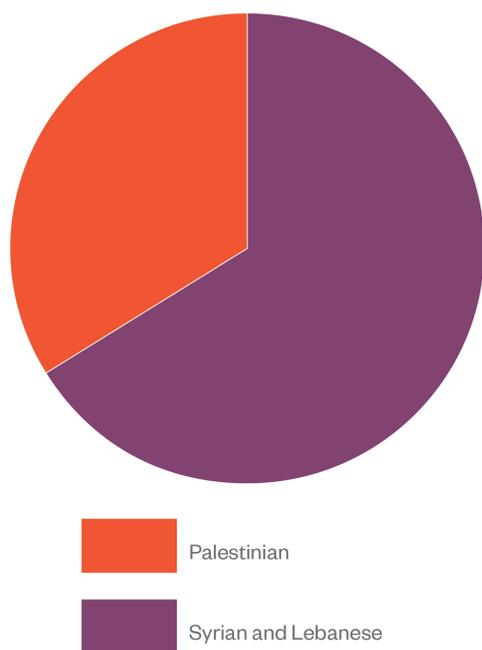
Table 1: GAGE’s Jordan sample

	Total	Palestinians
Baseline survey	4,100	304
Baseline qualitative	230	45
Covid-19 phone survey	2,951	243
Covid-19 interviews	52	20

In Lebanon, GAGE is using qualitative methods. We have been running participatory research groups – in which young people use photography and peer-to-peer interviews – with 89 adolescents, 30 of whom are Palestinian (see Figure 4). The Palestinian young people taking part in GAGE all live in Ein el-Hilweh Camp, which is physically and socially walled off from the host communities around them, and Wavel Camp, which has demarcated borders from the larger community but is not walled off in the same way as Ein el-Hilweh. Research groups formed in 2019 and have been virtual during the pandemic. GAGE’s work in Lebanon also includes interviews with key informants.

In Palestine, GAGE is using mixed methods (see Table 2). In 2016, as part of a pilot, we collected qualitative data from adolescents (primarily girls), their caregivers and key informants. We also conducted a service mapping using a tablet-based survey. In 2019, our in-country research partners collected pre-pandemic survey data from 406 girls who married as children. Between October 2020 and January 2021, GAGE fielded a survey with

Figure 4: GAGE’s Lebanon sample



1,005 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 (split equally between Gaza and the West Bank, and including those who live in formal camps as well as those who do not), completed interviews with 50 adolescents and their caregivers (as well as key informants), and has been running virtual participatory research groups with 56 adolescents. Selection of potential participants for the survey relied on a sampling frame provided by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). In addition, a snowballing approach was used to reach young people considered to be particularly vulnerable, namely adolescents with disabilities, ever-married girls and adolescents who had dropped out of school.

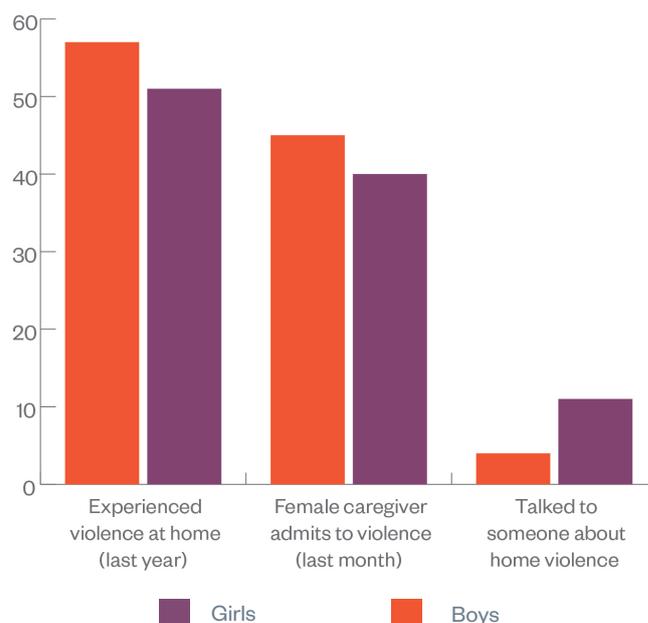
Table 2: GAGE’s Palestine sample

2016 mixed-methods pilot	239
Quantitative survey data with married girls	406
Quantitative covid phone survey	1005
Qualitative covid phone interviews	50
Participatory research	56

Findings

With the caveat that our findings are shaped by our samples, and as such are not necessarily applicable to the less vulnerable adolescents who are unlikely to be included in our research, we turn now to the protection risks faced by Palestinian young people living in Jordan, Lebanon and the State of Palestine. Findings are organised

Figure 5: Violence in the home, by gender



first by country and then by type of protection risk: violence in the home, school and community; child labour and child marriage. Where possible, given data constraints, we clarify the impacts of the covid pandemic on protection risks and discuss young people’s access to the services meant to address those risks.

Jordan

Violence in the home, school and community

For the Palestine refugee adolescents living in Jordan’s Gaza camp, home is not a sanctuary from violence. Across cohorts, over half of young people reported experiencing violence at home in the last year, with boys (57%) disadvantaged compared to girls (51%) (see Figure 5). Female caregivers (primarily mothers) largely agreed with their children. Of the women raising boys, 45% admitted to using violent discipline in the last month (compared to 40% for girls).

Our qualitative work found that violence tends to be meted out for gendered reasons. Boys are generally beaten because they disobey and misbehave. The mother of a younger boy admitted that she beats her son when he fails to report bullying: *‘Sometimes, he doesn’t tell me when boys hit him. Recently, he tells me when boys hit him. I hit him to tell me what happened with him.’* Girls, on the other hand, are most often beaten for violating gender norms – a broad category of offences which includes not

► Sometimes, he doesn't tell me when boys hit him. Recently, he tells me when boys hit him. I hit him to tell me what happened with him.

(The mother of a younger boy)

only speaking to boys (and girls perceived to have socially questionable behaviour) but even opening the door wide enough to be seen by passers-by on the street. The mother of an older girl explained, *'There is a girl in the area who had an affair with one of the boys. If my daughter talked to her I would beat my daughter. Because she might ruin my daughter's future, the future that I hope for her.'*

Our baseline also found that Palestine refugee adolescents living in Gaza camp are unlikely to have ever sought support for violence they experience or witness at home. Of those in our sample, only 11% of girls and 4% of boys had ever spoken to anyone about violence at home (see Figure 7 above). These figures are striking for two reasons. First, while boys are more likely to experience violence than girls, they are less likely to seek support – due to norms about masculinity and stoicism. Second, Palestine refugee adolescents are far less likely than their Jordanian and Syrian peers to seek support for violence at home. Of the latter, 21% of girls and 9% of boys had spoken to someone about violence at home. Our qualitative work suggests that underreporting is largely due to the normalising of violence in the Palestinian community – and limited justice responses. A mother, when asked about recent changes in community norms regarding violence, expressed disdain for young people who report their parents for violence. *'People of today care about themselves only A daughter may file a claim against her father at the family protection agency. They may even imprison the father because he beat his daughter,'* she explained. Key informants, on the other hand, admitted that safeguarding advances are poorly implemented, leaving young people who report even more at risk. One recounted, *'I know a case ... she went to Family Protection and said that her father beat her and her sister, brought the father, and forced him to pledge not to hit them, but when he returned home, he broke their [the girls'] feet.'*

At baseline, Palestinian adolescents participating in the GAGE longitudinal study, nearly all of whom attend UNRWA schools (up to Grade 10) because they live in Gaza camp, also reported high rates of violent discipline at school. Boys (64%) were twice as likely as girls (32%) to report violence at the hands of a teacher. Types of violence

were also gendered. Girls were more likely to report insults to their dignity. A 16-year-old girl recalled, *'There was a punishment where students were asked to go outside the class and stand raising one leg. Or they may ask the student to stand by the rubbish bin as a punishment. It was worse than beating. It was an insult.'* Boys, in contrast, quite often detailed severe beatings – despite knowing that teachers can theoretically be fired by UNRWA for repeated violations. A 13-year-old boy reported, *'My English teacher, when I ask him to get an eraser to rewrite my answers, he asks me not to move. Then when he comes to correct our answers, he asks me why I didn't rewrite the right answers and I tell him that I asked for his permission to and he refused, he gets the sticks and hits me as hard as he can.'* An 11-year-old boy added that boys who try to protect themselves are then often punished even more, *'The teacher slaps him or hits him with the hose [a rubber pipe]. If he refuses to open his hand for the teacher to hit him, he'll be hit three times. Every time he keeps refusing to open his hand, the teacher adds on the number of times to hit him, five, six, seven or 10 times.'* Palestine refugee boys – like their Jordanian and Syrian peers – explained that teachers' violence towards students not only makes them hate school, it also drives them to quit. A 17-year-old boy, when asked why he was no longer in school, replied: *'I dropped out of school because they hit us.'* GAGE respondents also reported that students with disabilities are not immune to violent discipline from teachers and that some students are victimised because of their disability. The father of an older girl with a hearing impairment recalled, *'I saw a teacher hitting a student, and the child can't hear, he doesn't understand that the child can't hear.'*

Our baseline research also found that violence at the hands of peers is common for Palestinian young people living in Jordan's Gaza camp (and analogous to the levels of peer violence among their Syrian refugee peers). Boys are more likely than girls to report being bullied (44% versus 34%). Boys noted that they fight among themselves, at school and in the community, to prove that they are strong. They added that younger and smaller boys are victimised by older boys. A 12-year-old observed that his snacks are often stolen by older boys who cannot afford to buy

► I know a case ... she went to Family Protection and ... forced him to pledge not to hit them, but when he returned home, he broke their [the girls'] feet.

(A key informant)

their own. *'I bought something to eat and he didn't. He wanted to eat with me against my will. He hits me every day.'* Adolescents and parents observed that despite UNRWA's efforts to *'provide us awareness sessions about not talking with people with disabilities in a violent way'* (12-year-old girl), young people with disabilities are especially likely to be bullied at school. The mother of a boy with a vision impairment and an extra finger on each hand reported, *'They beat him and mock him in the school. One day, they broke his hand.'* Older boys reported that the youth violence that pervades Gaza Camp is not only frightening, but life-threatening. *'It is known to everybody that this street is troublesome. If you go there at night you will become frightened. Nobody can enter those areas,'* explained an 18-year-old boy. A 16-year-old noted, *'This street has witnessed gun shooting several times.'*

For girls, sexual harassment is so common that only 17% feel safe outside their homes after dark. Girls reported that travel to and from school – and schools themselves – are especially dangerous. A 17-year-old, now out of school, recalled: *'We used to see this yard full of guys. You would have found them climbing the walls and sitting on the roofs of bathrooms. There are two male guards at the gates. However, boys still jump over the walls and open the*

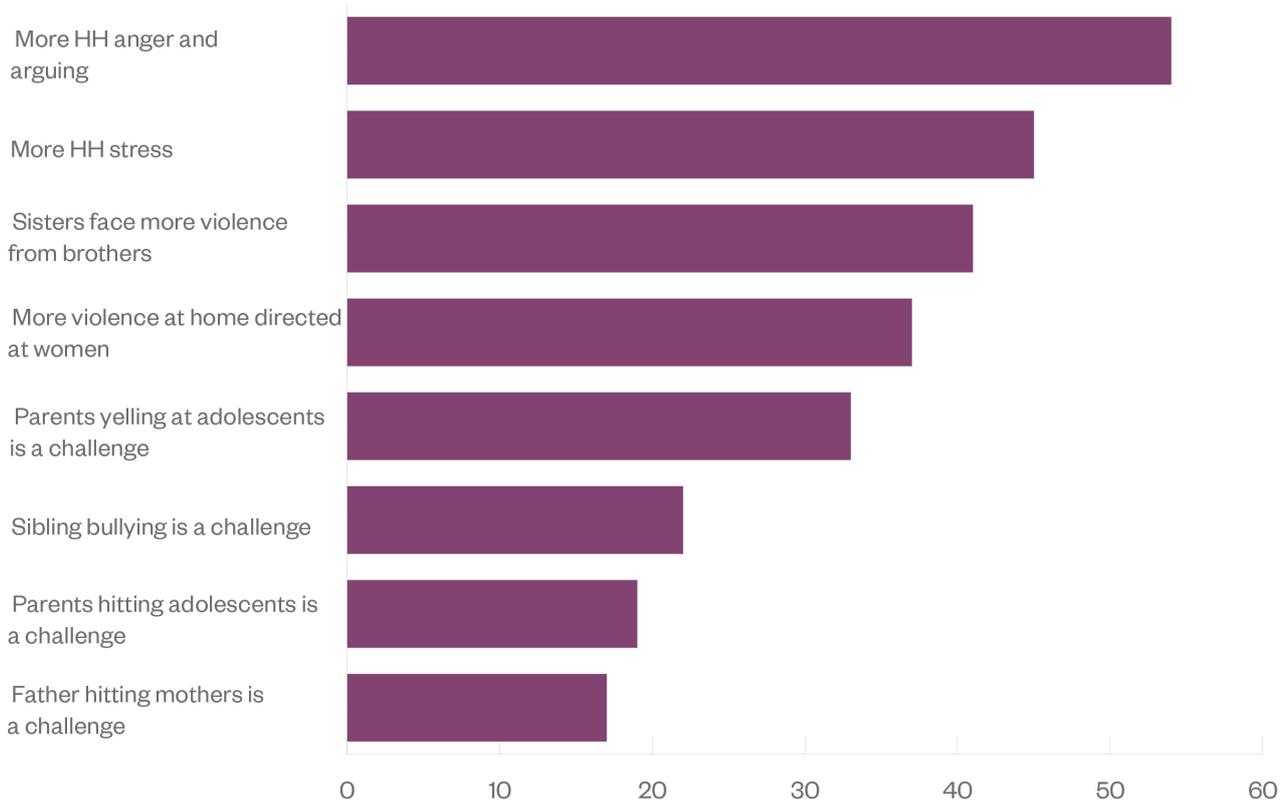
classrooms. Cops would come as well. When the boys hear the sirens of the police cars, they would run away.'

Adolescents – and their parents – admitted that little is done to stop peer violence. Some young people reported that they keep bullying to themselves, because they know there is little their parents can do. An older girl with vitiligo,⁴ for example, noted that she only tells her parents when the teasing is especially severe: *'I talk to my mother, father, sometimes I tell them, other times I don't. I keep it to myself.'* Parents acknowledged that they often feel powerless to help. The mother of a girl with a facial deformity reported that when she approached her daughter's teachers – to ask for their help – she was rebuffed and told, *'What can I do with the students?'* Adolescent boys added that the police are similarly unhelpful when it comes to gang violence in the community. One explained, *'We hit and beat each other and kill each other. They arrive after everything is already done.'*

Effects of the pandemic on adolescents' right to protection from age-based violence

Echoing global research from the last year (Béland et al., 2021; Calvano et al., 2021; Cluver et al., 2020; Usher et al., 2020; Chiang et al., 2020; Pereda and Diaz-Faes,

Figure 6: Impacts of covid-19 on Palestinian adolescents living in Jordan



4 Vitiligo is a condition in which the skin loses pigmentation.

▮ Husbands are not used to staying at home. Now they govern like police inside the house.

(A key informant)

2020), our covid-19 phone surveys with adolescents and caregivers have found that the pandemic has exacerbated household stress and violence (see Figure 6). Of the Palestine refugee adolescents in our sample who were asked due to privacy concerns not about their own lives, but about the lives of adolescents like themselves, 54% report more household anger, 41% report that violence from brothers (to sisters) is a challenge, 37% report that there is more violence in the home directed at women and 19% report that parents hitting adolescents is a challenge. In interviews, although adolescents were often circumspect in how they spoke of household violence, due to lack of confidentiality, many admitted that school closures and social isolation have taken a toll on families. A 16-year-old girl with a visual impairment reported, *'People fight a lot ... because they spend all the time with each other.'* Key informants were more forthright. Several noted that financial stress, and confinement, had left men – and their families – struggling to adapt. One key informant stated, *'Husbands are not used to staying at home. Now they govern like police inside the house.'* Another added, *'Of course, the domestic violence increases ... when such a head of household is there ... he will blast the family and there will be violence.'*

Child labour

GAGE's baseline research found that Palestine refugee boys living in Jordan's Gaza Camp are highly vulnerable to child labour. Of the 15–17-year-old boys in our sample, 54% had worked for pay in the last year – compared to only 9% of their female peers. Boys' work is intermittent and poorly paid. On average, working boys had worked only nine days in the last month (earning 8.6 JOD/day) and only 23 hours in the last week (earning only 1.3 JOD/hour). Although older boys are more likely to work for pay than younger boys, an 18-year-old boy reported that household poverty sometimes pushes even very young boys into work: *'Boys as young as nine work harvesting olives They give the young kids ... 3–5 JODs.'* A 16-year-old boy, who dropped out of school at nine, added that he works whatever odd jobs he can find, in part to supplement household income

▮ To us, the cousin is something important. If the cousin wants me, he has the priority over the stranger.

(A 16-year-old girl)

and in part to have his own pocket money. He said, *'I work in the shops. I work for different employers I help them unload and pack stuff. I earn 10 Jordan dinars per week I sometimes work and some other times don't. If you want me to count the whole time that I was employed during these seven years (since I left school), it would be no more than one year only.'* With adults' access to paid work restricted by the pandemic, a sizeable minority of boys who completed GAGE's covid-19 phone survey reported increased pressure to earn. Of Palestinian boys, 35% reported more pressure.

Child marriage

In line with existing research, our baseline survey found that for Palestinians living in Gaza Camp, child marriage is quite normalised (Tiltne and Zhang, 2013). Of female caregivers in our sample, 29% had married before the age of 18. Of Palestinian adolescents, 68% agreed that *'most girls in my community marry before 18'* and 50% agreed that *'most adults expect girls to marry before 18'*.

Respondents noted that cousin marriage is generally preferred by Palestinian families, with matches most often arranged between girls and their paternal cousins. A 16-year-old girl explained, *'To us, the cousin is something important. If the cousin wants me, he has the priority over the stranger.'* This arrangement means that girls are pushed into marriages they do not want in order to protect family harmony (and reduce costs for grooms' families), and that mothers – even if they want to – are unable to protect their daughters from child marriage, because girls' fathers listen first and foremost to their own brothers. A 19-year-old married girl recalled that she tried several times to refuse her cousin's proposals for marriage, but in the end was worn down by her extended family: *'My family agreed [to the marriage]. I refused him four times They told me, "This is your life and we won't push you. Keep praying." I agreed the last time.'*

Palestine refugee respondents added that while it is more common for girls to marry after age 16, when courts may grant legal exemptions (without court permission, 18 is the legal minimum age for marriage), some girls

Men want to marry young girls, so they could raise them in their own way.

(A 15-year-old now divorced girl)

are effectively married years earlier by religious leaders willing to ignore the law. A mother acknowledged that girls' parents sometimes prefer this, to prevent the community gossip that surrounds girls (and their families) beginning at puberty. She said, *'Families want to marry their daughters quickly because they are worried They want to marry their daughters to be free of their burden.'* Girls added that husbands and mothers-in-law also quite often prefer very early marriage, because men (and their mothers) want to 'raise' girls to be compliant – so that they are easier to control. A 15-year-old now divorced girl explained, *'Men want to marry young girls, so they could raise them in their own way.'*

Palestinian respondents noted that efforts to prevent child marriage are extremely limited. Although a few girls reported that they have *'talked a lot about early marriage in Makani'*,⁵ just as many reported having learned *'nothing related to early marriage'*. No Palestinian girls reported that schoolteachers or Makani facilitators had tried to intervene to prevent a child marriage. Girls added that the legal mechanisms meant to protect them did not. A 12-year-old girl recalled that a school mate had reported her own mother to the police for trying to force her into marriage – to no avail. She explained, *'(The police) gave her a paper and she gave it to her mother. Her mother tore it apart.'* A 16-year-old, previously married to a cousin but now divorced, added that she had been vehemently opposed to marriage but was pressured by her family to tell the judge that her marriage was not forced. She said, *'Everyone just thought it was time for me to get married. I strongly said no, but they forced me to accept. I said yes (to the judge) because my father was with me.'* Another girl reported that she had been legally married without even being physically present. Adults acknowledged that the practice is normalised within the community and will be hard to shift. *'The problem is not with the student but with the family,'* noted a key informant when asked how adolescent-focused programming might address child marriage. A mother added that she perceives parents' hands to be tied by community preferences – as parents are afraid of being

I keep praying that no one comes to marry me. When women come to our house, I start being random. I mess things up. I take a lot of time to serve them coffee.

(An 18-year-old girl)

ostracised by extended family and neighbours: *'Customs and traditions rule.'* With few allies willing to support their preferences for adult marriage, girls must rely on their own ingenuity to remain unmarried. An 18-year-old, for example, reported that when prospective mothers-in-law come to *'interview'* her, she tries to demonstrate that she has poor domestic skills. She explained, *'I keep praying that no one comes to marry me. When women come to our house, I start being random. I mess things up. I take a lot of time to serve them coffee.'*

Although some girls agree to marry as children in order to escape violence in their natal homes, marriage is rarely a respite. Indeed, married Palestinian girls – like their Syrian peers – reported high levels of gender-based violence, often starting with rape on the night of their wedding. A 16-year-old girl, formerly married to her cousin, reported that her husband was so disappointed that she did not sufficiently bleed on their wedding night that he then forced her to submit to an invasive virginity test. *'He (my husband) said that we are going to see a doctor on Saturday to see whether you're a virgin or not. ... I didn't want to object or defend myself so he doesn't think I am hiding anything,'* she explained.

Girls reported violence from both their husbands and their in-laws. Indeed, it was common for girls to report that their husbands beat them because of their in-laws. An 18-year-old, now separated from her husband, observed, *'Marriage is awful. He is persuaded by his parents' attitude, and he hits me. And whatever I say, he doesn't believe me. He hit me on the head. Even when I was pregnant, he hit me.'* Despite fathers' protestations that their daughters are safer married to nephews and living with their uncles and aunts, the girls at highest risk of abuse are often those married to their cousins. A 16-year-old, now divorced from her cousin, recalled, *'On our third day of marriage I had a fight with my uncle, he hit me and badmouthed and cursed my mother.'*

⁵ Makani is an integrated child and adolescent programme for refugee and host communities managed by UNICEF Jordan and implemented by UNICEF Jordan partners. It includes life skills programming for children and adolescents, learning support, child protection and psychosocial support and referrals.

Sometimes my uncles make a gathering and make him promise not to hit me again, but as soon as we go back home, he hits me again like nothing happened.

(A married 18-year-old girl)

Most married girls who had experienced violence admitted that they had never told anyone – in part because violence is a ‘house secret’ and in part due to fear that reporting might lead to escalation. *‘It would be considered bad and indecent if she decided to complain against her husband,’* explained a 16-year-old married girl. Only a few married Palestinian girls living in Jordan reported receiving any support for violence – and all of those reported informal support from family rather than formal support from justice officials and psychosocial service providers. *‘My family used to tell him not to beat me,’* recalled a married 18-year-old. *‘Sometimes my uncles make a gathering and make him promise not to hit me again, but as soon as we go back home, he hits me again like nothing happened,’* added a separated girl of the same age. Girls married to cousins generally have the least support. Some are afraid to tell their parents because they fear damaging the bonds between their fathers and their uncles. Others report violence, only to discover their fathers are unwilling to confront their (own) brothers and nephews.

While there are concerns globally that the covid-19 pandemic may be pushing more girls into child marriage, the findings from our covid-19 phone survey in Jordan are mixed. On the one hand, of the Palestinians in our sample, 13% report that girls face increased pressure to marry due to the pandemic. Reasons offered include school closures as well as increased poverty in girls’ households due to the economic downturn. On the other hand, a similar number of adolescents reported decreased pressure to marry (13%). This was twice as likely for boys as for girls (18% versus 9%). Reasons offered include the economic downturn, which has left young men without the financial resources they need to marry, and social distancing regulations, given that wedding celebrations are considered a risk. However, although Palestinians are just as likely to report decreased pressure to marry as Syrians and Jordanians, it is important to note they are twice as likely to report increased pressure to marry.

Lebanon

Violence in the home, school and community

Our ongoing participatory research in Lebanon’s Ein el-Hilweh and Wavel Camps underscores that violence pervades Palestinian households, schools and the community in very gendered ways. Within the home, although both girls and boys report violence at the hands of parents, generally fathers, boys appear far more at risk of the most extreme forms of violence. Indeed, several boys reported that their fathers had drawn guns on them. One, an 18-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh Camp, recalled: *‘My father is always angry and hits us and shoots at us Can you imagine he tried to shoot me and my brother because of a PlayStation game! We were playing and joking and that provoked him. He pulled his gun and started shooting, he was shooting at our legs, and we started running That is our life.’* Another, the same age and from the same location, added that his father aimed not at his legs, but at his head. He recalled, *‘I remember when I was 15 years old, I once stayed out late at night with my friend, and I slept there. When I returned home in the morning, my father asked me “Were you smoking hash with your friend?” ... I did not even know what hash is. I told him: “I do not understand what you are talking about.” He started hitting me ... then he pulled his gun and put it on my head. He pulled the trigger but the bullet did not come out. I looked at him and told him: “Please, try again.” ... He tried again but it did not fire again. My mother fainted. I stared into his eyes, spat on the ground and I left the house.’*

Although boys see themselves as their sisters’ protectors, girls’ narratives about extreme violence in the household almost always include brothers – not fathers – as perpetrators. This is because older brothers are often tasked, including by mothers, with monitoring

My father is always angry and hits us and shoots at us Can you imagine, he tried to shoot me and my brother because of a PlayStation game! ... He pulled out his gun and started shooting, he was shooting at our legs, and we started running That is our life.

(An 18-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh Camp)

Box 1: Security challenges in Ein el-Hilweh Camp and risks for adolescent boys and girls

The Palestinian political factions are the de facto authorities within the Palestinian camps due to a historical – and now defunct – agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Government of Lebanon (UNHCR, 2016). Although government authorities control camp entrances, they do not police the communities inside camp boundaries. The absence of Lebanese authorities and the conflicts between armed factions and groups pose a high risk to adolescents' safety and security within the camps.

Boys in particular are at high risk of being recruited and enrolled by the different factions and armed groups in the camps. Boys report receiving military training by the factions as young as 16 years old. An 18-year-old boy from Wavel Camp explained: *'I had two military trainings and I went to several camping trips to train us ... The first military training I had was when I was 16 years old.'* Being enrolled in armed factions also poses increased risks to boys' lives due to the mobilisation of these young people during armed clashes in the camps. This risk is especially high for boys in Ein el-Hilweh Camp due to frequent armed clashes there. A 17-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh noted: *'I was with [a political faction] since I was a child ... As I got older, I started receiving different types of training with them ... I saw how bad they are and saw many bad things with them especially during the fights ... I realised that all factions are not what they pretend to be ... They just use us for their own benefits and we die for nothing.'*

The lack of official authority within the camp also results in a lack of access to justice among these communities. This is especially the case for Ein el-Hilweh Camp which is infamous for its frequent armed clashes and lack of security; adolescents perceive this to be a major reason behind their inability to lead normal lives as an 18-year-old adolescent girl from Ein el-Hilweh explained: *'There are no fundamental pillars to a normal human life inside the camp ... Look at all this ruin and destruction, wherever you turn your head you see armed men and every other day when one is bored he gets up to shoot with the weapon ... This is not a life and we have no rights to protect us and we can do nothing about it.'* The lack of security not only poses an immediate threat to the safety of adolescents, it also impacts their mobility and psychosocial well-being as a 16-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh explained *'I do not have friends in the camp because I do not go out of the house ... My parents fear for safety because of the problems and the shootings in the camp ... My father especially does not like me to leave the house.'* Another 17-year-old adolescent girl from the same camp explained *'The armed men scare me, like if we are going to cross the road and find armed men, I'd never go on before asking if there is something going on.'* Another girl stated *'I feel terrified if I see someone with a weapon. Its shape scares me ... When I see someone armed, I take a different route ... You may be hit by a stray bullet during a clash at any time. I am unable to accept the presence of the weapons, their shapes, the noises, all of it.'* The armed clashes inside the camp causes heightened anxiety for adolescents especially girls on the streets and even inside their homes. One 19-year-old girl explained: *'Whenever I hear shooting, my heart stops and I hide under the bed.'* Adolescents are often caught under fire during the sudden clashes or shootings in the camp as one girl described *'I was walking once on the street and they started shooting, I was terrified, I swear, I fainted that day on the street.'*

Another impact of the lack of the rule of law is reflected in the lack of access to justice especially for girls who face honour-related violence without being able to access protection or without any accountability of perpetrators of violence. A 17-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh Camp explained: *'Families kill the daughters [in reference to honour-related killing] in the camp for no reason and no one cares and no one questions it because there is no state here ... If there were police and army, this would not happen.'* Another 19-year-old girl from the same camp added *'The drugs problem is huge in the camp because there are no laws here and all the criminals and drugs dealers are protected by [the armed groups] ... Instead of treating the drug addicts, they treat them as criminals and put them in prison inside the camp ... They would put them in centres if they were outside the camp ... this is what happens when there is no law.'*

and controlling girls' behaviours, to prevent girls from besmirching family honour. An 18-year-old boy from Wavel Camp in Baalbek explained, *'It is impossible that I would allow my sisters to go out alone, even my older sisters. I accompany them wherever they want to go.'* Girls report that their mobility and use of technology is strictly limited,

and that even perceived transgressions can result in violence. A 19-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh Camp explained that she had incurred serious injuries from her brother for which she needed to seek hospital treatment – and that no one, even her sister, stepped in to help: *'My brother heard a false rumour that I was talking to a boy on the*

Figure 7: Camp as a prison (Mohammad, a 19-year-old Palestinian boy working as a barber in a camp in Lebanon)



Source: Photo taken by a member of the GAGE participatory research group

street, he came home and started beating me so hard and imprisoned me at home He kept beating me several times and no one defended me not even my close sister After several times of being hospitalised, my uncle took me to live with him.' A 16-year-old from the same location added that her mother encourages her brother to beat her so as to ensure she is 'well disciplined'. She said, '(My bother) went crazy and started hitting me with everything My mother encourages him to do this No one in my family loves me. My mother always curses me and verbally abuses me.'

Adolescent researchers note that schools are also violent spaces, especially for boys. Some boys reported violence from teachers. A 16-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh Camp explained, 'The teachers physically punish students. They do that a lot. All schools in the camp use physical punishment.' A 17-year-old from the same location added, 'A teacher quarrelled with me, I kept quiet and did not speak, then I was surprised that he started hitting me, so I hit him.' Other boys reported peer violence, including with weapons, at school. A 17-year-old from Wavel recalled, 'We once had a fight with someone at school because he told on us to the teacher. We thought the fight ended there. When we went to the camp we heard that his brother and his friends will be waiting for us in front of school to beat us.

We went to the schools prepared, we took knives, chains and everything we need to the fight ... At the end of the [school] day when they came, they did not expect us to be prepared and we hurt them a lot.' Several boys added that peer violence on school grounds is increasingly fuelled by drug dealers, who sell drugs at school in an attempt to recruit new 'employees'. A 16-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh Camp explained, 'Drug dealers target the boys at the schools and sell them drugs They want them to get addicted to drugs so that they can make them work for them.'

The adolescents taking part in our participatory research groups report that violence also pervades the Palestinian communities living in Ein el-Hilweh and Wavel Camps, again in highly gendered ways. Girls and boys observed that knife and gun violence is increasingly common in camps, which are effectively unpoliced and controlled by gangs (see Box 1). A 17-year-old girl explained, 'Look at all this ruin and destruction, wherever you turn your head you see armed men.' A 16-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh Camp added: 'The camp is not safe even if we live in it While you are walking, a stray bullet can hit you, you cannot guarantee your life here.' Boys from Wavel Camp reported that the city of Baalbek is even more dangerous for Palestinians. A 17-year-old stated, 'Baalbek is more

▮▮ If I am in trouble, I do not tell anyone. I take my anger out on someone and beat them.

(An 18-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh Camp)

dangerous and if we go out to the streets there, we can be caught in an armed fight They shoot at each other all the time ... the camp is definitely safer than Baalbek. For girls, gang violence is not the only threat. Sexual harassment is nearly universal.

Boys observed that community violence inside camps is fed by violence at home and social norms that see violence as a demonstration of masculine strength. A 16-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh Camp explained: *'If I am in trouble, I do not tell anyone. I take my anger out on someone and beat them.'* Boys added that as community violence has spread, younger and younger boys have begun to carry weapons, to show how 'tough' they are. An 18-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh Camp reported, *'We are in a time where kids carry a weapon to show off. I was afraid of holding a knife when I was little, while in these days, you see some kid who is barely a metre tall carrying a weapon and walking around.'* Although some boys admitted that they are terrified of the violence that surrounds them, and, as this 18-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh Camp explained, *'avoid going to some neighbourhoods ... because I might get into fights'*, other boys proudly admitted taking part in gang violence. An 18-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh reported, *'I participated in at least three battles ... I do not know if I killed someone It does not matter to me if I killed some, I actually feel happy to kill them ... they savagely kill us.'* A 16-year-old from Wavel Camp recalled, *'I had several fights there and in some there were stabbing and shootings'*. His 18-year-old friend added, *'I learned how to hide a blade in my mouth when I was very young and I always keep it there just in case I get into a fight.'*

Girls observed that community violence further tightens restrictions on their mobility. A 16-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh Camp reported that her mother gives her strict instructions about how to behave each time she leaves home because *'Boys always harass girls on the streets and especially in the market ... even when you frown they won't leave you alone without saying something.'* A 19-year-old from the same camp noted that she is simply not allowed to leave home without an escort: *'It is scary*

▮▮ My friend killed herself a few months ago because her boyfriend had photos of her. She heard that her brother knew. She killed herself because she was afraid of what her family can do to her.

(A 16-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh Camp)

here. My father doesn't let me go out in the camp, he gets very scared when problems happen.' Another girl, of the same age and from the same location and unusual in that her parents do let her go out, added that her peers are so jealous of her freedom that they verbally and physically abuse her. She explained, *'The girls talk to me in a bad way and attack me and beat me when I speak to my male friends on the street They look at me as if I am a bad person because I wear tight clothes and because I have male friends They are actually jealous of me because my parents allow me to do this and they are forbidden.'*

The girls in GAGE's participatory research groups observed that in Lebanon, where connectivity is generally quite good, online violence can ruin girls' lives. A 16-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh Camp reported that her friend had committed suicide because she was afraid of what her family would do if and when they discovered that her boyfriend had photos of her. She said, *'My friend killed herself a few months ago because her boyfriend had photos of her. She heard that her brother knew. She killed herself because she was afraid of what her family can do to her.'* A 17-year-old girl from the same location added that an acquaintance had been killed by her brother for posting pictures that were then edited by someone else. She recalled, *'My aunt's neighbour posted pictures of herself. Someone stole them and edited them on Photoshop and showed them to her brother Her brother did not try to understand what is happening, he killed her immediately.'* Boys taking part in GAGE research groups admitted that online violence is primarily a problem for girls. An 18-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh Camp explained, *'It differs between the boy and the girl We boys use the social media in a public way, while girls use it in a hidden way They don't want their parents to know, and those things harm their reputation There are still some traditional ideas in our community that if the girl is talking to a boy, her family will kill her.'*

Access to services and support for adolescents who experience violence

Few adolescents who experience or witness violence receive any support. In part this is because reporting is uncommon, with many young people openly admitting that they do not see the point. *'We do not want to talk about violence ... nothing changes There is no awareness in the society No one will come to us and ask whether it is happening in reality or not,'* explained a 19-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh Camp. Other young people reported that they had tried to get help, but that service providers were so slow – or so poorly invested in client confidentiality – that they regretted their decision. A 19-year-old girl who had experienced gender-based violence, *'I do not like to tell anyone, I do not trust anyone. I feel regret that I told the psychologist She does not deal with us humanely. I waited for her more than once, then left without talking to her She told me to wait but was just eating and talking to her friends.'* Another girl the same age, and a survivor of sexual violence, added, *'I do not want to go to a psychologist or anyone because the people who work there might know me and know my family and might tell*

▶ I do not like to tell anyone, I do not trust anyone. I feel regret that I told the psychologist She does not deal with us humanely.

(A 19-year-old girl who had experienced gender-based violence)

them, and people might see me there and start gossiping.' Adolescents observed that while school counsellors ought to be able to provide some support – as they have more regular contact and can see when young people are struggling – this is generally not the case. A 17-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh explained, *'When a student is noticed to be unwell or stressed they should be offered help ... but they do not offer us anything at all.'*

Effects of the pandemic on adolescents' right to protection from age-based violence

GAGE's adolescent participatory researchers report that the pandemic has had mixed impacts on violence at home. Most, in line with their peers in Jordan, observe that



▶ The tension at my home increased due to the stress over our financial situation, especially with the increase in the price of food and vegetables. My father and brother are not working My mother is angry all the time because she cannot get enough food for us.

(A 19-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh)

stress and violence have increased – especially given that in Lebanon pandemic-related stress has been layered on top of an already extreme economic downturn. A 19-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh reported, *‘Everyone is distempered. Everyone is fighting with the other. Anyone who is idle sitting at home fights with anyone My father will be fighting with my mother and you are sitting and watching Then your brothers will interfere and my father will start beating them, God, it’s bad. It’s a big fight. Please, God. This movie is our everyday scene at home. My father and mother fight.’* With unemployment now the norm, and food insecurity increasing, another 19-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh added that the stress is all but unbearable: *‘The tension at my home increased due to the stress over our financial situation, especially with the increase in the price of food and vegetables. My father and brother are not working My mother is angry all the time because she cannot get enough food for us.’*

A minority of adolescents observed that while stress and fighting have increased, so has family time – which has helped them get to know their family members better. A 19-year-old girl explained, *‘During this period I became closer to my family, frankly, I did not know my family well. Now, I sit with my brother and my stepmother, we eat with each other and joke with each other, and if we faced any problem, we discuss it with each other. We never discussed our problems with each other, everyone used to go to their room and we did not speak about anything with each other.’* A 17-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh added that while lockdowns have increased fighting, on the whole he feels they have strengthened his relationships with his family: *‘Staying together at home is good and not good. For me, it’s good because my father spends more time in the house now, sometimes my brothers take days off and stay at home too. We get to sit together and talk to each other But, on the other hand, it’s not good because my father and I fight a lot However, it is normal when everyone is*

looked at home and bored to burst on each other ... I think, as a family, we are better than before.’

Adolescents report some impacts of the pandemic on community violence. In Wavel Camp, several boys noted that property crimes (and the risk of violence) have increased, as people have become more desperate. An 18-year-old boy explained *‘There used to be armed robberies on the streets but those used to happen during the night and at certain roads ... now robberies happen during the day and everywhere They also talk a lot about kidnapping incidents now.’* Several girls from Ein el-Hilweh Camp added that as food insecurity has increased, even girls are considering entering the drug trade and joining gangs, as a means of offsetting household poverty. A 16-year-old girl reported, *‘Girls also started selling drugs now. Because of the crisis, they now use the girls to move drugs because no one will suspect them. The girls are doing this now because there is no work and if their father and brother are not working, they need to do this to get money.’* An 18-year-old girl added, *‘We are thinking about joining one of the factions If we had the opportunity we would do it ... people with these factions get paid and do not have to worry.’*

▶ Girls also started selling drugs now. Because of the crisis, they now use the girls to move drugs because no one will suspect them. The girls are doing this now because there is no work and if their father and brother are not working, they need to do this to get money.

(A 16-year-old girl)

Child labour

In Lebanon, Palestinian adolescents’ vulnerability to child labour is shaped by gender, law and poverty. Historically, boys have been far more at risk than girls, because of gender norms that leave girls largely confined to home and position boys as breadwinners alongside their fathers. A 17-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh recalled, *‘I had to leave school and start working to help my father Our [financial] situation was hard ... I started working when I was 14 years old.’* Although poverty pushes boys into paid work, laws meant to reserve the best paid jobs for Lebanese nationals keep boys from finding decent work. A 19-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh explained, *‘Palestinians in Lebanon*

are not allowed to work in anything.' Boys added that with professional work out of reach, they see little point in secondary – let alone tertiary – education. Another 19-year-old boy from Ein el-Hilweh noted, *'I dropped out of school at 15 because I did not see any value in education My brother is a university graduate and he cannot find work He encouraged me to leave school and told me to learn a profession that I can make money from ... I started working as a barber.'* In recent years, with first the economic crisis and then the pandemic, a few girls observed that they have faced increased pressure to find paid work. A 19-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh explained, *'After the crisis, my father started asking me to look for work although he used to oppose it before But with the crisis, our situation became very bad and he changed his mind.'* Another 19-year-old Palestinian girl expressed, *'I might not register in school if the situation remains like that I'll have to find work and help my family as we are not able to afford food anymore.'*

Child marriage

Of the Palestinian girls in our participatory research groups in Ein el-Hilweh and Wavel Camps, several were engaged at age 16. Adolescents reported that child marriage has multiple intersecting drivers. Some families encourage their daughters to marry because of household poverty, which has become more common and more severe since the onset of the most recent economic crisis. A 17-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh explained, *'Families are very poor in the camp and some people cannot even eat, so they have to marry off their daughters.'* Other families encourage their daughters to marry as children because of the rampant violence within camps, believing that husbands will serve as protectors. Another 17-year-old girl from the same location reported, *'Families want to marry off their daughters because it is not safe for the girls in the camp.'* Girls acknowledged, however, that while poverty and violence may be the most proximate drivers of child marriage, gender norms that position girls' sexual purity as central to family honour are the root cause of child marriage. A 16-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh observed, *'The girl is always subjected to pressures and restrictions by parents because of the customs and traditions, and fear of people's gossip about the girl. This has become worse with time.'* A 19-year-old girl from the same camp agreed, *'They want to put girls in a jar and close it You only go out*

DD *They want to put girls in a jar and close it You only go out from the father's house to your husband's house They think that they are protecting her, they don't know that they destroy her in this way.*

(A 19-year-old girl)

from the father's house to your husband's house They think that they are protecting her, they don't know that they destroy her in this way.'

Girls noted that child marriage effectively ends girls' education. Some girls drop out before they are engaged, because they know that once they are engaged their fiancés will not let them attend. A 19-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh explained, *'I heard a lot of girls say that their fiancé or husband does not allow them to study or work ... so I told my mother that even if I go to school and study, in the future my husband will not let me work, so it is all useless. I put this in my head and dropped out of school I was engaged soon after I dropped out at 16.'* Other girls drop out after they are engaged because their fiancés prohibit them from attending school. Another 19-year-old from Ein el-Hilweh recalled that her parents – who had told her that she could complete her education if she agreed to marry – instead refused to advocate for her when her fiancé refused to honour his pledge: *'When my fiancé prevented me from going to school, my family did not react to this.'*

As was the case in Jordan, adolescents reported that the pandemic has had mixed impacts on girls' vulnerability to child marriage. On the one hand, increased poverty has reduced pressure. Young men cannot afford to marry. An 18-year-old boy explained, *'If I want to get married, I'll need around US\$50,000 to build a house How would I do this if we do not have work or money?'* A 19-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh agreed that *'Now that everything is expensive, there will be no grooms as the boys will not be able to afford marriage.'* On the other hand, the risk of arranged marriages to men living in other countries appears to have increased – as families (and girls) are desperate to escape Lebanon and the confluence of the crisis and the pandemic. A 19-year-old girl from Ein el-Hilweh observed, *'Many girls agree to marry men living abroad even if they do not know them Most girls prefer migrating outside Lebanon because there is security abroad.'*

Palestine

Violence in the home, school and community

Adolescents who took part in our formative research reported that age- and gender-based violence pervades their homes. Both girls and boys reported violence at the hands of their parents. A 15-year-old boy from Jabalia Camp noted, 'Our house is full of hate, it is extremely difficult.' An 11-year-old girl from the same location added: 'I cannot understand my father, while he always says that I am his dear and that he draws a red line against anyone hurting me, he himself beats me frequently.' Girls, like their peers in Jordan and Lebanon, also reported violence at the hands of their older brothers. A 13-year-old girl from Jabalia explained, 'When we get into a fight and my mom can't solve it she asks my older brother to hit us.'

Young people, especially boys, added that teachers also use violent discipline – to control overcrowded and often unruly classrooms and punish students for academic mistakes. A 17-year-old boy from Jabalia reported that he dropped out to escape beatings from his teachers, only

Two things worry me: the night and the war. I worry about everyone in my family, I don't want them to leave the house.

(A 14-year-old girl from Jabalia)

to attract them from his father. He said, 'I decided to stop schooling, I am frequently beaten whenever I make wrong answers. One day I was fed up and decided to stop. A few days later, my father got to know about it and beat me badly with an electrical cable to return to school, but I was beaten anyway so I ignored him.' An older girl from the same community and in a focus group discussion added that a teacher at an UNRWA school had made her 'carry around a banner with "donkey" on it'. Adolescents with disabilities also reported violence at the hands of teachers. A 19-year-old girl with a physical disability from Jabalia recalled, 'I left the school when I was 14 due to maltreatment. Everyone at school was cruel, teachers used to ask me to sit in the back and not to talk with girls because they found me scary!'

Adolescents living in Palestine – especially Gaza – observed that occupation and conflict with Israel form the backdrop for how they experience other forms of violence.

Figure 8: A 17-year-old boy admits that he beats his younger brother for not listening



Source: Photo taken by a member of the GAGE participatory research group, Khanyounis Camp Gaza, 2016.

They (boys) lack safety in Gaza because of the ongoing conflict; every moment they are exposed to injury or to a gunshot wound by the Israeli army.

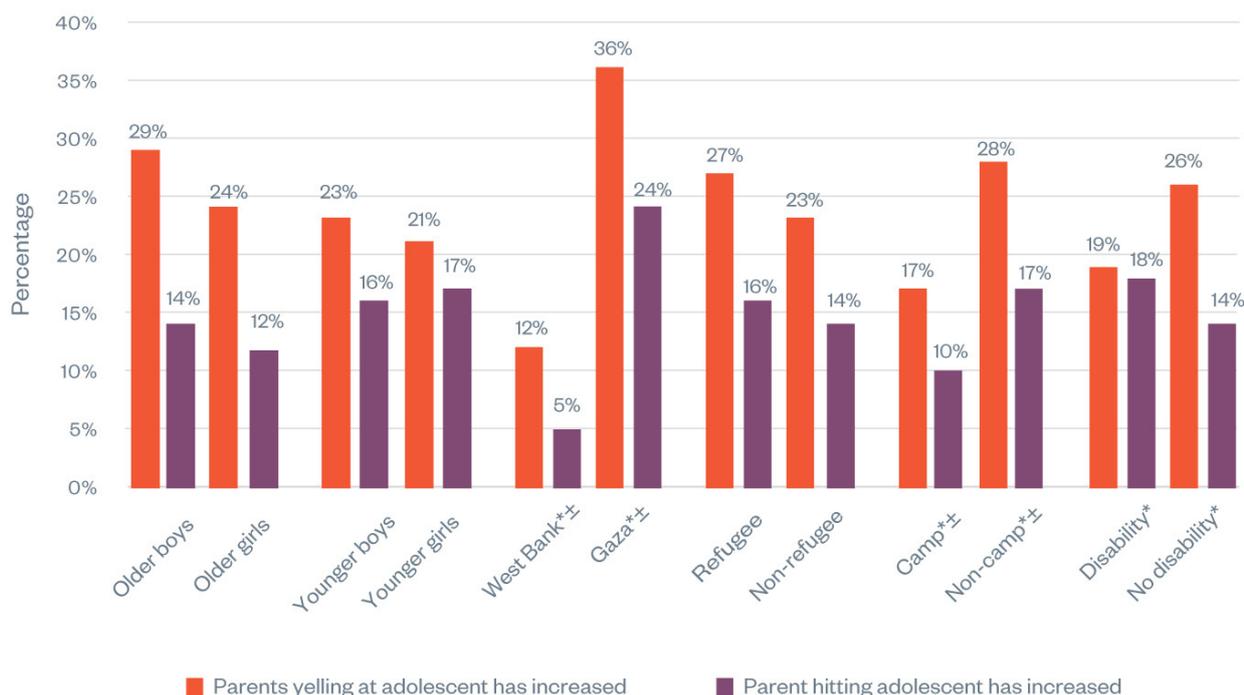
(A younger girl)

A 14-year-old girl from Jabalia, whose father lost his life in 2014, said during an in-depth interview: *‘Two things worry me: the night and the war. I worry about everyone in my family, I don’t want them to leave the house. I like to sleep before everyone, I hate staying at night alone.’* A younger girl, in a focus group in the same location, added that boys are at higher risk of being injured than girls. This is in part because they are more likely to engage in child labour (and be out and about in the community) and in part because notions of masculinity in this context are linked to physical resistance to the Israeli occupation. She said, *‘They (boys) lack safety in Gaza because of the ongoing conflict; every moment they are exposed to injury or to a gunshot wound by the Israeli army.’*

Access to services and support for adolescents who experience violence

Few of the adolescents in our samples in Gaza or the West Bank have any access to support after experiencing or witnessing violence. Key informants observed that this is because specialised, professional services are largely unavailable in Palestine – and the myriad NGO-run services tend to be focused on younger children, not adolescents. They added that school counsellors are largely focused on academic underperformers, or on misbehaving pupils, not on those with mental health needs. Adolescents emphasised that stigma is a key barrier to accessing support. Some spoke of being too embarrassed to ask for help; others reported that their parents would not let them seek help, for fear that the entire family would be shamed and ostracised. A 19-year-old girl with a disability from Jabalia explained: *‘I usually prefer to stay silent.’* A 14-year-old girl from the same location added, *‘I asked my mother to go and see a psychotherapist but she refused.’*

Figure 9: Perceptions of household violence for ‘adolescents like themselves’ among unmarried adolescents



Source: Abu Hamad et al., 2021b.

Effects of the pandemic on adolescents' right to protection from age-based violence

Our covid-19 phone survey, which, as a result of privacy concerns, asked young people not about their own experiences but about experiences in their community, found that the pandemic has amplified household stress and intra-household violence (see Figure 9), with some notable differences between different groups of adolescents. For example, young people in Gaza, where economic conditions are worse, were more likely to report increased household stress than their peers in the West Bank (67% versus 30%). Older adolescents similarly reported more household stress than younger adolescents (53% versus 43%). There were no differences between girls and boys. Rates of violence from parents to adolescents largely echo stress patterning, with adolescents in Gaza more at risk than those in the West Bank (e.g. 24% versus 5% for physical violence).

Adolescents drew attention to two stressors they thought were especially important: financial pressure (and food insecurity) born of increased unemployment and spending too much time together. Both were more common in Gaza, where 40% of adolescents reported more hunger in the last month (compared to 6% in the West Bank). A 14-year-old boy from Gaza City explained, *'People's routines have changed and they are trying to adapt to the situation where they have to stay indoors. So, there are problems inside the houses, especially for the breadwinners who are daily wage workers. I mean, how will they provide food for their families?'* An 18-year-old girl added, *'My cousins ... fight a lot with each other several times a day. They discharged their negative energy on fighting with each other.'*

Reflecting pre-pandemic patterning, adolescents clarified that boys tend to bear the brunt of parents' frustrations, whereas girls bear the brunt of their older brothers'. A 17-year-old girl from the West Bank noted, *'Parents shout more at boys than girls ... even the mother*

► Boys are stressed. So, they tend towards violence as a tool to discharge the negative feelings on anyone more vulnerable such as girls or any younger boy.

(A 15-year-old girl from Gaza)

► The police have become violent ... for example, if people are not committed to the quarantine, they beat them up.

(A 15-year-old girl from Gaza)

vents at her son, hurts him. I mean she beats him.' A 15-year-old boy with a disability living in Gaza added, *'(My father) has become nervous He shouts and slaps me if I forget to do something. Today I was slapped because I hadn't filled the water tank.'* A 14-year-old girl from Gaza reported, *'My brother, who lost his job, is fighting with me every day. He started hitting me.'*

Our covid-19 research in Palestine found that the pandemic has also amplified community violence. Adolescents in both Gaza and the West Bank reported that there is increased fighting in the streets – with both adults and older boys implicated as perpetrators, and stress identified as the primary driver. A 17-year-old girl from the West Bank noted, *'A boy will be playing in the street with a ball, a neighbour will create problems with the other neighbour that the boy hit his son, etc. or he is making noise in the neighbourhood and so on.'* A 15-year-old girl from Gaza added, *'Boys are stressed. So, they tend towards violence as a tool to discharge the negative feelings on anyone more vulnerable such as girls or any younger boy.'* In Gaza, young people added that police violence has also become more common, with officers overly zealous about enforcing quarantine. A 15-year-old girl explained, *'The police have become violent ... for example, if people are not committed to the quarantine, they beat them up.'*

Child labour

In Palestine, as in Lebanon and Jordan, boys are far more at risk of child labour than girls as a result of gender norms that position males as breadwinners and confine females to the home. That said, because of high rates of un- and under-employment, especially in Gaza, boys have little access to stable and decently paid work. A 17-year-old boy from Gaza explained, *'Sometimes we can find work and other times we do not find work.'*

Our covid-19 phone survey found that even prior to the pandemic, older boys were less likely to be enrolled in school than their female peers (63% versus 72%), which some respondents attributed to boys' need to work (or at least look for work), to help offset household poverty. The pandemic has amplified pressure on boys to earn. Just

My uncle approached my father and they decided that we marry as cousins, this is the norm in our culture. I didn't want to marry, but I don't want to be the cause of family problems.

(A 17-year-old girl from Jabalia)

over one-quarter (26%) of older boys reported that they are working more hours since the outbreak of covid-19 – compared to only 3% of older girls. Several adolescents reported that this increased pressure was driving some boys to suicide. An older boy who took part in a focus group discussion reported, *'Today, we woke up and heard about the catastrophic death of an 18-year-old boy in Khanyounis. He hung himself by a chain. I think he was too young to carry the responsibility placed on him.'*

Child marriage

Of the married girls who took part in the pre-pandemic survey conducted by GAGE partners, the median age of marriage was 16. Most (82%) were still enrolled in school at the time of marriage, most (57%) married men at least six years older, most (55%) married relatives, and nearly all (93%) reported that their marriages had been forced. A 16-year-old girl from Gaza, who took part in GAGE formative work, explained of her marriage, *'I refused and I tried to commit suicide, I didn't want to I was young and I would hear about problems from girls. I said I will grow up a little and understand life then, but at the end they accepted and I didn't.'*

Girls highlighted that child marriage has multiple, intersecting drivers. Of the girls who completed the survey conducted by GAGE partners, 83% reported conservative family norms as a driver. Just over one-third (36%) of girls reported that family poverty, related to large household size, is to blame for child marriage. A quarter of girls (25%) linked child marriage and poor educational opportunities. Interestingly, the survey found that girls who are married as children do not, on average, come from households that are relatively poorer (the natal household income of married girls was in line with the national average). Girls who were married as children do, however, have parents with relatively lower levels of education.

Girls who participated in GAGE's formative work offered narratives that explained survey results. A 17-year-old from Jabalia explained that she saw no way to refuse

her cousin because it would sow family discord: *'My uncle approached my father and they decided that we marry as cousins, this is the norm in our culture. I didn't want to marry, but I don't want to be the cause of family problems.'* A 17-year-old from Khanyounis recalled, *'I was married at the age of 14 to a man more than twice my age. I did not want to marry as a child. I wanted to attend university and become a journalist. However, because I am one of 13 children, including eight sisters, my father decided against my wish in order to reduce expenses.'* Girls explained that they saw no reason to stay in school given that they were not learning. A 16-year-old from Gaza noted, *'As for education, I can say the quality of education is not great. Some girls in the ninth grade cannot even read.'*

My mother and my uncles suggested that I get married so that I have children and make up for my father's death.

(A 17-year-old married boy from Gaza)

Although child marriage is far more common for girls than for boys, GAGE's formative work found that some boys are also pressured into marrying as children. The boys most at risk are overwhelmingly likely to be those whose older male relatives have died. A 17-year-old married boy from Gaza explained, *'My mother and my uncles suggested that I get married so that I have children and make up for my father's death.'*

Our research underscores that married girls in Palestine face regular violence. Of the girls who completed the survey fielded by GAGE partners, 45% reported experiencing violence in the marital home. Of those who reported experiencing violence, 94% reported their husband as the perpetrator and 21% reported an in-law as the perpetrator. Most (92%) reported verbal violence; nearly half (46%) reported physical violence and just over a third (37%) reported psychological violence.

Physical violence, girls in our formative research clarified, is generally meted out by husbands – though fathers-in-law can also become violent. *'My husband... came with an angry face and started shouting and hitting me,'* reported a 16-year-old from Gaza. Another girl, the same age and also from Gaza, explained that violence is amplified by the stress of poverty – and men's feelings of inadequacy: *'My husband beats me every time he feels upset because he has no job.'*

My mother-in-law used to go outside the house and lock it so I was unable to get food She never gave me or other daughters-in-law sufficient or good food Once she kept me three days without food.

(A 16-year-old from Shajaia)

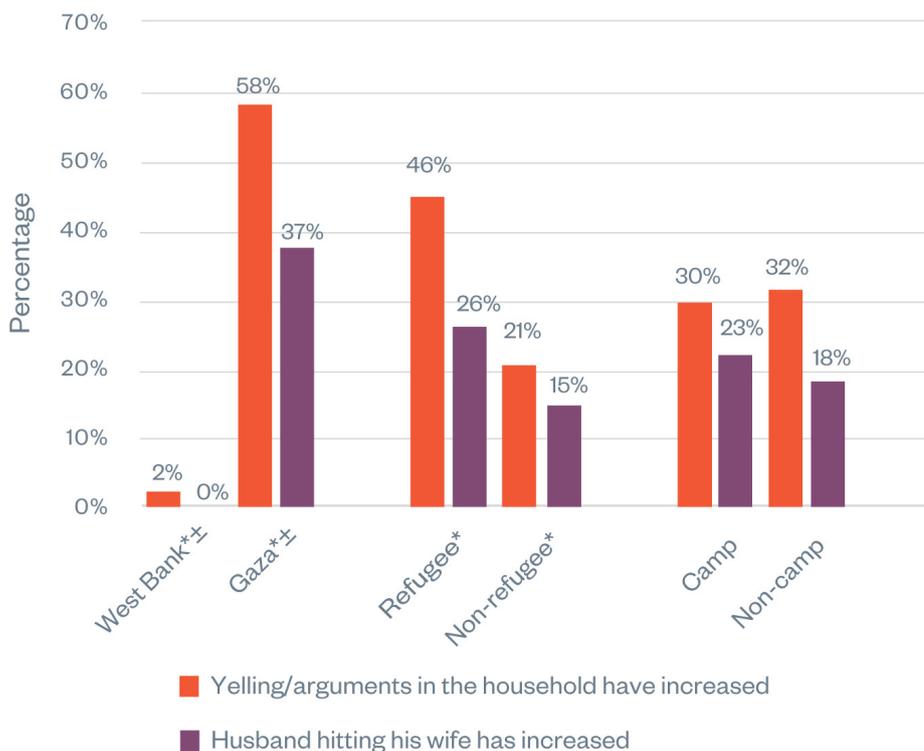
Emotional violence, on the other hand, is quite often perpetrated by mothers-in-law. Girls noted that their mothers-in-law denigrate them and deny them food in order to control them. An older girl from Jabalia recalled, 'I talked to my mother-in-law because I was pregnant and I was feeling so sick due to not being able to eat healthy food. She told me to go to my parents' house and eat there. She mocked me and told me to find somewhere else that'd provide me good food ... I cry sometimes when I am hungry and I don't have food.' Girls reported that mothers-in-law also interfere with marital relationships, which not only exacerbates physical violence, but keeps girls and their husbands from forming the emotional bonds that girls crave. A 16-year-old from Shajaia stated, 'My mother-in-law used to go outside the house and lock it so I was unable

to get food She never gave me or other daughters-in-law sufficient or good food. I convinced my husband for a while to bring me food. When she knew, she prevented that. Once she kept me three days without food.'

Although sisters-in-law can be sources of practical and emotional support – girls in our sample underscored that that this is not always the case, especially in large households where several daughters-in-law are vying for favoured status for themselves and their children. An older girl in a focus group discussion in Gaza explained that her sister-in-law not only tries to ruin her relationship with her mother-in-law, but has also weaponised the children in the household, to make her feel more marginalised. 'She always has a problem with me. She sends her children to urinate and defecate in front of my room. She also hides things and then accuses me of theft.'

Our research found that married girls who experience violence receive very little support. The survey conducted by GAGE partners found that only one-third (37%) of survivors of violence had ever told anyone about their experiences. Girls in GAGE's formative work clarified that under-reporting is common because they feel reporting is pointless – parents who force daughters into child marriage do not permit them to divorce. A 17-year-old from

Figure 10: Perceptions of household violence for 'adolescents like themselves' among married older girls (aged 15 and older)



Source: Abu Hamad et al., 2021b.

▮ I have tried suicide many times. I drank poison and pills, because of the kind of living I have is very hard.

(A 16-year-old girl from Gaza)

Gaza noted, *'Some people refuse to let their daughter get divorced even she lives in a hell.'* A 20-year-old woman, also from Gaza and married to a cousin at 16, reported that when she had approached her father, *'he pulled me from my hair to the streets ... hit me and he told me go back ... he said filthy stuff, he called me names, he kicked me out to the street.'* Several girls in our sample admitted that they saw suicide as the only escape from an abusive marriage. A 16-year-old from Gaza confessed, *'I have tried suicide many times. I drank poison and pills, because of the kind of living I have is very hard.'*

Our covid-19 phone survey found that the pandemic has overall decreased pressure on adolescents to marry. While only 3% of adolescents reported increased pressure to marry (4% in Gaza and 2% in the West Bank), 8% reported decreased pressure (13% in Gaza and 2% in West Bank). Key informants, on the other hand, are concerned solely about increased pressure. Some point to the financial stress brought on by the pandemic and others to parents' broader feelings of insecurity. One NGO informant noted, *'Regarding our villages, girls are getting engaged ... This was happening before but now it has increased due to corona[virus]. Now they say "Let's get her married during corona[virus] and get rid of this responsibility as one doesn't need to spend anything and it will be a relief".'* Another added, *'The father prefers to marry his daughter early because he is afraid of major closure and is afraid about her future Some parents, because they fear the pandemic, are forcing their daughters to leave school in order to get married.'*

The pandemic's impacts on married girls have been more pronounced, especially in Gaza and especially for refugees (see Figure 10). Of married girls completing the phone survey, 58% of those in Gaza reported that there has been an increase in household violence for 'adolescents like me' (versus 2% in West Bank). More than one-third of married girls (37%) in Gaza reported an increase in husbands hitting wives (versus 0% in West Bank). While none of the married girls in the West Bank reported increased forced sex since the outbreak of the pandemic, 15% of those in Gaza did so. Key informants added girls' access to justice and support services has

▮ Violence inside the house is not dealt with as a priority by the government because the government is so busy defeating the pandemic and taking care of the infected cases.

(A key informant)

been limited since the onset of the pandemic, as violence that takes place behind closed doors tends to stay behind closed doors. One explained, *'Violence inside the house is not dealt with as a priority by the government because the government is so busy defeating the pandemic and taking care of the infected cases.'*



A 15-year-old girl who lives in Wavel Camp, Lebanon and attends school © Elie Matar / GAGE

Conclusions and recommendations

GAGE research underscores the myriad and intersecting protection risks facing many Palestinian adolescents. Across contexts, it is common for young people to face violence from adults – and each other – in the home, at school and in the community. Risks are gendered, with boys more vulnerable to the worst forms of physical violence, gang-related violence and child labour, and girls more vulnerable to honour-related violence within the home, sexual harassment and child marriage (and then violence within marriage). In all three contexts, access to reporting channels, services and support for protection-related concerns is very limited, and most adolescents at risk of or experiencing violence can at best rely on informal family support. The covid-19 pandemic has generally served to amplify risks, largely because households are under increased financial stress but also because access to justice services has been further hindered. With the caveats that we acknowledge the limits on UNRWA's mandate, and recognise that UNRWA is working to improve the services that it offers, our research suggests that adolescents' protection risks could be more effectively addressed if UNRWA and its partners invest in the following priority actions:

Addressing violence in the home

- **Scale up social assistance** especially cash plus transfers that can help alleviate economic stressors within the household among the most economically vulnerable.
- **Support positive parenting practices** through courses that address gender norms, emphasise communication and connection, and include age-appropriate positive discipline strategies. Also promote intergenerational dialogue between children and parents through schools, NGOs and mass media to reduce intergenerational conflict.
- **Provide inclusive safe spaces and recreational opportunities (e.g. through adolescent/ youth clubs)** where young people can develop friendships and interact with caring adults – and learn to recognise

and eschew violence, their rights and where to report and seek support when they are at risk. Programmes should directly address gender norms, empowering girls and supporting boys to adopt alternative, non-violent masculinities.

- **Implement hotlines (both phone and online)** that allow young people to report and get support if they are survivors of violence at home or in the community.
- **Step up efforts to prevent child marriage** – using schools to deliver messages to adolescents and as venues where planned marriages might be reported and working with religious leaders to sway parents and communities. Advocacy efforts with government stakeholders, Palestinian authorities and donors to strengthen justice services and legal enforcement will also be critical.
- **Address intimate partner violence** by empowering married girls to recognise and report abuse, and working with boys and young men (especially young husbands) to shift the gender norms that leave girls at risk. Investing in couples' classes to strengthen connection and communication could also provide support in helping married couples deal with multiple stressors in very challenging contexts.
- **Scale up the utilisation of social workers** – expanding their roles to include protection activities.

Addressing violence at school and in the community

- **Provide teachers with regular trainings on non-violent disciplinary approaches** and ensure they are supported to troubleshoot classroom problems.
- **Ensure all schools have counsellors** who are trained to recognise and support students who may be experiencing violence.
- **Continue scaling up child-sensitive reporting systems in schools** and support first- and second-time perpetrators with one-on-one guidance and remove continued offenders.
- **Provide students – especially boys – with sessions aimed at improving communication skills**, fostering non-violent conflict resolution and alternative masculinities – through schools as well as community peer-to-peer youth empowerment programming.

- **Strengthen anti-bullying policies in schools**, making sure students are aware of their rights and know how to report and that policies are consistently enforced.
- **Step up efforts to address sexual harassment**, working with girls on how to protect themselves, invest in self-defence classes to improve confidence and promote awareness about how to report harassment. Also prioritise life skills sessions with boys on alternative masculinities, potentially through sports classes (following the model of Promundo⁶ and ICRW⁷) and encourage parents to recognise that girls are not to blame.
- **Invest in case management** and ensure that social workers are adequately trained and supported to increase awareness of risks of violence against adolescents, how to identify survivors and what justice and referral services exist. Expand the budget to provide meaningful support for cases once referred.
- **Promote intersectoral cooperation among actors to address the multifaceted risk factors of violence**, including among religious institutions, schools, political factions, NGOs and media, and to strengthen reporting and surveillance systems.

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6 See Promundo (2019).

7 See ICRW (2018).

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GAGE Programme Office
Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom
Email: gage@odi.org.uk
Web: www.gage.odi.org

About GAGE

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

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