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# JOURNAL ON EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

Special Issue on Gender in Education in Emergencies

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Youths' Experiences in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Canada

*Kathy Bickmore and Najme Kishani Farahani*

Barriers to Refugee Adolescents' Educational Access during COVID-19:  
Exploring the Roles of Gender, Displacement, and Social Inequalities

*Nicola Jones, Kate Pincock, Silvia Guglielmi, Sarah Baird, Ingrid Sánchez Tapia,  
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The COVID-19 Experience in Ghana

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*Forging the Ideal Educated Girl: The Production of Desirable Subjects in Muslim  
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*Borderless Higher Education for Refugees: Lessons from the Dadaab Refugee Camps*  
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## EDITORIAL NOTE

CARINE ALLAF, JULIA DICUM, AND RUTH NAYLOR<sup>1</sup>

The importance of addressing issues of gender in education in emergencies (EiE) has been well recognized by practitioners over the last two decades. Gaps in male and female enrollment and the gender dimensions inherent in the quality of education received, which are driven in times of emergency by heightened cultural and economic barriers and conditions of violence, have been confirmed and supported by research evidence. Although it is difficult to undertake in acute emergencies, research on EiE is key to enhancing understanding, identifying innovative solutions for complex learning needs, and making headway in providing equal access to education for girls and boys at all levels.

Over the last 22 years, global education has benefited from the support of the G7 member states, which have come together at key moments to advance efforts to significantly change access to quality education globally, particularly in developing countries. In 2018, during a Canadian G7 presidency, G7 leaders agreed to the Charlevoix Declaration on quality education for girls, adolescent girls, and women in developing countries. Contexts of conflict, fragility, and emergency, and the people who experience them, are a key focus of the Charlevoix Declaration.

The fourth commitment stated in the declaration is to “improve sex- and age-disaggregated data and accountability,” including through the “analysis, publication and reporting of progress in girls’ and women’s education participation, completion and learning, training and youth employment.” The conducting and dissemination of academic research can play a critical role in fostering understanding of how to close the gender equality gap in education, and in youth training and employment during and after emergencies. It was with this in mind that the Government of Canada chose to support the *Journal on Education in Emergencies* Special Issue on Gender in Education in Emergencies. The publication of this special issue will bring attention to the role academic journals play in accountability for and the advancement of gender equality in EiE.

The process of soliciting and reviewing submissions for this special issue has led the lead editors into many interesting conceptual discussions. One question that will be pertinent and familiar to many of us, especially in this era of mass global school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic is, What counts as an emergency?

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<sup>1</sup> Carine Allaf, Julia Dicum, and Ruth Naylor served as lead editors for this issue of *Journal on Education in Emergencies* and contributed equally to its development and production.

This is not a new question in EiE, but it is one we had to grapple with when deciding which articles could and should be included here. Should it be limited to countries receiving international humanitarian aid, or should we also consider high-income countries that are being affected by emergency? What scale does an emergency need to reach in order to qualify? The COVID-19 pandemic and the growing climate and refugee crises are, of course, global in impact, but that qualifier would make nearly everywhere an emergency context.

We can categorize countries as crisis affected based on the number of humanitarian appeals issued or the number of people experiencing forcible displacement. The World Bank and UNESCO have produced lists of conflict-affected countries that are based on the number of battle-related deaths. But these country-based definitions can be problematic, especially when considering large countries like Nigeria and Ethiopia, where much of the population is relatively unaffected by a particular conflict or crisis. Should the EiE field include small-scale emergencies that are having a major impact on a particular community in an otherwise stable country? Moreover, for girls and boys, a household emergency can be as traumatic and as disruptive to their education as a national emergency. When a girl is forced into an early marriage and sent away from her home, is this not an individual case of forced displacement?

After juggling these issues, the editorial team arrived at a broad definition of “what counts” as an emergency context. Rather than relying on quantitative measures of what counts as an emergency, we decided to consider how learners themselves experience emergencies, whether local, national, or global. We received submissions from a wide range of contexts, including many that traditionally would not be considered emergencies and relatively few from traditional emergency contexts. In many of these contexts, data disaggregated by sex are limited, which means that any analysis of gender often fails at the first hurdle. Like education, addressing gender is unfortunately still seen as nonessential in some emergencies. If we are to make gender count in emergency interventions, we first need to count the number of girls and boys affected. It is laudable that several of the contributors to this issue present a gender analysis of quantitative data on girls and boys affected by displacement (see Dulieu et al. 2022; Jones et al. 2022), and that other contributors use rich datasets to help understand the intersection of gender with other vulnerable characteristics in a variety of settings (see Carvalho 2022; Sayibu 2022; Cohen et al. 2022).

The second question the editorial team debated was whether this issue is about gender or about girls' education. These two areas are too often conflated. "Addressing gender" often involves a narrow focus on parity ratios and girls' enrollment, with little consideration for gendered experiences within education or what students learn about gender through education. For example, the well-evidenced but morally complex arguments relating to the relationship between girls' education and fertility, if applied without a gender lens, could be interpreted as "girls' education as birth control." However, taking gender into account should mean that education is a way to empower girls to take control of their own lives and their own futures. Girls and boys do not live in isolation from one another, and their life experiences are linked and affected by other societal factors. As such, looking at gender does not mean only boys or girls are being studied. Some contributors to this special issue (see Bickmore and Kishani Farahani 2022; Cohen et al. 2022) examine the gendered experience of education from the perspectives of both girls and boys in a wide range of contexts, which helps us to understand how education systems can both mitigate and exacerbate gender-based aggression and social exclusion.

The third question we debated was whether to include COVID-19 explicitly in the call for papers. We came together to lead the special issue in early 2020, just as the first global lockdown was starting. Research takes time, we reasoned, and the effects of the pandemic, no matter how long it lasted, would be difficult to determine in time for this issue, except perhaps in field notes. Little did we know as we discussed this just how far-reaching COVID-19 would be and how deeply every aspect of life would be affected, including exacerbating gender divides and violence against women and the unprecedented near global shutdown of education at all levels. Even that early in the pandemic, however, it was clear that we could not exclude COVID-19. As such, we included COVID-19 in the call for papers and have included three articles on the topic. We can only guess at the many ways COVID-19 has affected the production of this special issue, from the availability of reviewers to the amount of time the authors and editors had to focus on completing their work. While we could not have anticipated the themes and contexts that would be offered in this special issue, we are pleased with the five research articles, one field note, and three book reviews contained in its pages.

This special issue of *JEiE* offers new insights into the gendered experiences of girls and boys seeking quality education in contexts of conflict and crisis. The contributing authors share learning from research and fieldwork conducted in varied contexts, including North America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. This special issue of *JEiE* ties the crisis of girls' unequal access to quality education with the worldwide impact of COVID-19 in several ways.

Kicking off the research articles is “Peacebuilding Education to Address Gender-Based Aggression: Youths’ Experiences in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Canada” by Kathy Bickmore and Najme Kishani Farahani. In this article, Bickmore and Kishani Farahani illustrate how education in emergencies is viewed in various contexts in the three countries. They drew from focus group discussions and workshops with youth and teachers from economically marginalized areas in three countries with distinct and different conflict contexts: Mexico, Bangladesh, and Canada. Despite the various differences between these countries, the problems of gender-based inequity and violence were pervasive in all the participants’ lives. The similarities in the three countries’ cases were more prominent than the differences. Students in all three contexts shared similar stories about gender-based violence in their communities and families. Both female and male participants in all the focus groups described having frequent experience with and concern about direct gendered violence. The participating students and their teachers also showed some awareness of the cultural and social-structural dimensions of gender exploitation that legitimized and exacerbated gender-based violence. However, despite these common experiences, gender conflict was almost never addressed in any curriculum or practice described by the teachers and students in the Canadian schools, and it was rarely mentioned by the Mexican and Bangladeshi participants.

The next two articles explore education during the COVID-19 pandemic, which singlehandedly created a global emergency. In “Barriers to Refugee Adolescents’ Educational Access during COVID-19: Exploring the Roles of Gender, Displacement, and Social Inequalities,” Nicola Jones, Kate Pincock, Silvia Guglielmi, Sarah Baird, Ingrid Sánchez Tapia, Erin Oakley, and Jennifer Seager explore the experiences of Rohingya refugee communities in Bangladesh and compare them with the experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Jones et al. draw from survey data on 3,030 adolescents and in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with a subset of adolescents and key informants. The research, which is part of an existing longitudinal research sample, was conducted at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; data were collected between April and July 2020. This study focuses on adolescent Rohingya and Syrian refugees’ access to formal and nonformal education prior to COVID-19, and the extent to which they were able to continue learning during the pandemic. Drawing from an intersectional conceptual framing that attends to the ways vulnerability is compounded for the most socially marginalized, the findings in this paper demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened gender and other social inequalities that directly affect these refugee adolescents’ access to education. Despite the two countries’ different approaches to the lockdowns, the widespread school closures in each had negative effects on the Rohingya and Syrian refugee communities. In

Bangladesh, education was deemed nonessential for the Rohingya refugees during COVID-19, which further exacerbated the existing barriers to their learning continuity. Gendered barriers that affected both communities included issues with connectivity for distance learning, such as gaining access to devices, and the increased amount of time adolescent girls spent on domestic and caregiving responsibilities.

In “Girls’ and Boys’ Voices on the Gendered Experience of Learning during COVID-19 in Countries Affected by Displacement,” Nicole Dulieu, Silvia Arlini, Mya Gordon, and Allyson Krupar continue the theme of looking at multiple countries and populations that were affected by displacement and conflict prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. To study the additional impact resulting from COVID-19, the authors drew data from ten countries affected by displacement, looking specifically at girls’ and boys’ (those who were and were not displaced) gendered perceptions of their ability to learn during the COVID-19-related school closures. Their overall findings were consistent with the general literature and with Jones et al.’s article, which show that girls were disadvantaged in terms of access to learning resources in their households. Boys were more likely to report learning “a little bit” or “nothing” when they also reported having more negative feelings due to COVID-19, such as feeling sadder, more worried, or more bored; when they reported experiencing increased violence in their homes; and when they had to do more chores and take more responsibility for the care of other children. Although girls reported experiencing the same challenges, except for increased violence in the home, they were *not* as strongly correlated to girls’ perceptions of learning “a little bit” or “nothing.” This may suggest that girls were more accustomed to pursuing their learning despite facing challenges such as violence in the home and responsibility for domestic chores. Boys were less able to adapt to these challenges during COVID-19, which affected their perceptions of their ability to learn.

The last two research articles look not at COVID-19 but at refugee populations vis-à-vis their host communities. In “Intersectionality: Experiences of Gender Socialization and Racialization for Iraqi Students Resettled in the United States,” Flora Cohen, Sarah R. Meyer, Ilana Seff, Cyril Bennouna, Carine Allaf, and Lindsay Stark use a qualitative study to examine Iraqi students’ lived experiences while attending public schools in Texas and Virginia. These Iraqi adolescents navigated the multiple factors that shaped their racialization and gender socialization, including their parents’ expectations of gender roles; their teachers’ and peers’ perceptions of gendered behavior for Arab and Muslim adolescents, which often were influenced by stereotypes; and their own observations and internalization

of the gender socialization process of their US-born peers. Like the findings in other types of emergencies, the refugee youth in this study experienced an increase in household responsibilities. Interestingly, this created opportunities for the participants' parents to treat their sons and daughters more equitably in terms of participation in the labor market. However, this resulted in the youth having less time to engage with their studies and schools. The study also looked at how differently these Iraqi youth experienced gender and racial socialization than their US-born counterparts.

The final research article, "Refugee Girls' Secondary Education in Ethiopia: Examining the Vulnerabilities of Refugees and Host Communities in Low-Resource Displacement Settings" by Shelby Carvalho, also looks at secondary schooling for adolescents. Carvalho specifically compared the experiences of girls living in refugee camps in Ethiopia to girls in the host communities. Drawing from two household surveys, Carvalho's quantitative study finds that domestic responsibilities at home and concerns about safety in the community limit refugee girls' secondary school participation disproportionately more than the participation of refugee boys and host community children. However, other factors that may affect refugee girls' education, including parental education, parental perceptions about the value of schooling, and exposure to gender-based violence, did not affect refugee girls disproportionately. This suggests that refugee girls and host community girls in low-resource settings face many of the same challenges in accessing secondary school, but that refugee girls face additional compounding barriers that limit their secondary school participation. In looking at the differences in school participation at the camp and host levels, rather than examining aggregate regional statistics, Carvalho was able to investigate how barriers vary across groups and explore how compounded disadvantages can create substantial barriers to refugee girls' education. Her analysis emphasizes the importance of policies and interventions that target the specific barriers faced in each region, rather than taking a blanket approach to girls' education.

This special issue includes one field note, "Data Disaggregation for Inclusive Quality Education in Emergencies: The COVID-19 Experience in Ghana" by Abdul Badi Sayibu. Using the Making Ghanaian Girls Great! (also known as MGCubed) experience as a case study, Sayibu discusses the difficulty of collecting data during emergencies. In April 2020, the Ghanaian Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service, in collaboration with Plan International Ghana, introduced a TV teaching and learning program for all primary school children in the country. This program included lessons in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. From the start, the program put great importance on measuring

the rates of participation in order to ensure equal access and inclusion for all. Sayibu discusses the program's phone-based data collection and analysis strategies and demonstrates how a simple data disaggregation method can provide valuable insights into the reach, inclusiveness, and participation of the most vulnerable sub-groups in education interventions during crises.

The three book reviewers in this special issue examine four quite different works. In the first review, Nora Fyles discusses UNESCO's *GEMR Gender Report 2019: Building Bridges for Gender Equality* and INEE's *Mind the Gap: The State of Girls' Education in Crisis and Conflict*. She finds that, while the scope and objectives of the two reports differ, both contribute to the evidence base on gender and education in a range of crisis contexts, including migration and displacement. They also summarize international, regional, and national legal and policy frameworks, draw from the literature to describe gender dynamics in education, and provide specific examples and case studies. Both reports establish a foundation of evidence on the status of girls' education in crisis contexts and also point to critical concerns that should be addressed in order to advance the ambitions of the Charlevoix Declaration.

In the next review, Laila Kadiwal looks at Shenila Khoja-Moolji's *Forging the Ideal Educated Girl: The Production of Desirable Subjects in Muslim South Asia*. While this book does not stand out immediately as a work that contributes directly to gender in education in emergencies, Kadiwal points out that Khoja-Moolji dismantles homogenous assumptions about Muslim girls that are embedded in Western aid and foreign policies, as well as in the domestic policies of Muslim societies. This book takes readers across South Asia, from 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial India to present-day Pakistan, to demonstrate that the educated Muslim girl is a dynamic figure, and not the monolithic one often perceived. Khoja-Moolji urges anyone working in education to look at the underlying causes of why women are treated in certain ways.

Finally, Spogmai Akseer reviews Wenona Giles and Lorrie Miller's edited book, *Borderless Higher Education for Refugees: Lessons from the Dadaab Refugee Camps*, which offers interesting takeaways on refugees' views on higher education as a transformative power in their lives. Giles and Miller and the other contributors to this book tackle the complicated issue of providing higher education for refugees head on. They demonstrate that providing higher education for refugees is critical to enabling them to navigate ongoing systems of inequality and to overcome some of the social, political, and economic barriers they face.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION TO ADDRESS GENDER-BASED AGGRESSION: YOUTHS' EXPERIENCES IN MEXICO, BANGLADESH, AND CANADA

KATHY BICKMORE AND NAJME KISHANI FARAHANI

## ABSTRACT

*Building durable peace through education requires addressing the gender ideologies and hierarchies that encourage both direct physical aggression and indirect harm through marginalization and exploitation. Although formal education systems are shaped by gendered patterns of social conflict, enmity, and inequity, schools can help young people to build on their inclination, relationships, and capability to participate in building sustainable, gender-just peace. In this paper, we draw from focus group research conducted with youths and their teachers in public schools in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Canada to investigate how young people understood the social conflicts and violence surrounding them and what citizens could do about these issues, and how their teachers used the school curricula to address them. The research revealed that gender-based violence was pervasive in students' lives in all three settings, yet the curriculum the teachers and students described, with minor differences between contexts, included few opportunities to examine or resist the gender norms, institutions, and hierarchies that are the roots of exploitation and violence.*

## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an incremental, normalized emergency that occurs alongside everyday violence in both war zones and non-war contexts. However, despite its omnipresence, GBV has been insufficiently problematized in peacebuilding education research and practice (Bourgois 2009; Kovinthan Levi

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2019). Gender-sensitive perspectives are crucial to inquiry and practice in relation to conflict, peacebuilding, and education for peace (Davies 2008; Reardon and Snauwaert 2015). Gender is implicated in the ways conflict is addressed, whether negatively or positively, in both relatively peaceful contexts (e.g., Schultz, Buck, and Niesz 2000) and intergroup conflict situations (e.g., Bekerman, Zembylas, and McGlynn 2009). Hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity are deeply entrenched in existing hierarchies, ideologies, and practices of violence (Connell 1995; Dunne and Leach 2007; Mlamleu et al. 2000).

The research presented in this paper is an examination of the gendered dimensions of social conflict and violence experienced by a selection of female and male youths in three countries, and of teachers' responses to their students' concerns. The participants, who included youths and teachers from several schools in each country, live in the relatively peaceful context of Canada, the moderately violent context of Bangladesh, and the relatively violent, non-war context of Mexico. By engaging in dialogue with youth and teacher participants in a few schools per country, we investigated the conflicts that preoccupied these young people. We also compared their views about possibilities for and impediments to transforming these conflicts with those in the curricula their teachers used in their daily practices.

## **DIMENSIONS OF VIOLENCE AND PEACE**

Direct and indirect forms of violence reinforce one another (Galtung 1990). Indirect violence includes the social-structural patterns of inequitable access to tangible resources and the power to meet human needs, such as discrimination against women and girls that results in their disproportionate levels of poverty and vulnerability (Burton and Dukes 1990). Another form of indirect violence is psycho-cultural, which refers to the norms, narratives, and symbols that legitimate direct violence, oppression, and enmity, such as misogyny and male chauvinism (Ross 2007). As argued by the peace and conflict theorists cited above, alleviating direct violence is not possible without also transforming its social-structural and cultural roots.

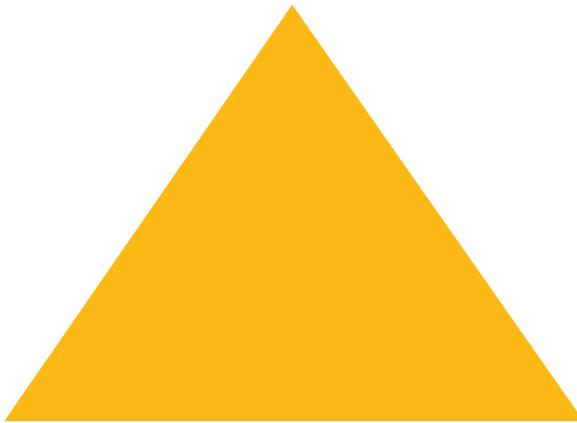
Social justice, which is the opposite of systemic violence, means that people in all sectors of society have access to substantive resource equity (social-structural redistribution), inclusion (cultural recognition), and equitable participation (i.e., political representation) in decisionmaking processes about the conflicts that affect them (Dahl, Stoltz, and Willig, 2004; Fraser 2005). As John Paul Lederach

(2003, 73) explains, achieving social justice requires collective communication and problem-solving, as well as “creating and addressing social and public spheres where human institutions, structures, and patterns of relationships are constructed.” This is why transitional justice processes for peacebuilding often include education as a way to enable people to face the social harm and injustice embedded in their difficult pasts (Davies 2017; Paulson and Bellino 2017).

Acknowledging and applying these intersecting dimensions of justice enables us to discern the potentially nonviolent, transformable conflicts that underlie violence, and thus to create potential spaces for humans to redress the conditions that limit sustainable (just) peace. Figure 1 presents the three dimensions of destructive conflict or violence: participating in direct physical violence (represented at the top of the triangle), and in indirect cultural violence and social-structural violence (represented at the base of the triangle). Figure 2 presents the analogous dimensions of potentially constructive conflict that are needed for systemic peacebuilding: participation or political representation in decisionmaking processes (top of the triangle), and indirect systemic peacebuilding through inclusion and equitable resource distribution (base of the triangle).

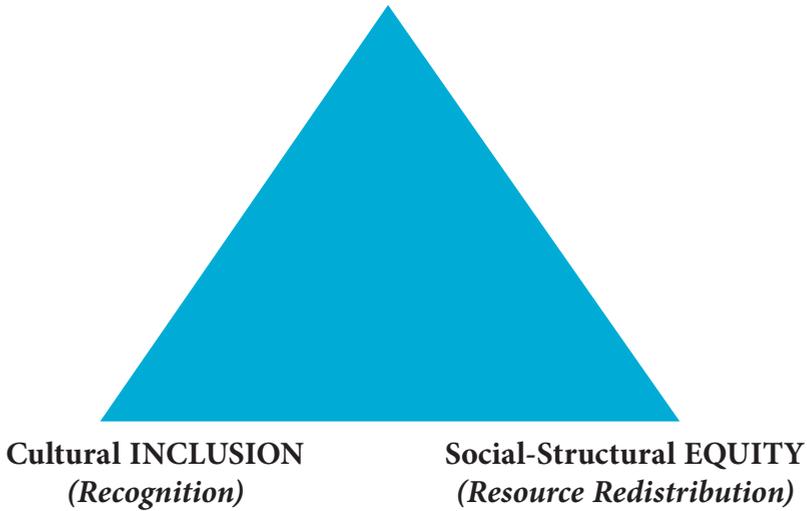
*Figure 1: Dimensions of Direct and Indirect Violence*

***(Direct Violence) PARTICIPATION***



**Cultural EXCLUSION    *(Indirect Violence)*    Structural INEQUITY**

*Figure 2: Dimensions of Systemic Peacebuilding*  
**(Political) PARTICIPATION and REPRESENTATION**



Correction: The original publication of this figure in June 2022 erroneously labeled the lower left vertex “Cultural EXCLUSION.” The figure has been corrected in this version (August 2022) to represent cultural INCLUSION as a dimension of systemic peacebuilding.

These mutually reinforcing dimensions of conflict, violence, and peacebuilding shape the lived learning experiences of young people, and their opportunities to learn through formal, nonformal, and informal education. Therefore, educating for just and sustainable peace means engaging in constructive conflict communication and addressing the systemic and direct causes of violence, including GBV.

### **EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CONFLICT**

While the scholars cited above offer possibilities for systemic justice-based peacebuilding education in informal and nonformal settings, we focus in this paper on uncovering the thin and broadly distributed spaces for socially transformative education in public formal schooling. Clearly, education alone cannot resolve entrenched structural and cultural conflicts, such as inequitable distribution of resources, othering, the concentration of power, and gendered aggression. However, some feasible changes in public education can help to mitigate and avoid reinforcing, and even begin to transform, such destructive conflicts.

Mieke Lopes Cardozo and colleagues (Lopes Cardozo, Higgins, and Le Mat 2016) have articulated the kinds of education policies and programming that can contribute to learners’ development of agency in each of these peacebuilding

dimensions. Social-structural redistribution of resources includes work-related programming; recognition of cultural identity includes intercommunal arts, sports, and multilingualism; political representation includes citizen-action initiatives, participation in governance, and interpersonal peacemaking. Our research, presented below, shows how schools can give diverse students opportunities to understand and learn how/where to challenge dominance, violence, exploitation, and the paralysis of disengagement—to build this three-dimensional repertoire of constructive options for participating in collective democratic peacebuilding citizenship and for managing the inevitable social conflicts of life.

Young people’s capability and inclination to participate in identifying the causes of and remedies for direct and systemic social conflict are learned “feet first” (McCauley 2002) in lived relationships and in social and political institutions. Implicit experiences with social hierarchies and governance may complement or contradict the explicit messages of curriculum lessons. Inevitably, such feet-first learning experiences reflect differential, gendered cultural and social-structural hierarchies and direct violence. In violent contexts in particular, citizenship education and related development initiatives may function as securitization that frames certain social identity groups (including youth) as an internal threat, or that ignores the barriers some people face (such as GBV) rather than encouraging democratic engagement (Kassimir and Flanagan 2010; Novelli 2011; Pearce and Perea 2019). Relying heavily on peacekeeping and policing to temporarily prevent violence—for instance, to protect vulnerable people from child abuse, rape, or war—can be the crucial first step educators take toward making space for peacebuilding. However, securitization efforts can also impede systemic peacebuilding by not enabling people to understand or handle indirect forms and causes of violence, such as sexism, male chauvinism, and gender discrimination (e.g., Cremin and Guilherme 2016; Novelli 2017).

Globalized discourse that is embedded in educational materials may indoctrinate students into a Western neoliberal view of the citizen as an economically useful, law abiding, implicitly male, autonomous individual who is alienated from historical contexts of injustice and possibilities for collective action (Espínola 2005; Kennelly and Llewellyn 2011; Quaynor 2012; Young 2011). Rather than holding public institutions or collective processes responsible for addressing social conflicts, mainstream citizenship, and peace education in particular, may emphasize individual responsibility and ignore gender and socioeconomic status (Davies 2011; Ross 2010).

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School antiviolence initiatives also focus too often on surveillance and punishment—which reflects a disproportionate distrust of particular youth populations—instead of on education, resolution, or the transformation of underlying problems (Bickmore 2011; Skiba et al. 2002). The discourses of *convivencia* (peaceful living together) in Latin America, along with UNESCO’s similar notions about a culture of peace, have been taken up in various ways and sometimes even reimagined as being in compliance with oppressive hierarchies (Ascorra and López 2019; Fierro-Evans and Carbajal-Padilla 2019; Morales and López 2019; Perales Franco 2019). For instance, in the Mexican state of Guanajuato, a 2014 *convivencia* school regulation emphasized regulation and punishment rather than equity or inclusion (Zurita Rivera 2012). This project thus investigates participants’ opportunities to learn about social dynamics and democratic citizen action, which offer precious resources to bring about social transformation and build sustainable peace.

Public school education may build on, or contradict, students’ experiential knowledge that has been shaped by their gender and intersecting identities in their respective communities. Resources for peacebuilding and conflict transformation are rooted (albeit often buried) in each community’s languages, narratives, and strategies for approaching conflict; education may help people to name, critique, and build on these context-responsive cultural and social-political resources (Lederach 1995). Comparative international qualitative research can help to identify the risks and opportunities students face in their classrooms, and to elicit and recognize a wide variety of experiences, insights, and critical perspectives.

### **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, EDUCATION, AND BUILDING PEACE**

In a wide variety of contexts around the world, women and girls suffer disproportionate physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, especially intimate partner violence (United Nations 2015). Formal education can help young people and educators recognize and resist everyday violence against children, GBV in particular, but it often does not. School textbooks worldwide, which are indicators of the governing cultural and political values as well as the core resources for students and teachers, increasingly do address GBV (30% of 2005-2011 texts surveyed); this is especially true when the textbooks also address gender equity more generally (Russell, Lerch, and Wotipka 2018). On the other hand, even where macro-level GBV policies are in place, local districts and schools may not adhere to them (Parkes 2016; Parkes, Ross, and Heslop 2020).

Until quite recently, many research and intervention approaches to such violence often ignored the gendered school practices and structures that implicitly reinforce discrimination and sexualized gender violence (Leach, Dunne, and Salvi 2014; Manaen 2011). For instance, research in Latin America has mainly considered gangs, guns, and drugs in nongendered terms (Dunne, Humphreys, and Leach 2006), and programs to prevent bullying and corporal punishment at school have been similarly gender blind (Parkes et al. 2016). This remains true, even as gender experiences, roles, and hierarchies intersect with other social identities to reinforce such violence.

There is little robust qualitative research on the processes, sustainability, and long-term impact of GBV interventions in schools, particularly outside North America or sub-Saharan Africa (Parkes et al. 2020). Nevertheless, scholars have begun to identify key elements of relatively effective practices. These include applying wholistic school approaches rather than stand-alone GBV prevention programs (Dunne et al. 2006; Heslop et al. 2019); giving attention to the broad sociopolitical, cultural, and economic contexts of violence inside and outside schools (Lundgren and Amin 2015; Parkes 2016; Parkes and Heslop 2013); and justice-oriented consideration of the intersectionality among social identities such as gender, age, class, and race with social-structural inequalities and GBV (Bhana et al. 2021; Parkes et al. 2016). In sum, narrow or isolated initiatives focused on the symptoms of GBV in schools are unlikely to have much success in reducing the phenomenon; in contrast, initiatives that are effective seem to be broader, to be based in understanding and transforming the roots of misogyny and gender inequity, and to intersect with other facets of identity and context inside and beyond standard schooling practices.

Building on these insights, our justice-based peacebuilding framework takes into account the intersecting social-structural and cultural causes of, and the actors involved in, young people's direct experiences of violence, including explicit and implicit GBV, in three contrasting contexts. Participatory dialogical pedagogies and research methodologies are also important in helping students and teachers develop the "action competence" needed to address GBV and other injustice (Biström and Lundström 2021), and in linking learning with their experience and understandings in their particular contexts (Adriany, Yulindrasari, and Safrina 2021; Allen and Rasmussen 2017; Carl and Ravitch 2018; Parkes et al. 2020). Therefore, our methodology centers on teachers' and youths' expression of their experiences and understandings of gender, and the intersecting elements

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such as race and economic status, in the conflicts they are concerned about (see examples below). Informed by Lederach's (1995) notion of culturally "elicitive" (versus prescriptive) conflict transformation education, our methodology was designed to facilitate participants' constructively critical reflections on the relation between education and social conflict, as experienced by marginalized youth and their teachers in particular contexts. Gender-based aggression is embedded in the complex contexts of social conflict described by the female and male young people who navigate them.

### RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND METHODS

The larger research project from which this paper is taken examined the curricula experienced by our young participants, juxtaposed with their understanding of certain social conflicts affecting their own non-war urban settings and of what citizens, including them, could do about them. We focus in this paper on the participants' education and their experiences of gender-based aggression in selected marginalized urban communities in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Canada. Because we examined the relation between school and society in violent non-war contexts, we purposively selected countries whose cultural and political contexts had differing levels of violence. Table 1 summarizes some of these countries' characteristics. Because more than 80,000 people have been killed and many more displaced by drug gang violence and associated police/military activity in Mexico in the two decades preceding this study, it is ranked low on the Global Peace Index (IEP 2015, 2016). Bangladesh is ranked in the middle of the Global Peace Index, due to fairly high rates of social exclusion and some direct violence among the supporters of rival political groups. Even in Canada, a relatively peaceful country, marginalized high-poverty communities endure considerable direct and indirect violence, including GBV, that is largely hidden from its privileged neighbors (Cotter and Savage 2019; Doob and Cesaroni 2004). Thus, the contexts for this research are neither (post)war zones nor completely peaceful zones. Much of the review above is of literature that examines contexts of armed conflict and/or intergroup division, whereas this research focuses on other contexts of urgent, deadly violence, including GBV, that also deserve attention.

Table 1: National Research Contexts

|   | Canada  | Mexico  | Bangladesh   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Global Peace Index rank</b><br>(IEP 2016, 2021)                    | 8 (2016),<br>10 (2021)  | 140 (2016),<br>140 (2021)   | 83 (2016),<br>91 (2021)  |
| <b>Population, 2022</b>   | 38,388,419  | 131,562,772   | 167,885,689  |
| <b>Percent of population ages 0-14</b><br>(World Bank 2020)           | 15.9%   | 25.8%   | 27.2%  |
| <b>Human Development Index rank</b><br>(World Population Review 2022) | 13  | 75  | 133  |
| <b>Gender Inequality Index rank</b><br>(UNDP 2020)                    | 16  | 71  | 133  |
| <b>Government system</b>  | Democratic constitutional monarchy  | Democratic federal republic   | Parliamentary democratic republic  |
| <b>Some key axes of conflict and violence</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Francophone and Anglophone populations</li> <li>• Settler-colonial and indigenous populations</li> <li>• (Some terrorism)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spanish colonial and indigenous populations</li> <li>• Indigenous resistance to current government</li> <li>• Criminal gang and drug war violence</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal political rivalry</li> <li>• Anticolonial (British India)</li> <li>• Bangladesh–Pakistan</li> <li>• Refugee–citizen populations</li> </ul> |
| <b>School system</b>  | Secular, mixed  | Secular, mixed  | Religious, gender segregated   |

Our fieldwork sites within these differing contexts (2014-2016) were publicly funded urban schools in economically marginalized areas: Ontario, Canada (three schools in one city), Guanajuato, Mexico (four schools in one city), and Bangladesh (four schools: a boys' and a girls' school in a large city experiencing significant political violence, and a boys' and a girls' school in a smaller, politically more tranquil city). The heart of the research process was a series of voluntary focus group workshops with students and teachers at each school. The researchers

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engaged 3-6 groups of student volunteers from grades 4-8 at each school, and each group had 4-6 students of similar ages. Table 2 presents the research participants and sites.

*Table 2: Research Sites and Participants*

|                          | Ontario,<br>Canada | Guanajuato,<br>Mexico | Bangladesh | Total   |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------|---|
| <b>Number of Schools</b> | 3                  | 4                     | 4          | 11  |
| <b>Students:</b>         |                    |                       |            |   |
| Number of participants   | 55                 | 81                    | 36         | 172 students<br>(82 female, 90 male)                |
| Number of focus groups   | 12                 | 16                    | 4          | 36 focus groups<br>1 session each=<br>36 sessions   |
| <b>Teachers:</b>         |                    |                       |            |   |
| Number of participants   | 14                 | 21                    | 16         | 51 teachers<br>(mostly female)                      |
| Number of focus groups   | 3                  | 4                     | 4          | 11 focus groups<br>3-5 sessions<br>each=32 sessions |

Each student focus group met once. In most schools, we also held follow-up sessions with participants similar to the original groups to present and invite feedback on our initial results. In the focus group workshops, the students expressed their understanding of and concerns about social conflict and violence, what they believed citizens including themselves could do about these problems, and what relevant education they had received at school. The focus group participants were shown 10-12 (non-gory) images that reflected a range of locally relevant incidents of direct violence and indirect systemic conflict, including at least one that reflected GBV (see descriptions below). After viewing and briefly discussing the images, each group chose the conflicts they considered most important in their lives, and then worked together like reporters to name and discuss the “who-what-where-why-how and now what?” of each conflict. They shared their understandings of what stakeholders were affected, which factors had caused or exacerbated the problems, and what authorities and ordinary citizens, like themselves, could do about those problems. Students also told how their school curricula had addressed these concerns, or had not, and offered suggestions for the teachers. As dictated by ethics protocols and the informed consent process, the children retained a sense of security during this process by continually making

autonomous decisions about whether, how, and in what ways to participate. In addition, the focus groups took place in students' school spaces, where they had access to support if they needed it.

Four to seven teachers from each school voluntarily participated in separate focus group discussions that were based on their interest in educating for peace and/or citizenship. Each group attended three to five workshops held a month or more apart. They discussed the pedagogical practices they considered relevant to conflict, citizenship, and peace education. In the first focus group session, teachers shared what and how they were already teaching about various conflict issues and peace actions, and what their students were facing in their respective contexts. The teachers then vetted the image prompts that were to be used in the student focus groups, suggested adjustments for comprehensibility and local relevance, and communicated their own understandings of the conflicts represented in the images. Weeks later, after completing the student focus groups, the research team met with the same teacher focus groups to present anonymized results from the student focus groups at their school. The teachers reflected together on how the curriculum and pedagogies they implemented corresponded (or did not) with students' understandings and concerns. The subsequent teacher focus group sessions were prompted by summary analyses of official curriculum guideline documents in each location, which prompted further conversation about the (mis)fit between democratic peacebuilding goals, students' concerns and understandings, and the constraints on the teachers' work.

In keeping with the methodological guidance of Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), these cases were dynamic and not neatly bounded, and all were affected by local and national history, culture, social-economic inequity and power dynamics, and by the globalized shape of schooling. Our analysis was an iterative, interactive, constructivist process that engaged participants and an evolving research team. The unique participants, schools, and urban communities were comparable in the limited sense that all were economically stressed urban public schools in non-war zones that were experiencing considerable community violence. The team selected contrasting national-cultural conflict contexts in order to shed light on factors that could contribute to and/or impede young people's development of the capability, inclination, and confidence to contribute to building just peace in violent contexts. Our analyses and presentation of these findings, which were guided by the three dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding noted above, responded to our research questions: How did these young people understand and feel about various kinds of social conflict that were affecting their lives, including the factors underlying

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direct and indirect violence? What challenges, roles, and repertoire of possibilities did they see in citizens' action for democratic peacebuilding as a way to help remake their worlds? How did they feel their schooling was helping them, or was not helping them, to overcome those challenges? How did their perspectives compare with those embedded in the curricula their teachers implemented? The comparisons between and among participants, schools, and urban-national communities shed light on factors that could contribute to, or impede, young people's development of citizenship agency for peacebuilding.

Our research goal was conceptual and illustrative; we sought to invite participatory dialogue more than to quantitatively represent attitudes or experiences. We enhanced reliability by including multiple student focus groups at each school, by meeting with each teacher focus group multiple times over a period of months, by vetting discussion prompts and, later, the aggregated student responses with their teachers, and by making follow-up visits to the schools and classrooms to critique and discuss our analysis with research participants.

We next present select findings from the student and teacher focus groups to highlight the participants' perspectives on gender-based aggression and gender-equity conflicts, which were vividly experienced by every group of young people in every research setting. Our analysis of gender conflicts highlights the interplay among the intersecting cultural, social-structural, and participation dimensions of conflict, peace, and education in each context.

## FINDINGS

In this section, we first present findings about the gender-related experiences of violence described by the young participants in each country context, which their teachers then corroborated and discussed. We then use the three-dimensional conceptual framework introduced above to structure an analytical summary of the young people's understanding of the actors, factors, and causes behind that violence, and what they thought people like them and their families could do about those problems. They also described how their teachers' curricula addressed their concerns, or did not. We note the similarities and differences in the results from the three countries, and between students' and teachers' responses, for each dimension of gender-based conflict and peacebuilding: cultural bias or inclusion, social-structural equity, and participation, including citizen representation.

**GENDERED PERSONAL-PHYSICAL AGGRESSION:  
AN ACUTE PROBLEM IN ALL RESEARCH SETTINGS**

The focus group prompts used in each country included an image of a large clenched masculine fist of indeterminate ethnic identity in front of a smaller image of a person cowering. The young people in every focus group and country location identified the problem the image suggested as gender-based domestic violence. They then described their own experiences of gender-based harassment and assault, inside and outside their homes. GBV was prominent in the lived concerns expressed by students in all the participating schools and locations. They vividly described the actors involved in direct GBV: male perpetrators, female victims, and children, whom they described as both witnesses and victims. The students also identified other actors who could intervene but, in their experience, usually did not, including neighbors, family members, the police, and the courts.

Several male and female Mexican students emotionally described their vivid personal experiences of domestic violence: “Sometimes my dad hits my mom.” “My aunt lives next to a man who killed his wife with a gun.” Several girls said their freedom of mobility was severely curtailed by curfews and the risk of violence, and young people of both genders mentioned that rape was a particular risk for female migrants traveling northward to seek work outside of Mexico. Most of the focus group participants from a Mexican intermediate school and an elementary school chose to discuss gender-based aggression in depth; at the other two schools, this topic was eclipsed by implicitly gendered concerns, such as gang violence, pollution, and the economic exploitation of women and children. The Mexican students also described fighting, bullying, and street violence, primarily with male perpetrators, as major problems in their lives.

Student participants in the focus groups in Bangladesh similarly identified direct GBV and harassment in the community and at home as very serious problems in their personal experience. Most of the female students, especially in the smaller city, described experiencing gender-based harassment and violence in their own families and neighborhoods: “[Men] beat women for small mistakes.” “Spoilt boys harass girls.” They were outraged that females who had been assaulted were often stigmatized and noted that economically powerful men were particularly abusive. Girls in the larger city also had experienced GBV and sexual harassment. One said that her uncle frequently battered her aunt, and another lamented that “we always see women get beaten.” Boys in both cities stated that “[gender-based violence] happens a lot in my neighborhood” and that “when husbands do not

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like something about their wives, they beat them.” Boys in the larger city also said sexual harassment was pervasive.

Student participants in every Canadian school focus group identified GBV as an issue of primary concern. Female and male youths from two of the three Canadian schools also expressed concern about homophobic/transphobic harassment, sometimes identifying their family members as targets. Canadian students, like their Mexican and Bangladeshi counterparts, all shared stories of GBV in their communities: women being murdered by men, a woman raped and beaten on the street near one of the schools, a male teacher fired due to his alleged sexual abuse of female students. Most students in one Canadian school and many in the other Canadian schools also expressed deep concern about the frequent interpersonal aggression, both in-person and cyber bullying, in their schools and communities, which was perpetrated by males who targeted weaker boys and girls. Despite Canada’s identification as a peace zone, several Canadian students said they had been personally victimized. A boy and a girl from different focus groups at one school shed tears while describing being persistently targeted by aggression. In sum, GBV was a vivid daily concern of the young people in all three research settings.

Student participants in all three countries expressed considerably more concern about gender-based aggression than most of their teachers, although the teachers did affirm, when asked, that such offenses were widespread. The participating teachers’ lessons addressed gender aggression conflict symptoms generically, if at all; this left the responsibility for stopping aggressive or intolerant behavior, and for avoiding others’ aggression, up to the students. Echoing the students’ narratives, a teacher at a Bangladeshi girls’ school said he had warned students that “there will be naughty and spoilt boys on the street, trying to harass you.”

Domestic GBV was addressed in a few Mexican elementary civics and ethics lessons, but they often emphasized poor communication between husbands and wives rather than patterns of violence stemming from a power imbalance. In one lesson, students created skits portraying the perspective of each party in a story from their textbook about a marital conflict over money. A teacher at a Mexican intermediate school said she had learned of her students’ experiences of abuse by having them submit autobiographical journal entries, but she did not offer lessons to address their issues. Some female teachers in Mexico reported teaching self-care, empathy, and mutual respect in intimate relations, which implied but did not address gender roles.

Some of the participating Canadian teachers expressed a similar awareness of gender-based and heterosexist aggression in their students' lives but, despite the strong concern their students voiced in the focus groups, they all said the topic was too sensitive to address explicitly in class. When discussing direct violence in general, teachers and students in all three countries consistently referred to the aggressors as "he," without commenting on the gendered aspect of violence. In sum, the participating teachers, especially those in Canada, avoided teaching explicitly about GBV or about its roots in gender injustice.

### **GENDER AS CULTURAL NORMS AND BELIEFS: BIAS AND INCLUSION**

Students in all three countries showed some awareness of how social-structural gender discrimination was reinforced by sexist cultural beliefs that in turn perpetuated GBV, as well as indirect harm. The young people in each context identified sexism and male chauvinism (and, in Canada, homophobia) as attitudes and beliefs perpetuated by family and community norms. A few also mentioned misrepresentation or invisibility of girls, women, and LGBTQ+ people in the media as another cultural perpetuator of gender injustice and aggression. Essentially all the participating teachers and students who addressed gender-based aggression named bad attitudes and faulty morals as the cause. Mexican teachers and students described a culture of normalized gender-based and domestic violence that was passed on through the generations. Girls and boys described and lamented the pervasive *machismo* (male chauvinism and sense of superiority) that was exacerbated by stress and drug use. An elementary school-age girl said that "men . . . want to feel like kings . . . Sometimes men hit women for no reason." A girl from an intermediate school stated that "[men] are, according to them, the best, and they believe they have the right to hit women." The boys sometimes mentioned alternate causes of domestic violence, such as stress, alcohol, or mass media representations, and they occasionally blamed women for provoking men's violence.

The Bangladeshi girls also described the cultural dimensions of gender-based conflict. They said the girls in their communities were generally less valued than the boys, and that their activities and mobility were severely limited by sexism and protective curfews enforced by fathers, grandmothers, and in-laws. Boys attending the larger Bangladeshi city boys' school shared the girls' pervasive view that women were expected to "serve and satisfy men" or to be "sex slaves" (boy participants in the smaller city did not discuss gender roles). They also agreed that victimized women were stigmatized: "If a woman, being abused, goes to the police station, people of the society look down upon her. They call her disobedient."

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Worth noting is that one participant at each boys' school argued that Bangladeshi politics were corrupt and ineffective because the country's prime minister was a woman. The student and teacher participants said that proper Islamic behavior protected against sexist cultural practices, including aggression. As a teacher put it, "Men and women are equally respected in the real Islam." One boy explained that, "in Islam, women must wear *hijab* and veil, and men cannot legally touch or look at women . . . [Sexual harassment] happens mainly because of violating this Islamic law." The few Hindu minority students in each focus group remained silent, neither affirming nor contradicting this view.

The participating Canadian girls and boys also recognized the cultural dimensions of gender violence, such as biased representations of males and females in the electronic media and a school culture that normalized sexist and heterosexist aggression. They said they often heard sexist expressions, such as "don't cry like a girl, don't hit like a girl." They said that boys who did not conform to the dominant masculinity norms were bullied. One boy explained that "[male students] are just trying to prove they are better than [female students] . . . through violence." As in Mexico and Bangladesh, these Canadian young people said they disagreed with sexist ideologies. One girl sighed and said, "Boys . . . consider themselves stronger than girls, which is not true." A few Canadian teachers mentioned students whom they knew had been victimized by GBV, suggesting that sexist patterns were learned at home. One teacher lamented that a boy in her class recently had called a female classmate a "whore" but didn't say how she had responded. Several Canadian students noted the intersection of ethnocultural bias with gender-based aggression, noting particularly that Muslim women wearing the hijab were harassed and that Indigenous women were murdered in disproportionate numbers. However, several students and some teachers at one school also blamed the male members of one particular immigrant community for much of the aggression they suffered in school. Some Canadian students identified media representations (movies, sports coverage) as exacerbating sexism and male aggression; some also expressed optimism that alternative media representations could counteract such attitudes.

Although the participants in all contexts typically referred to the perpetrators of aggression as "he," the schools' curricula rarely or never explicitly addressed the cultural gender dimensions of the challenges they addressed. Most participants, both teachers and students, said they spent little or no class time on sexism or gender relations. Just a few Mexican and Bangladeshi teachers said they mentioned GBV in the classroom; neither the teachers nor the students in Canada reported having classroom lessons about GBV or sexism. Moreover, although the Canadian

students had attended presentations at school by guest speakers who opposed homophobia, few or none of them had encountered this issue in their regular classroom work. The Canadian teachers spoke little in the focus groups about gender-related conflict or injustice.

One Mexican elementary teacher had organized a unique class “debate” about gender-based domestic violence. She had allowed three of her male students to argue that women sometimes deserved to be beaten, while the teacher and their classmates voiced their disagreement. On the one hand, this lesson probed gender-based conflict and enabled the teacher and students to express their opposition to violence in more depth than the other participating teachers’ curricula. On the other hand, this pedagogical framing could have been seen to legitimize an anti-human-rights viewpoint. In sum, the participating students in all three countries understood GBV to be part of a larger cultural problem of ideologies and attitudes that support male domination, which is learned largely at home and through the media. Neither the students nor the teachers in any of the focus groups acknowledged that their school played any role in reinforcing a culture of chauvinism or misogyny. The Bangladeshi and Mexican students and teachers instead suggested that moral values education might persuade individuals to be more tolerant or less violent. Despite acknowledging the presence of GBV in students’ lives, the Canadian teachers suggested that sexist cultural beliefs were a problem in places such as Pakistan, not in their own culture.

#### **SOCIAL-STRUCTURAL INEQUITY: GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND (LACK OF) INSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION**

All the student participants recognized to some degree how indirect social-structural gender injustice reinforced aggression, and that patterns of gender-based aggression reinforced economic marginalization. Many students in each context described the gendered status and occupational hierarchies in their communities, specifically that women’s jobs tended to be poorly paid, and that women and girls had limited freedom but primary responsibility for caregiving in the family. Some students, especially those in Bangladesh and Mexico, described how the risk of GBV contributed to indirect gender injustice by impeding women’s mobility and job opportunities. Some elementary and many intermediate Mexican students mentioned women’s disproportionate economic vulnerability and dependency on men as an obstacle to escaping domestic violence. A few intermediate students described the gender “slavery” and prostitution linked to drug trafficking gangs and noted that gender discrimination intersects with the structural disadvantages rural indigenous people are already facing. The participating girls in the smaller

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city in Bangladesh and the participating boys in the larger city said that a family's demand that a prospective bride's family pay a dowry reinforced direct GBV.

The Bangladeshi teachers taught a mandated social studies chapter about the immorality of dowry practices, as one elaborated: "Because of dowry, women get physically beaten or killed." A few female students in Bangladesh but none of the teachers mentioned girls' unequal access to education. A few Canadian students but none of their teachers mentioned social-structural discrimination against women, such as employment and wage inequity, and they were most animated and specific when describing heterosexist discrimination. Just one Canadian teacher mentioned the social-structural problem of females being constrained from fleeing violence because of their financial dependence on men. Another lamented that two-thirds of her students lived in economically marginalized female-headed households. However, these topics were not included in their practice. A few Mexican teachers said they had mentioned gender inequity in their lessons; however, this included generally urging girls and boys to stay enrolled in school and was not related to GBV. In sum, many of the participating students expressed awareness of how economic inequity reinforced gender-based vulnerability, or vice versa. Only the participating teachers in Bangladesh taught lessons about the social structures of gender inequity, and this was primarily in relation to the cultural practice of paying a dowry.

**PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ACTION TO RESIST  
MULTIDIMENSIONAL GENDER INJUSTICE**

As suggested above, the cultural, social-structural, and participatory political dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. In this section, we reconnect these strands by examining the direct personal, political, cultural, and social-institutional elements in the students' and teachers' suggested responses to GBV and other gender injustice. The young participants in all three locations demonstrated that their repertoire of responses to GBV and other gender injustice was limited. None of them had confidence that any potential actions or actors would successfully confront or mitigate gender-based injustice or aggression.

Responses of the students in Mexico and Bangladesh to gender-based aggression almost universally focused on individual self-control, as inculcated via moral (Bangladesh) or values (Mexico) education and associated punishment. Most participating Canadian students suggested monitoring and punishment of perpetrators by authorities, alongside values of tolerance and opposing sexism/

homophobia. One Canadian student advocated for girls to take self-defense classes. Reflecting their teachers' representation of GBV as miscommunication that escalated into a dispute rather than a form of systemic injustice, several students in one Mexican elementary school suggested that conflict resolution dialogue and psychotherapy for abusers would be helpful responses. For instance, one Mexican boy suggested that a grandmother could mediate in a marital conflict: "[She could] talk to them and calm them down and ask them why they fight and hit each other." One or two Mexican girls suggested that neighbors or friends could physically restrain or retaliate against the perpetrators of violence. Thus, in each context, students' understandings of what could be done about gender-based or homophobic aggression emphasized changing individual attitudes, self-regulation, and occasionally force, rather than collective political or cultural action for change.

Participating students in Canada, Mexico, and Bangladesh said they wanted to discuss conflict and violence issues, including the gender-related aspects, more often and in more depth in their classrooms, and they expressed a desire to learn about the roots of and potential solutions for this behavior. Some students requested relationship-building and creative arts activities, such as role plays about how to handle disputes and aggression. Several students argued that teachers blamed them too much for disputes, rather than listening to their perspectives, and they wanted students to have a greater voice in solving conflicts in ways that were more sensitive to diversities such as race, ethnicity, and gender expression. However, other students wanted school staff to monitor hallways and the schoolyard more vigilantly, to intervene more often to enforce safety, and to punish aggressors.

Students in the focus groups in all three countries offered very thoughtful conflict analyses. A Mexican intermediate teacher described to her focus group members how some of her students had demonstrated their brilliant ability to speak about and probe deeply into gender relations and equity in the classroom. When her students were assigned to present panels on topics of their choice, one group of girls chose to address how much a parent should constrain a girl's freedom to keep her safe from GBV. They articulated the contrasting perspectives of father, adolescent girl, psychologist, and sociologist. The youth participants in all three contexts expressed both enthusiasm and ability to confront the challenges of gender injustice that enabled GBV. They wanted to know more about what they could do to confront these problems.

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In terms of cultural action for change, several Bangladeshi girls and boys and a few Mexican girls suggested undertaking grassroots community mobilization to combat gender injustice. A Bangladeshi girl said that “common people have to [become] aware, so that they . . . never oppress women.” Several girls in the smaller Bangladeshi city and one boy in the bigger city were optimistic that they could challenge patriarchal attitudes and promote justice for women. One girl explained: “We can make changes in our society by using the power of rallies to protest and raise people’s awareness.” So, even in the face of their discouragement and the lack of information about how to promote cultures of gender justice, the participating youth, especially those in Mexico and Bangladesh, believed in the possibility of and need for change.

The biggest gaps in the participating students’ understanding of how to promote gender justice were in the dimensions of social-structural change and collective political participation. Most of the participating students in Canada, in contrast to those in Mexico and Bangladesh, were aware of at least one place where victims of GBV could turn for help, such as an anonymous helpline or a domestic violence shelter. They were not aware of the political actions and institutions that had created and funded these supports, but they assumed that they should and would be provided. None of the Mexican or Bangladeshi participants seemed aware that such institutional protection was available, or that people could mobilize to demand or create it. Like their Canadian counterparts, the Mexican and Bangladeshi youth suggested denouncing the perpetrators of GBV to law enforcement, but the focus group participants in Mexico and Bangladesh expressed their discouragement with and distrust of these political authorities. They said that the police would not come, or would take bribes, or “would do nothing” to punish perpetrators or to protect women and children. One Mexican elementary girl suggested that there were no protective laws: “We need a law to protect women.” Clearly, the lack of awareness about the relevant social-political institutions demonstrates a need in all three research locations for curricula that address these issues.

The overwhelmingly common response to GBV among the participating teachers in Mexico and Bangladesh was the need for self-control—that is, that perpetrators should be persuaded that violence is wrong and that potential targets should be urged to protect themselves. Teachers in three Mexican schools emphasized the need to quell student aggression by using the curriculum to instill positive values—not skills, not institutional support, not citizen action. Teachers in the Mexican intermediate school emphasized “discussing” conflict issues as preferable to punishing disputants. Some teachers and students in this school described a lesson in a mandatory civics course that addressed GBV, legal equality, and

discrimination, but the students complained that the lesson that addressed the problem had not discussed any potential solutions in depth. One other lesson that included citizen action against gender-based injustice was a history unit on the Industrial Revolution, in which two Mexican teachers mentioned women's acquisition of the right to vote.

Meanwhile, the participating Canadian teachers avoided educating their students about GBV and gender injustice almost entirely. When one teacher suggested that they “should” teach respectful gender relations, her colleagues replied that such issues were too sensitive and “personal” to address in the classroom. Only one lesson about gender conflict was reported in one grade in one Canadian school: a global education lesson about Malala Yousafzai, the heroine who campaigned for girls' right to education in Pakistan. Beyond this single mention, the infrequent antihomophobia presentations made by visitors to the school, and the helpline information distributed, the Canadian students and teachers did not name or implement any lessons on personal, cultural, social, or institutional actions that could be taken to mitigate gender injustice or aggression.

Communicative conflict resolution capability, which some of the participating Mexican teachers included in their curricula, could be one necessary ingredient of nonviolent citizen action to promote gender justice. However, this remedy is not sufficient because it locates the problem only in the individual, not in the enabling and impeding institutions. Teaching about how social, cultural, and political change for gender justice has been possible in a community's history also could contribute to gender justice for sustainable peacebuilding. Teaching about inequitable gender regulations, as in the lesson about the need to prohibit dowry payments in Bangladesh, could provide a sense of how particular social practices that exacerbate GBV can be changed. Teaching about heroes in a distant fight for gender justice, as in the Canadian lesson about Malala Yousafzai, might inspire a sense of possibility, but it would not provide knowledge of the underlying local problems. In sum, the students and teachers who participated in the focus groups in Bangladesh, Canada, and Mexico point out a few potential avenues to pursue in creating justice-oriented, anti-GBV education.

## DISCUSSION

The comparative international evidence resulting from this study, which centers on youths' and teachers' voices in diverse settings, demonstrates the urgent need to attend to GBV, and to its underlying cultural and social-structural causes

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and remedies, as part of everyday school life and peacebuilding. The female and male participants in all the Mexican, Bangladeshi, and Canadian focus groups described having frequent experience with and concern about direct gendered violence. These students and their teachers also showed some awareness of the cultural and social-structural dimensions of gender exploitation that legitimized and exacerbated GBV. However, gender conflict was almost never addressed in any curriculum practice the teachers and students in the Canadian schools described, and it was rarely mentioned by the Mexican and Bangladeshi participants. Thus, the similarities in the experiences of the three country cases were more prominent than the differences. Despite the youth participants' extensive and troubling lived experiences of gendered conflict and violence, the responses to GBV and its roots in gender injustice were woefully inadequate in the curricula experienced by students in all the participating schools in all three national contexts.

Most students in all three contexts understood that GBV and discrimination were illegal in their countries—and wrong. However, most of the students, especially those in Mexico and Bangladesh, expressed deep distrust and skepticism that the existing legal protections would be upheld or enforced. Only students in the Canadian schools were aware of any institution where victims of gendered violence could go for help.

The participating youth and their teachers showed understanding that direct gender-based aggression was reinforced by indirect gendered cultural processes and intersecting social-structural inequalities. However, they were generally unaware of any political or institutional mechanisms to remedy these roots of violence. The youths in Canada were aware of recently enacted legal protections for same-sex couples, yet none mentioned the collective action or political processes that led to that legislative protection. A few students in Mexico and Bangladesh, mostly girls, expressed optimism that people could promote change in legal protections by collectively protesting injustice and changing community awareness. However, none could name or describe any particular social movement or mediating institution that might undertake such action for change. Their distrust of governments' unjust and ineffective securitization policies exacerbated the students' fear and frustration. In sum, the participating youth had had few opportunities to witness communicative peacemaking or problem mitigation, much less to participate in the large-scale social transformation and reshaping of institutions needed to address the indirect dimensions of the conflicts that underlie gendered violence.

A few teachers in some of the schools did touch on some direct and indirect dimensions of gendered conflict. A few curriculum mandates and textbooks had provided opportunities to recognize some gendered social problems—and, less often, their social-structural and cultural roots—and to teach critical analysis or communicative capabilities for citizen participation in the context of social justice conflict. However, the participating teachers and students, especially in Canada, told us that their lessons usually did not address these topics. In Canada, lessons occasionally named conflicts stemming from injustice, but none addressed contemporary local gender-based injustice and violence. In contrast, several Mexican and Bangladeshi teachers taught a few brief lessons opposing local gender-based aggression and discrimination.

The teachers in all three study locations were constrained by neoliberal individualism, which led them to frame their teaching-learning goals in terms of individual self-control, morality, and character, rather than conceptual understanding, institutional processes, or the development of skills to take action for peacebuilding. There was little evidence that teachers in any of these settings had guided practices to analyze or discuss gender-related conflicts, even those at an interpersonal level. The curricula implemented by the participating teachers apparently did not examine factors of social-political interest or expose students to possible collective actions they could take to resist GBV. This finding is consistent with Ross' (2010) critique of the typical peace education driven by international aid.

Further research could seek out comparative examples of gender-based peacebuilding education that would be viable in public schools in particular cultural and political contexts. Future researchers also could examine what kinds of lessons about gender conflict and aggression might serve as building blocks in the development of young people's capability and confidence to resist pervasive direct and indirect gender-based harm. Further research also could uncover more ways for young females and males, as well as teachers and institutions, to find the courage and the opportunity to address the systemic dimensions of gendered conflicts, violence, and peacebuilding. There will be no durable peace without gender justice.

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# BARRIERS TO REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS’ EDUCATIONAL ACCESS DURING COVID-19: EXPLORING THE ROLES OF GENDER, DISPLACEMENT, AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

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## ABSTRACT

*As of 2021, more than 80 million people worldwide have been displaced by war, violence, and poverty. An estimated 30 million to 34 million of these are under age 18, and many are at risk of interrupting their education permanently—a situation aggravated in recent years by the global COVID-19 pandemic.*

*In this article, we adopt an intersectional conceptual framework to explore the roles gender and other social inequalities have played in shaping adolescents’ access to education during the COVID-19 pandemic. We examine two refugee populations: the Rohingya, who have been excluded from formal education opportunities in Bangladesh, and Syrian refugees in Jordan, who have access to formal education in their host country. We provide novel empirical data, as well as insights into the adolescent refugee experience and the short-term consequences for education resulting from the pandemic.*

*In the article, we draw from quantitative survey data on 3,030 adolescents, and from in-depth qualitative interviews we conducted in the spring of 2020 with a subset of 91 adolescents who are part of an ongoing longitudinal study. We also conducted 40 key informant interviews with community leaders and service providers.*

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*Our findings highlight the fact that, during the pandemic, refugee adolescents have faced heightened challenges in accessing distance education, and that gender and other social inequalities, including marital status, have compounded these disadvantages. We conclude by outlining implications for gender-responsive education in emergencies in low- and middle-income countries.*

## INTRODUCTION

As of 2021, more than 80 million people worldwide have been displaced by war, violence, and poverty. Of these, an estimated 30 million to 34 million are below age 18, and many face significant barriers to realizing their right to education. Almost half (48%) of school-age refugee children and adolescents are out of school (UNHCR 2020), only 24 percent reach secondary education (UNHCR 2019), and many more are at risk of interrupting their education permanently. These barriers are also heavily gendered, with adolescent girls only half as likely to be enrolled in secondary school as their male peers (Grandi 2018). There is broad consensus that these disadvantages are being aggravated by the school closures and disruption of education associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Asian Development Bank et al. 2020; INEE 2020).

Using an intersectional conceptual framing that attends to the interaction of social differences to produce specific experiences of marginalization (Crenshaw 1991), we explore the ways gender and other social inequalities have shaped adolescents' access to education during the COVID-19 pandemic. We focus on two distinct refugee populations: the Rohingya, who are excluded from formal education opportunities in Bangladesh, and Syrian refugees in Jordan, who do have access to formal education there. Both countries host significant refugee populations; UNHCR (2019) estimates that 750,000 Rohingya have fled from Myanmar into Bangladesh since 2017, while Jordan currently hosts more than 650,000 Syrian refugees.<sup>1</sup> These populations, especially girls, already face significant challenges in accessing education, as well as inequalities around connectivity, resources, and internet access. We therefore investigate how these pre-existing disadvantages affect their opportunities for online learning.

In this article, we provide novel empirical data and insights into the adolescent refugee experience, including the short-term consequences for education that have been caused by the pandemic. We draw from survey data on 3,030 adolescents,

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1 In Jordan, 1 in 15 people is a refugee.

and from in-depth qualitative interviews we conducted between April and July 2020 with a subset of 91 adolescent girls and boys who are part of an existing longitudinal research sample.

We begin with an overview of the state of knowledge on gender-responsive education in emergencies in general, and for the Rohingya and Syrian refugee communities specifically. We then present our research methodology and findings, focusing on refugee adolescents' access to formal and nonformal education prior to COVID-19 and the extent to which they have been able to continue learning during the pandemic. We explore the extent to which gender and other social inequalities, including marital status, have compounded the disadvantages. We conclude by reflecting on the implications of these findings for gender-responsive education in emergencies in low- and middle-income countries.

## **STATE OF KNOWLEDGE ON GENDER-RESPONSIVE EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES**

Pre-existing gender inequalities have created challenges in accessing education in crisis settings. The 2013 Ebola outbreak in West Africa illustrated the significant negative consequences a health crisis can have for girls. Because the emergency was initially seen as a public health crisis, the knock-on effects on education, livelihoods, and safety were overlooked, leading to what has been termed an emergency within an emergency (ACAPS 2016). Schools were closed, and children were kept at home to prevent the spread of Ebola. However, because education funding and personnel were diverted to the epidemic response, students reported that the education materials that would enable them to continue learning at home were largely unavailable (Risso-Gill and Finnegan 2015). Moreover, after the crisis, families were fearful about letting their children return to school, and in Liberia, confusion about reopening dates led to low attendance (UNMEER 2015).

Because schools were closed during the Ebola epidemic and many parents were working, girls who were at home alone were more vulnerable to sexual advances and abuse by men in their communities. Children sent away from Ebola-affected areas to stay with extended family were at increased risk of abuse, exploitation, and neglect (UNDP 2014). Social workers who had worked in family mediation and child protection were diverted to sensitization and awareness campaigns, as were many teachers, which left fewer people available to investigate school attrition or protection concerns (Santos and Novelli 2017). Teenage pregnancies increased,

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which was connected to an increase in transactional sex as a way to cope with the economic effects of the epidemic (Bandiera et al. 2019). While child marriage rates were already relatively high in the countries affected by Ebola, spikes were reported in all contexts, especially in rural areas (Fraser 2020).

During the design stage of the response to the Ebola crisis, gender was not considered adequately. To avoid a similar outcome in such situations in the future, Onyango et al. (2019) have advocated for providing safe spaces for girls. This perspective is echoed elsewhere in the policy literature, which observes that, when face-to-face learning is not possible, it is important to connect emergency education initiatives to initiatives that address the challenges experienced specifically by girls (Naylor et al. 2020). However, while there is some evidence that girls can benefit from developing life skills in an emergency context, which may help them avoid dropping out of school or having an unwanted pregnancy (Rafaeli 2020), there is still scarce knowledge on how to enable girls to continue their studies during a crisis like COVID-19.

Another significant challenge in delivering remote learning is unequal access to technology across gender and other social inequalities. Research has found that, in low- and middle-income countries, boys are 1.5 times more likely than girls to have access to a mobile phone (Girl Effect and Vodafone Foundation 2018), and families that do have phones often do not have enough devices to meet the educational needs of all children in the household (see e.g., Abu Hamad et al. 2021). Moreover, unless carefully planned, distance education can exacerbate inequalities in education. Hardware “dumping,” whereby devices are simply handed out with the assumption that the young people will figure out the technology, is often the basic form of assistance, despite the lack of evidence that hardware alone can improve learning outcomes (Koomar, Coflan, and Kaye 2020; Trucano 2010). Parents may lack the ability to support their children’s use of technology, which can create online safety issues (Banaji et al. 2018). Moreover, girls’ domestic and caregiving responsibilities may limit the time they have to engage with digital technology (Montanez et al. 2019). These findings indicate that remote interventions that rely on technology may in fact perpetuate social inequalities.

In settings where digital access is already a challenge, such as where internet access is limited or expensive, socioeconomic inequities can exacerbate gendered inequality (Shane-Simpson et al. 2017). This can lead to tradeoffs between investing in children’s learning and having them engage in activities that

contribute to the family income (UNESCO 2018). These opportunity costs affect girls disproportionately (Dryden-Peterson 2011). A 2020 Education Development Trust report found that addressing economic shocks and the costs associated with learning—for example, through cash transfers—can increase participation among the most marginalized girls (Naylor et al. 2020). Alam and Tiwari (2020) have emphasized the need to address the barriers faced by marginalized learners, and to develop plans for reopening schools and bringing back face-to-face learning that mitigate the loss of learning and prevent the most vulnerable young people from being left behind.

### **BARRIERS SHAPING REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS' ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH AND JORDAN**

Multiple factors restrict adolescent girls' access to education in displacement contexts, including in Bangladesh and Jordan. In a cluster analysis of gender-based vulnerability across Rohingya refugee settlements, Nelson, Saade, and Greenough (2020) examined the poor security in Rohingya camps. They found that a lack of safe spaces for women and girls prevents them from developing protective peer networks and makes them feel unsafe outside the home. School is more than a place where adolescents go to learn; it also provides a safe space where they can connect with peers and teachers and get the support they need (Pillai and Zireva 2020). Humanitarian actors thus face major challenges, not only in how to deliver learning during a pandemic but in ensuring that girls benefit from the protective elements of learner engagement (see Rafaeli 2020; Pillai and Zireva 2020).

While remote learning may negate concerns about safety outside the home, it is important to recognize violence within the household as a factor in young people's learning. The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) study found that 46 percent of Syrian refugee adolescents in Jordan have experienced violence within their home but that they rarely report it; only 14 percent said they had spoken to someone about their experiences (Jones et al. 2019). This underreporting is partly due to gender norms that deter girls from reporting, due to the risk of bringing shame on their family (Presler-Marshall, Gercama, and Jones 2017). Research by UNICEF Jordan (McKeever 2020) found that half of the young people surveyed in Jordan have experienced cyberbullying at least once, which emphasizes the fact that caregivers need to supervise their children's internet use and be aware of safety issues (Naylor et al. 2020). Indeed, in low- and middle-income countries, parents' degree of digital literacy, which is mediated

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by socioeconomic and cultural inequalities, can have a major impact on young people's online learning experience (Banaji et al. 2018).

Restrictions on girls' mobility as a means of protection reflect other norms related to girls' perceived social roles, including those that may inhibit their participation in distance learning. In her work with Syrian refugee girls in Jordan's Zaatari refugee camp, Hattar-Pollara (2019) found that, while her respondents generally enjoyed school, many also felt that their parents discouraged them from attending. For example, if a male relative asked them to skip school to attend to household needs, they had little choice other than to comply. Such norms around obedience to male relatives and the devaluation of girls' education were exacerbated by poverty. Due to restrictions on adults leaving the camp for work, girls in Hattar-Pollara's study also reported that their parents sometimes asked them to miss school so they could engage in paid seasonal work on nearby farms.

Research with Syrian refugees has also connected adolescent girls' insecurity outside the home to their reduced access to education, as the crisis of displacement tends to exacerbate protection concerns (DeJong et al. 2017). Sexual harassment of refugee girls is common, especially as they travel to and from school. This leads to further restrictions on girls' mobility, especially as they often are blamed for "inviting" attention from men (Jones et al. 2019; USAID 2015).

Child marriage is also a critical factor in Syrian girls' limited access to education. While exact numbers are difficult to establish, it is widely recognized that child marriage is prevalent in Syrian refugee communities (Mourtada, Schlecht, and DeJong 2017; Wringe et al. 2019). A lack of educational opportunities and displacement make girls and their families feel less certain about the future and more vulnerable to violence, and marriage is often seen as a safer option than attending school, and a means of protection (Mourtada et al. 2017; Bartels et al. 2018; Wringe et al. 2019). COVID-19 has exacerbated these insecurities; Save the Children (2020) has estimated that the pandemic may set the world back 25 years in terms of progress on eliminating child marriage.

Similar interplay between gender and poverty has also been observed among the Rohingya refugees. Montanez et al. (2019) found that, before fleeing to Bangladesh, Rohingya girls did household work, such as helping their mothers cook, clean, and take care of relatives. They also played outdoors, had fun with siblings, and studied at home. (They did not attend school due to conservative social norms, as Rohingya girls' mobility is restricted once they reach puberty; Bakali and Wasty 2020). Since becoming refugees in Bangladesh, Rohingya girls' opportunities

to study and play have been very limited, as their time is largely taken up with doing housework and cooking.

While more Rohingya boys attend learning programs in the camps than girls, the boys are at risk of engaging in hazardous and exploitative work to help their families. In Cox's Bazar, dropout rates for boys are around 45 percent, compared to 30 percent for girls (Shohel 2020). However, the GAGE research found that boys are 53 percent more likely than girls to be enrolled in learning programs in the first place; by older adolescence (ages 15-19), only 2 percent of girls, compared to 28 percent of boys, are engaged in some form of education outside the home (Guglielmi et al. 2020a).

### **IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 FOR THE EDUCATION OF REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH AND JORDAN**

The response to COVID-19 in Bangladesh was initially slow and uneven, whereas the lockdown in Jordan was immediate and much tighter; however, both countries experienced widespread school closures. In March 2020, as COVID-19 cases began to emerge in Bangladesh, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission in Cox's Bazar announced that only "essential" activities would be allowed to continue in all 34 camps; education was not considered essential (Pillai and Zireva 2020). Even before COVID-19, Rohingya refugees were not permitted to attend formal schools in Bangladesh. Because of the government's emphasis on the temporary nature of the Rohingya situation, refugee learners were taught in what were referred to as "temporary learning centers" (rather than schools) by Rohingya "volunteers" (rather than teachers); moreover, the curriculum was delivered in Burmese and English, although the refugees do not speak either language (Bakali and Wasty 2020).

The COVID-19-related closure of schools run by nongovernmental organizations and other learning facilities are estimated to have affected 325,000 children and young people in Bangladesh (Pillai and Zireva 2020). Although Syrian refugees in Jordan have more schooling options, they also face barriers to access. Syrian students in the camps have access to formal education that follows Jordan's national curriculum and is taught by Jordanian teachers. While refugees living in the host communities can attend the same schools as their Jordanian peers, administrative and practical barriers prevent many from enrolling. Some are enrolled in Syrians-only double-shift classes in the afternoons, but these classes are of poorer quality, due to having less-qualified teachers with discriminatory attitudes and fewer resources (Jones et al. 2019). Syrians living in informal tented

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settlements in Jordan often lack access to any schools, due to the distance from the closest schools and a lack of affordable transport.<sup>2</sup>

When the Jordanian government closed all schools in March 2020, distance education was quickly established through televised lessons and digital platforms offering educational content (UN Children’s Fund [UNICEF] 2020). However, there are significant divides in access to these technologies based on gender and other social inequalities. Almost 9 in 10 Syrian refugees in Jordan (85%) live below the poverty line (Hanmer et al. 2020), and OECD (2018) data show that fewer than 50 percent of students from the poorest families have internet access at home. This suggests that Syrian refugees may struggle to keep up with lessons and learning that require digital connectivity. Jones et al. (2019) found that girls in Jordan are 43 percent less likely than their male peers to own a mobile phone and 17 percent less likely to have engaged with online lessons. Adolescents with disabilities are 16 percent less likely than their nondisabled peers to have accessed the internet, and adolescents in informal tented settlements are less likely to have a phone than their peers in the host communities and refugee camps.

Among the Rohingya, internet connectivity and proliferation have been low, due to the Government of Bangladesh’s suspension of 3G and 4G mobile networks and internet access in the settlements between September 2019 and August 2020 (ISCG, IOM et al. 2020). These restrictions reduced any chance for the Rohingya to have access to distance learning opportunities that relied on internet connectivity, or to the timely dissemination of COVID-19 health messaging. There also are great gender discrepancies in mobile phone ownership; 63 percent of Rohingya men have access to a mobile phone, compared to 52 percent of the women (Toulemonde 2020).

## METHODS

Recognizing the multiple barriers adolescents face in accessing education during emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, we have used an intersectional conceptual framework to shape our methods and analysis of findings. An intersectional approach focuses on the ways various types of social difference, such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, and age, shape individual experiences (Collins 2015). These inequalities often interact and reinforce the marginalization of individuals at the “intersections” of social difference, which prevents some from

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<sup>2</sup> Some Syrian refugees live in informal tented settlements due to security and/or environmental concerns in the camps and the unaffordability of renting in the host community.

thriving, even when good choices are ostensibly available to them (Crenshaw 1991). Taking an intersectional approach means developing tools for data collection and analysis that attend to the interactive character of social differences (MacKinnon 2013).

In this article, we draw from data on a sample that includes 692 Rohingya adolescents who are living in camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, and 2,338 Syrian refugee adolescents living in camps, host communities, and informal tented settlements in Jordan.<sup>3</sup> Our sampling strategy was as follows: in the Rohingya community, we selected a random sample of adolescents ages 10-12 and 15-17 at baseline from a random sample of 32 refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar. We undertook an additional purposeful sampling of adolescents with disabilities and of those who had experienced child marriage. The sample of Syrian refugees includes adolescents living in the Azraq and Zaatari camps, host communities, and informal tented settlements located in the five governorates of Jordan: Amman, Mafraq, Irbid, Jerash, and Zarqa. It also includes subsamples of adolescents with disabilities, married girls, and out-of-school adolescents. We took these random subsamples from databases of vulnerable adolescents maintained by UNHCR and UNICEF, with an oversampling of adolescents with disabilities and those that had experienced child marriage.<sup>4</sup> Both groups formed part of the GAGE longitudinal research in the Middle East, East Africa, and South Asia. Our quantitative sample includes two cohorts: younger adolescents, largely ages 10-12 at baseline (2018-2019), and older adolescents, largely ages 15-17 at baseline. This article reports findings from telephone surveys undertaken in May and July 2020 (see Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

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3 The larger sample size in Jordan stems from the fact that refugees are living in three distinct contexts: host communities, informal tented settlements, and large formal refugee camps run by UNHCR. The overwhelming majority of the Rohingya in Bangladesh are living in refugee camps run by UNHCR, thus we were able to rely on a smaller sample to represent adolescent experiences during the pandemic.

4 The realities of these two groups tend to be overlooked because of their limited numbers.

5 The Rohingya COVID-19 sample was derived from a baseline sample of 1,071 Rohingya adolescents (reflecting a 65% contact rate) surveyed from March to August 2019 as part of the Cox's Bazar Panel Survey.

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*Table 1: Virtual Quantitative Research Sample for Rohingya and Syrian Refugee Communities*

| Country                                | Younger girls | Younger boys | Older girls | Older boys | Adult females            | (Camps) | (ITS/Host communities) | (Married girls) | (Adolescents with disabilities)   | Total |
|--|---------------|--------------|-------------|------------|--------------------------|---------|------------------------|-----------------|---|-------|
| <b>BANGLADESH</b><br>Rohingya refugees | 158           | 192          | 201         | 141        | 366                      | 692     | -                      | 69              | 29  | 692   |
| <b>JORDAN</b><br>Syrian refugees       | 604           | 614          | 552         | 568        | Total AF surveys – 2,539 | 781     | 1,550                  | 149             | Functional difficulty – 228<br><br>Functional difficulty OR has an assistive device – 381 | 2,338 |

The quantitative data were complemented by a qualitative research sample in both contexts. In Bangladesh, we conducted in-depth qualitative telephone interviews with 21 adolescents from the older cohorts in three camps; in Jordan, we interviewed 70 Syrian refugees from both age cohorts.<sup>6</sup> To inform the pandemic response and contribute to efforts to ensure that gender- and age-specific experiences were taken into account, our sample also captured other social characteristics, including disability and marital status. We report disaggregated findings by gender, age, and other intersecting dimensions. To preserve confidentiality, the research locations of the people quoted in this article are anonymized. To understand the measures taken by the government, United Nations agencies, and nongovernmental organizations in response to the ongoing pandemic (see Table 2), we complemented the interviews with adolescents by conducting key informant interviews (7 in Bangladesh and 40 in Jordan) with experts working in education, public health, and site management in the camps.

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6 We included only older Rohingya adolescents in the virtual qualitative in-depth interviews because we experienced very low response rates with limited content during piloting. This is likely due to younger adolescents having little familiarity with phone conversations, the very limited privacy in the overcrowded camp settings, and a high level of insecurity among the Rohingya community.

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*Table 2: Virtual Qualitative Research Sample for Rohingya and Syrian Refugee Communities*

| Country                                | Younger girls | Younger boys | Older girls | Older boys | Key informants | (Camps) | (ITS/Host communities) | (Married girls) | (Adolescents with disabilities) | Total |
|--|---------------|--------------|-------------|------------|----------------|---------|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| <b>BANGLADESH</b><br>Rohingya refugees | -             | -            | 12          | 11         | 7              | 21      | -                      | 6               | 2                               | 28    |
| <b>JORDAN</b><br>Syrian refugees       | 16            | 14           | 28          | 16         | 40             | 25      | 31                     | 15              | 5                               | 114   |

We present our findings from a set of indicators constructed from the quantitative data to capture Rohingya and Syrian refugee adolescents' education experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. For all outcomes, we explored differences by gender and age, and assessed whether these differences are statistically significant. All differences in the text are statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ , unless otherwise noted. We performed the quantitative analysis using Stata SE 16.

A team of researchers undertook the qualitative data gathering, data management, and data analysis. The interview transcripts were initially transcribed from audio recordings and then translated: in Bangladesh they were translated from Chittagonian into Bangla, and subsequently into English; in Jordan they were translated from Arabic into English. The transcripts were coded using the software package MAXQDA, following a thematic codebook that was shaped around a conceptual framework informed by intersectionality and overlapping social inequalities that affect adolescent refugees' education experiences. During the qualitative data analysis, we took care to identify cross-cutting themes while allowing space for unique voices to emerge. We secured ethics approval internationally and locally.

## FINDINGS

We now turn to our findings, beginning with a brief overview of the divergent patterns among the sampled Rohingya and Syrian refugees' pre-COVID-19 access to education. We then discuss learning continuity and the gendered barriers to learning that arose during the pandemic.

### REFUGEES' ACCESS TO EDUCATION BEFORE COVID-19

In the camps, Rohingya refugees have no access to formal school, due to Bangladesh government restrictions. However, before COVID-19, 29 percent of Rohingya adolescents in the camps were enrolled in nonformal schools, with significant differences in gender and age: boys were twice as likely to be enrolled as girls (39% versus 19%), and young adolescents were three times as likely to be enrolled as their older counterparts (43% versus 15%).

Our data highlight the fact that, COVID-19 aside, gender and age are key factors that intersect to shape Rohingya adolescents' access to education. This process is also dynamic; while refugee girls are disadvantaged at any age in terms of access to

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learning, their marginalization intensifies as they go through adolescence.<sup>7</sup> Among the older cohort, only 6 percent of girls were enrolled, compared to 25 percent of boys; among the younger cohort, girls were significantly less likely than boys to be enrolled, 33 percent versus 51 percent. In fact, for many older adolescent girls, closing the learning centers in the camps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 does not appear to have altered their daily routine, as a 15-year-old girl explained:

In the morning I wash myself, say my prayers, recite Qur'an, then eat rice and go to sleep. Then at noon after washing myself, I say my prayer, then eat, and then if I have any household work, I do it. I don't do anything else...I don't go to school—now or before...If adolescent girls go to school, it is [a] shame here, as they are adolescents.

This sentiment was echoed by another 15-year-old girl: “We are [getting by] with sorrow and sufferings. No, [I don't go out, and] I didn't go to study [before COVID]. I didn't go anywhere [to learn].”

The qualitative data indicate that intersecting and compounded vulnerabilities, including disability, were also pronounced before COVID-19, and educational access has remained unchanged by pandemic-related restrictive measures. An 18-year-old boy with a physical disability explained: “Everything is like before. I mostly lie around all day...I am unable to walk so I don't go out. I haven't gone out from my house for about two years.”

In Jordan, 72 percent of Syrian adolescents were enrolled in school prior to COVID-19 (68% in formal education and 32% in nonformal). However, among Syrian adolescents living in the informal tented settlements, only 52 percent were attending any school prior to COVID-19; 41 percent were attending a formal school at that time. Our findings also show that married girls are almost entirely shut out of education; among married girls age 15 and older, only 4 percent were enrolled in formal school before the pandemic. Interestingly, the enrollment figures in our sample do not vary by disability status. Our qualitative research, which highlighted transport barriers, poorly adapted school infrastructure, and stigma, suggests that this is most likely because our sample was purposively selected and included a number of adolescents in specialist schools.

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7 During the initial phase of the Syrian refugee influx into Jordan, a shortage of schools meant that some children were unable to secure a place in a school. According to the ministry of education rules, those who were more than three years over the usual age for their grade were not allowed to resume formal education. Thus, older adolescents who lost several years of schooling soon after the onset of the Syrian crisis found their pathway to learning blocked. The dearth of education spaces has been addressed by using double shifts in many schools (Jones et al. 2019).

Given that older adolescents were of school age when the Syrian war broke out and arrived in Jordan before schooling had been scaled up, it is not surprising that they were far more likely (26%) than their younger peers to have ever been out of school for more than three months. Many of the enrollment issues for older Syrian adolescents are a legacy from the years before double-shift schools were taken to scale and documentation requirements largely abolished. A father in Zaatari camp, whose daughter is two years too old for her grade, explained: “When we came here there weren’t schools, so her education was delayed.”

Our qualitative research reveals that displacement and gender intersect, which creates further barriers for adolescent refugees. For refugee girls, these barriers derive from their parents’ limited aspirations for their daughters’ formal education (especially for families in the tented settlements), concerns about safety, and child marriage. As an older girl in an informal settlement noted, “They told me that I can write and read, so no need for school.” The biggest barrier to education for refugee boys is pressure to obtain paid work. A 15-year-old Syrian boy living in a host community noted, for example, that his parents “even wanted me to [work so I could] pay rent for the whole house.” Others underscored the endemic problems of school violence and poor-quality instruction. Out-of-school Jordanian boys explained that they had left school because they “felt bored.”

### **LEARNING CONTINUITY DURING COVID-19**

We now discuss learning continuity among refugee adolescents during COVID-19, beginning with formal schooling, then turn to nonformal education, religious education, and skills-training programs.

#### **FORMAL EDUCATION**

Among the Syrian refugees who are living in Jordan in camps, informal tented settlements, and host communities, we found mixed evidence about adolescents’ learning continuity when relying on distance education. Of the students enrolled in formal school prior to the pandemic, 67 percent reported that their school was providing some form of learning support while closed, but less than half (47%) reported having been in contact with a teacher in the previous seven days. While many (88%) had heard about the national distance education broadcasts the ministry of education was providing on television, radio, and the internet, only 15 percent reported using the online education program as their primary method of distance learning, while 32 percent reported using TV or radio. Notably, only 11

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percent of the Syrian refugee adolescents enrolled in school were concerned that they would not be able to return to school when the enforced closures ended.<sup>8</sup>

One strong, cross-cutting theme emerged from the qualitative data: concerns about the poor quality of the distance education instruction. A 19-year-old Syrian refugee boy with a physical disability who was living in a host community noted that “distance education is not learning, it’s like copy and paste...I mean, we don’t learn a thing.” A 17-year-old Syrian girl also living in a host community emphasized similarly that “the lessons aired on the TV aren’t understood at all...It isn’t that the teacher doesn’t know how to explain, but for me, being face-to-face with a teacher explaining to me, making me understand the way I do, is different than distance learning.” Many adolescents commented on the dearth of teacher-student interaction. Another 17-year-old girl living in Zaatari camp pointed out that “we don’t feel that we are studying seriously because we don’t go to the school, we don’t sit in front of the teacher, and she doesn’t explain the lessons in front of us... The change to distance learning negatively affected my study. On the internet, the teacher doesn’t repeat what he explained. You have to understand the explanation from the first time.” Younger adolescents underscored the challenges of trying to concentrate during distance learning and being unable to ask the teacher questions to help them understand the lessons. A 13-year-old Syrian refugee girl from Azraq camp explained: “I don’t study as hard as before because I can’t focus any more and I cannot ask any questions when I struggle with the class.”

#### NONFORMAL EDUCATION

The data on the Rohingya refugees reveal only limited evidence of learning continuity in the camps when relying on distance education. However, the closure of the camp learning facilities does appear to have affected families’ younger siblings and the children of married adolescents. A 17-year-old boy explained: “Now there are many difficulties in education in the camp. Previously they were tested at the end of the year. Now [this won’t happen].” A 19-year-old married girl noted that “[my son] is five years old. He used to go [to school] earlier. He doesn’t go now, it’s been closed for two months.” Notwithstanding the learning center closures, both younger and older Rohingya adolescents appear to have aspirations for their learning post-COVID-19. Among those enrolled in school prior to COVID-19, only 5 percent expressed concern about not returning once the restrictions ended, with no significant difference by gender.

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8 At that time, this was expected to occur in early 2021.

Our data show a multitude of ramifications of the government’s decision to deem education a “nonessential” activity during the fight to curb the spread of COVID-19. Bangladeshi teachers were no longer allowed in the camps, and some Rohingya volunteer teachers turned their attention to other activities in the humanitarian sector. The restructuring of the humanitarian staff led to a doubling of efforts in the health and nutrition sectors, which in turn created a teaching void. An education focal point official in one of the camp blocks explained that “most of the camp teachers are working now as volunteers with the nutrition and health team...WASH [water, sanitation, and hygiene] is also active, as they must maintain hygiene. So, our teachers are working as volunteers with them, as they have no work now.”

The education sector’s attempts to maintain learning continuity during the pandemic appear to have targeted only children and younger adolescents. A key informant discussed the provision of take-home learning packs and the self-education guides being developed for younger adolescents, which further exposed the stark age divide around educational access in the camps: “Younger adolescents can get proper information for their level of study, but older adolescents didn’t get any kit to learn by themselves.” The qualitative data also reveal that some Rohingya families organized ad hoc home-based learning, which still targeted young children. A 17-year-old boy explained: “[Children] are taught at home right now. We have 8 to 10 [neighbors] here. We make the children learn by keeping one master [teacher] and one *hujur* [religious teacher].”

Almost half (49%) of the adolescent Syrian refugees who were enrolled in informal or nonformal education programs in Jordan reported doing something to continue learning while schools were closed: 14 percent were learning through online videos, 10 percent through ministry of education online programs, 11 percent through ministry of education programs on TV, and 26 percent through mobile learning apps.

Our qualitative data highlight the fact that this was largely a reflection of the Makani (My Place) nonformal education centers managed by UNICEF Jordan, which had pivoted quickly to provide online messaging and short educational videos in the early phases of the first lockdown. Our findings also show that Makani facilitators set up WhatsApp groups to provide psychosocial support, as well as support for formal distance education. As a 15-year-old Syrian girl in a refugee camp explained, “The Makani centers send us messages by phone...about healthy food, practicing sports, and COVID-19 prevention measures...They raise awareness about online education. They help us with the lessons that we get at school.” A 12-year-old Syrian boy, also in a refugee camp, noted that “the Makani center teachers created a group

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for us on the mobile. They give us questions and we solve them. They told me to follow my lessons through the Jordan channel [on TV].”

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Given the absence of formal schooling options, adolescent Rohingya refugees were twice as likely as Bangladeshi adolescents (24% versus 13%) to receive religious education prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, as Rohingya parents prioritized religious over secular teaching for their children (Guglielmi et al. 2020b). Important age and gender distinctions persisted during the pandemic, with Rohingya boys nearly twice as likely as girls (30% versus 17%) to be enrolled in religious education classes. The majority of enrolled students across both genders were in the younger cohort (39% versus 8%), which indicates that older students were not accessing education. Our qualitative data highlight the impact religious school closures have had on adolescents’ wellbeing. A 15-year-old boy said that, “since the mosque-madrassa cannot be opened, as the government has closed it, I am not able to study [now]. That’s why a lot of sadness is in my mind.”

Syrian refugees, especially girls, reported participating relatively less in Qur’anic education classes during lockdown. However, it was noted that, in some host communities, sheikhs were reaching out informally to encourage refugee students to continue studying the Qur’an as a source of psychosocial support. A 12-year-old Syrian girl from a host community described her family’s situation during COVID-19:

I can’t go to school and go outside home, I don’t see my friends...My siblings fight with each other and my mother gets angry. But my brothers...like studying. They memorize some Qur’anic verses...the Sheik comes to teach them and they recite the Qur’anic verses to him.

TRAINING AND SKILLS-BASED EDUCATION

Our survey data reveal that very few (3%) Rohingya adolescents are engaged in training and skills-based education. Girls are more likely to be engaged than boys, although overall numbers are a mere 4 percent and 1 percent, respectively. Our qualitative data reveal that girls appear to be more accustomed to learning deprivation. In fact, they appear to be more frustrated by the loss of earning ability they might have gained from learning a craft, rather than by the halted learning itself. A 15-year-old girl explained: “Before corona[virus] I learned tailoring. [But now] I can’t go [to work]...Before, I [could have some] income and at least manage

the expenditure of daily shopping. But now I can't go out. I have no brother, no father, how I will do?"

The qualitative data provide a mixed picture of adolescent uptake and participation in training courses linked to COVID-19 prevention measures. As a key informant explained, "People of different ages participate in the training. Adolescents come, the religious leaders come... Four sessions a day are being given, in groups of five, [such as lessons on] maintaining social distance, what to do about nutrition, hand washing." However, an 18-year-old married girl noted that some training had been halted: "No one is holding meetings now. It's been [more than] one month." One 19-year-old married girl had not benefited from any training or classes: "No one came here to talk to us about anything."

### **GENDERED BARRIERS TO EDUCATION DURING COVID-19**

We now discuss the gendered barriers to education faced by refugee adolescents in both contexts during COVID-19.

#### **CONNECTIVITY**

Distance learning via low- or high-tech practices, including radio, TV, and internet-enabled phones, was largely inaccessible among the adolescent Rohingya refugees in the camps. As a 17-year-old married girl explained, "We don't have any mobile phone or television." This also created gaps in the dissemination of information about COVID-19. Although a minority of Rohingya adolescents mentioned that their household owned a mobile phone and that they had found creative ways to go online—for example, "I use Facebook somehow [by] going up on the hill" (18-year-old male)—many more described how the combination of not owning a mobile phone, illiteracy, and internet suppression in the camps made internet-based information flow and learning difficult. A 15-year-old boy stated that "the internet connection has closed over here... I've never used the internet." One 17-year-old boy could not afford the internet: "How can I use [the internet] when I've no money? [Just] having food is too hard now." Poverty is a barrier to technological access for Rohingya adolescents, as a 15-year-old boy explained: "I don't have a smartphone like that. I'm poor, so I can't buy it." COVID-19 has further exacerbated personal and household income deprivation, which is a concern for many adolescents, as an 18-year-old boy explained: "We could earn money then. Now we can't."

There is a more mixed picture among the older adolescent Syrian refugees in Jordan, and the survey data reveal significant differences by gender. Overall, 67

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percent of Syrian adolescents reported that their formal school was providing learning support during the COVID-19-related school closures; however, older girls were significantly more likely than their older male peers (58% versus 48%) to report receiving support from school (79%) or being in touch with a teacher in the seven days prior to the survey (60%). Older girls also felt that their parents were trying to accommodate their studies; they were more likely than older boys (65% versus 47%) to report that their family reduced the time they had to spend on household chores to support their learning from home, and that their family provided access to mobile learning apps during the shutdown (34% versus 24%). Our qualitative work helps to explain differing perceptions between boys and girls about the balance they were able to achieve between studying and domestic duties; prior to the pandemic, older boys were not expected to participate in household chores, but they reported that they were expected to do more to help around the home during lockdowns. These differences were typically less significant among boys and girls in the younger cohort, which suggests that gendered differences in support for schooling from family and schools increases with age.

By contrast, while students reported using internet-based methods to continue their education at a similar rate by gender within each cohort, older adolescent boys were much more likely to have their own mobile device with internet access (63%) than older adolescent girls (34%). Younger boys also were slightly more likely to have such a device than younger girls (14% versus 9%). Indeed, our qualitative findings highlight the fact that, although both boys and girls from refugee families were often at a disadvantage due to limited internet connectivity (in the camps) and poverty-related access barriers (in the host communities), discriminatory gender norms often exacerbated the challenges girls faced in accessing online education. Some girls noted that, pre-pandemic, they had generally had more limited access to mobile phones and the internet than their brothers, due to their parents' fears that the phones might expose them to unwanted male attention. Thus, the switch to online education presented them with a steeper learning curve, as a 14-year-old Syrian girl in a host community explained:

We told the teachers that we didn't understand something, they told us to re-watch the lesson and that's it. It was as if the teacher only wants to relieve herself of the burden...Before... no one other than the teacher could explain the lesson for us, so she was obliged to explain...But now, at home...the lessons are explained on the platform, so the teacher has been ignoring us...It is so difficult, as all of this online stuff is not familiar to me.

Other girls explained that gaining access to devices was a major challenge, as they often did not own their own phone and had to negotiate access with their brothers, who were reluctant to share their phones. A 13-year-old Syrian girl living in an informal tented settlement explained: “I use my brother’s phone to access the lessons but he often doesn’t let anyone come near his phone...There is a lot of conflict about this, as he also needs the phone for his lessons.”

#### DOMESTIC AND CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

School closures appear to have increased the amount of time adolescents spend on household chores and child care; this was reported by 93 percent of Rohingya adolescents in Bangladesh and 88 percent of Syrian adolescents in Jordan. Our qualitative data, however, highlight gender divides. Girls, particularly in the host communities, mentioned an increase in their household chores and in helping their mothers during the pandemic. By contrast, COVID-19 and the associated restrictions do not appear to have significantly changed the lived realities of married Rohingya girls. As an 18-year-old married girl stated, “I cook and serve food to everyone. That’s all I do...We are women. There is no change in our work...[What is different is that] we can’t have enough food. No one even gives us food.” A 17-year-old married girl recounted similar experiences: “What do I do? I cook, serve food, eat, that’s it.”

Of the Syrian refugees in Jordan, less than half (46%) were spending the same number or more hours per day studying/learning, while 88 percent reported spending more time on household chores and/or child care during COVID-19. Our qualitative work shows that household burdens increased because more male family members were at home more often due to lockdowns, and a gendered division of labor meant that the majority of domestic responsibilities fell to women and girls. Our qualitative findings underscore the fact that these heavier domestic and caregiving responsibilities were affecting older and married girls in particular, which limited their ability to continue learning during the pandemic. As a 17-year-old Syrian girl in a host community explained, “I used to go to school, then I returned back and studied. If I was stressed, I went out walking or to the mall. Now, I cannot go out...Now, I just work at home. There is no time for fun...I sleep, study, or work at home. This affected my studies a lot.” An 18-year-old married Syrian girl described her circumstances similarly:

The situation has changed a lot since the virus. Before, I divided my time between school, the house, my husband, and studying...But now...I spend all my time at home, taking care

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of my husband and the house. I try my best to learn new things, watch new things, and do new things, but time for myself is limited... Even to my parents' house, I went more often before... and sometimes I stayed over, but now, it's difficult to do so.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from an intersectional conceptual framing that attends to the ways vulnerability is compounded for the most socially marginalized, our findings demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened gender and other social inequalities that have shaped refugee adolescents' access to education. Rohingya refugee girls in Bangladesh reported experiencing more "time poverty," as they were expected to help with household work because they were not at school. This was compounded by a devaluation of girls' education, as reflected in the lower rates of attendance in religious education and informal education programs. By contrast, married girls' restricted mobility and responsibilities in the home changed little. The picture was more complex for Syrian refugees in Jordan, where girls' school enrollment before the pandemic was higher than in Bangladesh and digital connectivity was generally better. However, the school closures and the shift toward distance learning created new challenges. Despite support from international nongovernmental organizations and the schools, girls found themselves struggling to access distance learning because of discriminatory gender norms that restricted their use of technology. Syrian girls similarly reported a higher burden of domestic work, which limited their time to study. Demands on their time within the home left girls little flexibility in terms of when they could study.

These findings have various implications for gender-responsive education in emergencies in low- and middle-income countries. The first is the clear need to address time poverty and its impact on girls' opportunities to participate in distance learning. A 2020 Education Development Trust report found that addressing economic shocks and the costs associated with learning—for example, through cash transfers that incentivize girls to continue their education—can increase the participation of even the most marginalized girls (Naylor et al. 2020). However, school closures do not only affect practical matters. The findings discussed here echo other findings about the negative effects school closures have on young people's mental health and wellbeing (Lee 2020). For example, girls expressed fear and anxiety about being pushed into marriage and not being able to pursue their educational aspirations. Our findings also underscore the fact that regular communication with a trusted and competent adult who can assist with and advocate for girls' continued learning is vital, as is continued outreach by

the organizations that work with young people, as seen at the Makani education centers in Jordan.

Technology is an appealing means of delivering education in an emergency, and it has been the focus of many responses to COVID-19 (Naylor et al. 2020; Koomar et al. 2020). However, given the evidence that even very low-tech solutions may be unsuitable to the Rohingya refugees' context, local realities that present practical barriers to learning must not be overlooked. Furthermore, having access to technology does not guarantee that refugee adolescents will have equal learning opportunities (UNICEF and ITU 2020). Previous work on education in emergencies has identified modalities for delivering education that do not always rely on internet access. Using a combination of approaches can make distance learning more accessible; for example, a flexible multimodal approach may be more accessible for learners who, due to gender, marital status, age, or socioeconomic barriers, lack access to technology (Alam and Tiwari 2020). It is most vital that efforts to support education during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 emergency, and future similar emergencies, confront and address the gender and social inequalities that shape learning opportunities for refugee adolescents.

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# GIRLS' AND BOYS' VOICES ON THE GENDERED EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING DURING COVID-19 IN COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY DISPLACEMENT

NICOLE DULIEU, SILVIA ARLINI, MYA GORDON, AND ALLYSON KRUPAR

## ABSTRACT

*In this article, we present research on girls' and boys' gendered perceptions of their learning during COVID-19-related school closures. The research was conducted in ten countries affected by displacement across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. We applied statistical analysis using multivariate logistic regression models from the results of a survey conducted with parents or caregivers and their children. We complemented the quantitative study with qualitative methodology, which provided a nuanced understanding of girls' and boys' perceptions of their learning and their voiced concerns during the school closures. Our results show that the children in these displaced settings were likely to perceive a decline in their learning during the pandemic, and that the factors influencing this perception differed between boys and girls. Girls' perceptions of learning "nothing" or only "a little bit" were more strongly associated with material barriers, such as limited access to learning materials and household economic circumstances, than was the case for boys. The boys' experience of learning "a little bit" or "nothing" was more strongly associated with increased negative feelings, including feeling sad or worried, increased violence in the home, and increased responsibility for looking after siblings or other children. This research notes the importance of supporting displaced children by providing adequate resources to enable equitable access to learning, and calls for cross-sectoral programming to support displaced children who are dealing with emotional pressure.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the massive number of school closures that were part of public health efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, the education system worldwide is facing an unprecedented challenge. School closures due to COVID-19 led to approximately 90 percent of all students in the world being out of school and other places of learning. The move to remote learning has created gaps in the provision of education, especially for marginalized populations, displaced children, and girls with disabilities. Studies of previous school closures have shown that shocks, such as extreme weather events, result in a considerable decline in children's learning (Conto et al. 2020, 7). The school closures that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic may also result in a stagnation of children's learning and, in some cases, a decline in learning outcomes. The learning losses that may accrue among today's young generation, including their development of human capital, are likely to be significant. This study, which found that children reported learning significantly less since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic due to school closures, confirms such concerns.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, relatively limited research was conducted on the implications of public health emergencies for different groups, especially women and girls (Bennett and Davies 2016). Similarly little effort has been made to document children's voices when addressing learning needs during emergencies. Arguably, lessons learned from the Ebola epidemic were not applied in the Zika outbreak, nor were they widely known or applied during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO 2021). Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic are shown to compound structural gender inequalities (Davies and Bennett 2016), as well as unequal access to education for marginalized groups.

Children have a legal human right to be heard in decisions that affect them, a right enshrined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. However, only a limited number of systematic studies have incorporated children's perspectives or voices in the analysis of learning perceptions, especially those of girls and boys displaced during COVID-19. With this study, we aim to fill this gap by employing a mixed methods approach that draws from a quantitative survey conducted with children and their caregivers, and from four open-ended questions on the children's survey. Our analysis builds on children's lived experiences and perspectives on the quality of learning they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our aim is to provide evidence that highlights the importance of interventions that promote the provision of education in emergencies and of promoting gender equality in learning opportunities.

In this article, we attempt to answer the following research questions:

What effect has COVID-19 had on displaced children's perceptions of learning?

Do perceptions of learning during COVID-19 vary between girls and boys?

What factors are associated with the difference in girls' and boys' learning during school closures?

These questions, which are based on a feminist theoretical framework, highlight gender-based differences in children's perceptions, and on the voices of children who have experienced displacement. We assume that girls and boys are experts on their own experiences; thus, in our efforts to understand their home life, their perceptions of what they were missing most about school, their experience of learning at home, and their expectations of future opportunities for education programming during crises, we draw heavily from their words and responses in the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this study. Drawing from the work of Gallagher (2018) and Wang et al. (2020), our theoretical framework also considers the relationships between psychosocial wellbeing, learning, and the socioeconomic factors present in the households of displaced persons.

This article begins with a review of selected background literature that provides context and frames our analysis of the relationship between children's learning outcomes and gender disparities in learning in displaced settings. After discussing the research methods we used, we draw from our key findings to provide deeper insights into the perceived impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on learning outcomes, in particular those of displaced children.

## **GENDER DISPARITIES IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN DISPLACEMENT CONTEXTS**

### **EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN DISPLACEMENT**

Children worldwide are struggling with the impact of COVID-19, as an entire generation has had its education disrupted. The impact has been even more devastating for children experiencing displacement. UNHCR (2020a) estimates that displaced children are twice as likely to be out of school as those not displaced. Before the pandemic, more than half of the world's school-age children who were experiencing displacement did not have access to education (UNHCR 2019).

Displaced children are marginalized and vulnerable, and their right to education is commonly unfulfilled and often violated (Dryden-Peterson 2011). The barriers and obstacles to learning they have faced persisted and worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. These children's families have been living precariously; on top of facing difficulties in securing food, shelter, social protection, and safety, they are unable to afford the education fees, uniforms, textbooks, travel, radios, mobile data, internet, and digital devices that will enable their children to continue learning. Where there is no learning infrastructure to support distance learning (Ambe-Uva 2012), the school closures inevitably posed a significant threat to children's ability to access and continue receiving a quality education.

A growing body of literature discusses the issues faced by children living in conflict-affected and disaster-related crisis settings, including inequitable access to education and learning opportunities, a lack of material and social-emotional learning support, and gender disparities in education and learning (Rai 2020; Burde, Lahmann, and Thompson 2019; Ullah, Khan, and Mahmood 2017; Silwal 2016; Dryden-Peterson 2016). Humanitarian organizations have a growing interest in shifting their efforts from providing reactive humanitarian aid to supporting the goal of achieving education for all and increasing child protection in unstable environments, thereby contributing to peace and stability (Burde et al. 2017). Practitioners and educators also noted the pre-COVID-19 gap in services provided to displaced children and called for increased support for and investment in education (Anderson et al. 2006; Karpinska 2012). The majority of studies show that education in settings of displacement has a positive effect on children's protection, wellbeing, economic development, peace, and stability (Davies and Talbot 2008; Paulson and Rappleye 2007; Novelli and Cardozo 2008; Mosselson, Wheaton, and Frisoli 2009).

Economic factors can vastly influence a child's learning outcomes (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2010). The economic consequences of the global lockdowns are likely to reduce the earning capacity of many displaced households, and they may increase the opportunity costs of sending children to school or of providing children with access to learning resources and technology (Orendain and Djalante 2021).

While much of the education response to COVID-19 attempted to use technology to maintain distance learning during the pandemic-related school closures, there were marked inequities in access to remote learning both between and within

countries (Chapman and Bell 2020; Dreesen et al. 2020; UNICEF 2020b). Estimates from more than 100 countries of the global reach of broadcast and online remote learning during the pandemic found that at least 30 percent of children were not reached by these efforts (UNICEF 2020a). Children in conflict zones, rural areas, and poorer households were likely to be in the worst situation, as the majority of them did not have access to technology. Furthermore, girls' learning was disadvantaged during the school closures by unequal access to technology and a lack of gender-sensitive initiatives (UNICEF 2020b). This situation calls for humanitarian actions and interventions to improve both online and offline learning infrastructures in order to support children's education and improve their learning experiences in displaced settings; this was discussed by Dahya and Peterson (2017) relative to conflict-driven displacement, and by Mooney and French (2005) relative to internal displacement resulting from a number of causes. Distance learning strategies should support teachers' transition to remote teaching, mobilize financial and technological resources to sustain the provision of learning, and develop learning content and materials that can be delivered through both online platforms and print-based materials.

The psychosocial condition of displaced children, including the effects of trauma, violence, discrimination, feeling unsafe, worrying, and fear of being attacked, may also significantly affect their education and learning experiences. Although psychosocial experiences in displacement may be less apparent than physical and economic issues, daily stressors nonetheless affect children's learning (Burde et al. 2017, 635; O'Neal et al. 2018; Fernando, Miller, and Berger 2010). For example, several studies have shown that violence against children increased when COVID-19 lockdown measures required people to stay at home (Sharma and Borah 2020; Bradbury-Jones and Isham 2020). Miller and Jordans (2016), who reviewed research on the relationship between conflict and children's psychosocial wellbeing, found that the prevalence of family violence and negative parenting practices, together with poverty and overcrowded or unsafe housing in displacement settings, can put additional stress on children's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Recent research (Burgess et al. 2020) builds on these findings, demonstrating that economic shocks endured during the pandemic are globally correlated with increased violence against both adults and children, and that an increase in children's domestic chores and caregiving duties resulted in their poorer mental health and wellbeing.

## GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Despite continuous inclusion efforts, gender disparities in accessing education and learning resources remain prevalent among girls and boys from the poorest households and those living in fragile, conflict-affected, or humanitarian settings (Burde et al. 2019). Girls tend to receive less schooling than boys, particularly in rural areas, low-income countries, and settings of displacement (Alderman et al. 1996; Behrman and Knowles 1999; Glick 2008). Intra-household asset management, particularly for households experiencing difficult economic conditions, also appears to favor boys and to provide more learning resources for them, leaving girls behind in the process (Becker 2009; Björkman-Nyqvist 2013).

Evidence of girls facing barriers to education access is also observed among children living in refugee camps in conflict areas (Ullah et al. 2017; Silwal 2016). Research shows that, as conflict exacerbates inequitable access to education, girls and boys face reduced access to education in different ways (Burde et al. 2017). Some studies also found that education enrollment was disproportionately lower for girls living in conflict areas in Nepal (Silwal 2016) and Afghanistan (Burde and Khan 2016) than for boys in those areas. Unstable environments and social instability increase the likelihood that girls experiencing displacement will drop out of school (Kirk and Winthrop 2007). Furthermore, fears of being attacked and kidnapped have reduced parents' willingness to send their girls to school (Burde and Linden 2013).

Given the extensive evidence of girls' disadvantages in accessing learning and education, school closures due to the pandemic may also have led to a reduction in girls' time to study, due to their having a disproportionate increase in doing unpaid household work. A study by Burzynska and Contreras (2020) found that girls ages 5-14 already spent 40 percent more time doing household work than boys, and that time spent at home during school closures could lead to an even further increase in their domestic responsibilities. Studies of school closures due to the Ebola crisis in West and Central Africa also suggest that there was a decline in the time children had available for learning, and in their motivation to learn. For example, girls' time for learning in Sierra Leone declined by 12 hours per week, due to their increased household chores and paid work (Bandiera et al. 2019), while another study of the impact of the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone found that girls lost interest in education (Kostelny et al. 2016). Studies on the effects of COVID-19 on girls' and boys' education have shown girls to be disproportionately disadvantaged by increased domestic responsibilities (UNESCO 2021), while a study of trends in national exam results in Colombia showed that girls were disproportionately disadvantaged, as evidenced in their lower exam grades in 2021, by the COVID-

19-related school closures (Vegas 2022). Research that considers these persistent gender disparities in education suggests that girls may have faced more barriers and obstacles to learning than boys during the COVID-19 crisis.

While this considerable body of literature has discussed the inequitable access to education and learning opportunities faced by girls and boys living in conflict and other crisis settings, there is limited literature on girls' and boys' lived experience from their own perspectives on their learning outcomes, especially in the context of COVID-19-related school closures in countries affected by displacement. The aim of this study is to fill this gap in the literature by sharing the results of an extensive survey we conducted of girls' and boys' own perceptions and voiced concerns, based on their lived experience of education during the COVID-19 school closures in countries affected by displacement.

#### RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

We formulated three hypotheses that we use as the framework for answering our research questions, particularly those on the factors associated with perceptions of learning.

First, we hypothesize that the self-perceived learning outcomes of the boys and girls in our sample differ, depending on their context and the different gendered challenges they face. We reflect on findings from previous studies that argue that, due to social and cultural norms that often favor boys' education, girls tend to have lower school enrollment and, further, that social instability often stops parents from sending girls to schools for security reasons (Silwal 2016; Burde et al. 2017; Ullah et al. 2017). We examined these data to more fully understand the children's gender-based experiences and perceptions related to education, keeping in mind the different contexts and different problems they face (Kirk and Winthrop 2007).

Second, we hypothesize that children's perceptions of a decline in their learning is associated with their socioeconomic circumstances, including barriers and obstacles to accessing remote learning materials, as well as a lack of help in understanding the learning content and of reduced interactions with teachers, parents, and peers. This hypothesis is supported by previous studies showing that temporary school closures have acutely negative effects on displaced children, for whom school can provide a safe space to interact with peers and seek psychosocial support, and it can even be a reliable source of food (Care International 2020).

Our third hypothesis, which relates to emotional and psychosocial wellbeing, is that children with increased household responsibilities, such as taking care of siblings and housework, coupled with the prevalence of violence reported to occur in their homes, will perceive a decline in their learning. Through a gender-based analysis, we build on the understanding that psychosocial wellbeing affects learning outcomes (Gallagher 2018; Wang et al. 2020), with the aim of understanding more fully how changing family support, increased responsibilities, and violence at home affect children's learning.

## METHODOLOGY

### MIXED METHODS RESEARCH DESIGN

In examining the perceived effects on children's experience of learning during COVID-19-related school closures, we utilized cross-sectional data collected from the Save the Children International's global COVID-19 survey. We employed a mixed methods research approach to analyze quantitative and qualitative data collected from June 7 to July 12, 2020 (Burgess et al. 2020). We submitted the study to Save the Children's ethics review committee in April 2020, where it was reviewed by approximately 30 certified experts; approval was granted on May 25, 2020. Where they existed, we obtained approval from local independent review boards in all countries where we implemented the research. Informed consent and child assent were required from all participants, which we obtained remotely before starting the survey questionnaire.

### DATA USED AND SAMPLE

We collected data using the Save the Children's global COVID-19 survey in 2020, which was administered randomly among the organizational program participants (the beneficiaries) across six regions (Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa [ESA], West and Central Africa [WCA], Latin America and the Caribbean [LAC], the Pacific, and North America). The survey was distributed to the total sample of 17,565 parents/caregivers and 8,069 children. It was administered in the local languages to children ages 11-17 and their adult caregivers through either an online survey or phone survey. The research instruments were translated into 28 local languages to facilitate uptake in all 37 participating countries (Burgess et al. 2020). To ensure that the sample accurately reflected the characteristics of the local population, it was weighted against the total program participant population. The weight factors were calculated using the proportion of country-

level population participating in Save the Children's programs. The same weight was applied to all respondents across the sample.

From the 37 participating countries, we selected the ten that had the highest proportions of respondents (at least about 1 in 10 respondents) who belonged to a displaced group.<sup>1</sup> This included countries in five regions where the adult program participants self-identified as either an internally displaced person (IDP) or a refugee/asylum seeker, and the children were participating in distance learning during the school closures. We included the displaced group and the nondisplaced group in the analysis.

We refer to displacement using a broad definition of forced migration (UNHCR 2016) that includes the movement of refugees and IDPs due to conflict, and people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, poverty, or development projects. People also leave their place of origin because of persecution, conflict, repression, human rights violations, and natural as well as human-made disasters. Below are the contexts of displaced groups from each country selected for our sample.

*Table 1: Context of Displaced Population in Selected Countries in the Sample*

| <b>Countries</b>        | <b>Number of Displaced Population (as of December 2019)</b>            | <b>Displacement Context</b>   |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Columbia, Peru          | 5.5 million IDPs   | The displaced people have been forced to flee their homes due to situations such as violence and persecution but have not sought safety in other countries.   |
| Lebanon, Egypt, Albania | 1.5 million Syrian refugees; 180,000 pre-existing Palestinian refugees | Syrians who fled the conflict in their home country and Palestinian refugees already living in the camps  |
| Philippines             | 4 million IDPs, due to environmental disaster                          | The IDPs were displaced because of environmental disasters and conflicts between the armed forces and the Islamic state-inspired terrorist Maute Group. The respondents are among those who have lived in protracted displacement for decades, due to terrorist conflicts in Marawi City, Mindanao. |
| Bangladesh              | nearly 0.5 million IDPs  | Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who have fled to Bangladesh since August 25, 2017, and now live in the camp in Cox's Bazar   |

<sup>1</sup> These ten countries were the Philippines, Bangladesh, Somalia, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Peru, Albania, Egypt, and Lebanon.

Table 1: Context of Displaced Population in Selected Countries in the Sample (cont.)

| Countries                 | Number of Displaced Population (as of December 2019)                        | Displacement Context   |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Somalia                   | more than 2.6 million IDPs  | Conflict and violence linked to the activities of jihadist groups, together with slow- and sudden-onset disasters and food insecurity, have displaced this population. |
| South Sudan, Burkina Faso | 1.3 million IDPs (South Sudan)<br>More than 0.5 million IDPs (Burkina Faso) | Conflict, communal violence, and recurrent natural hazards such as floods and drought have created this IDP population.  |

Sources: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (n.d.), Save the Children (2020), UNHCR (n.d.), UNHCR (2020b), and Bermudez, Temprosa, and Benson (2018)

In this study, displaced children are defined as children living in households where the parents/caregivers identified themselves or a family member as refugees/asylum seekers or internally displaced people/groups when responding to the question, “Do you or anyone in your family identify as belonging to any minority group based on refugee/asylum seeker status and/or internally displaced people?” The analysis of children’s characteristics and their learning experiences was taken from a children’s questionnaire, while the information on the caregivers’ and household characteristics was taken from the adult questionnaire. The children’s sample in the qualitative analysis is the same as the sample of children in the quantitative analysis. It includes any child who answered at least one of four open-ended questions administered on the children’s questionnaire.

### ANALYSIS PLAN

We employed multivariate logistic regression models to examine perceptions of learning during school closures among children from displaced populations. We focused on the distinct gender differences between girls’ and boys’ perceptions of learning. The outcome variable is a dummy variable denoting children’s perception of learning “a little bit” or “nothing” during the COVID-19-related school closures. Their perceptions were in response to the question, “How much are you learning now that you are not going to school?” This question was only answered by the children who reported that their school was closed during the pandemic. We coded 1 for those who responded “a little bit” or “nothing,” and 0 for those who responded otherwise. Our main predictors are the dummy variable of displacement status (1 for displaced children and 0 for nondisplaced children) and the dummy variable of child gender (1 for girls and 0 for boys). We include control variables that are common confounders of the main associations of interest

in the study's particular context. These include the children's characteristics, identifiers of types of households or caregivers, the children's wellbeing, available learning supports, and learning obstacles the children reported on the survey. The definitions of these variables are available in Table A1 in the Appendix.

To support our interpretation of the model findings, we also incorporate some qualitative findings from the children's responses to the five open-ended questions in the child questionnaire: "What can adults do differently at home?" "What did you enjoy most about this time?" "What scared you the most about this time?" "What would you say to the leader in your country?" "What message do you have for other children?" We specifically explore the narratives children constructed about their academic worries due to COVID-19, their advocacy requests for world leaders, and their requests for support during the school closures. We used a conceptual content analysis approach to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts in the children's open-ended responses. All their open-ended responses were examined and coded, irrespective of any perceptions on saturation point.<sup>2</sup> Coding was undertaken to determine the key common themes that emerged from what the children were speaking of at the country level, regional level, or global level. Frequent themes included children's wellbeing, health, nutrition, education and learning, child protection, children's rights, and household economy.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE

As shown in Table 2, which presents descriptive statistics of the analytical sample on children's and household characteristics, our sample includes 632 girls (52.1%) and 554 boys (47.9%) from the five regions where Save the Children is operating. Each region represents roughly 20 percent of the sample; West and Central Africa had the fewest respondents, around 10 percent of the sample. The largest sample by country was from Colombia, followed by South Sudan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Philippines, Somalia, Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, and Peru. Approximately 11.0 percent of the sample comprises displaced children, and there is no significant variation between the proportion of displaced girls and displaced boys in the sample, as seen from the bivariate test (Pearson's Chi-sq indicator).

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<sup>2</sup> Saturation means that no additional data are being found that the researcher can use to develop properties of the category.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Sample: Children's and Household Characteristics

|                                     | Combined<br>Sample (%)<br>n=1186 | Girl<br>Sample (%)<br>n=632 | Boy<br>Sample (%)<br>n=554 | Bivariate Test               |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Learning a little or nothing        |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's Chi-sq(1)=2.92*    |
| No                                  | 28.2                             | 29.0                        | 27.4                       |                              |
| Yes                                 | 71.8                             | 71.0                        | 72.6                       |                              |
| Displaced children                  |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's Chi-sq(1)=0.60     |
| No                                  | 89.0                             | 87.5                        | 89.6                       |                              |
| Yes                                 | 11.0                             | 12.5                        | 10.4                       |                              |
| Age of children                     |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's Chi-sq(1)=0.44     |
| 11-14 years                         | 57.2                             | 56.3                        | 58.1                       |                              |
| 15-17 years                         | 42.8                             | 43.7                        | 41.9                       |                              |
| Number of children in the household | 3.5<br>(1.62)                    | 3.6<br>(1.62)               | 3.5<br>(1.61)              | Oneway ANOVA,<br>F-stat=0.23 |
| Disability status of children       |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's -sq(1)=4.67*       |
| No                                  | 98.8                             | 99.0                        | 98.6                       |                              |
| Yes                                 | 1.2                              | 1.0                         | 1.4                        |                              |
| Caregiver gender                    |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's Chi-sq(1)=3.50~    |
| No                                  | 30.9                             | 31.4                        | 30.4                       |                              |
| Yes                                 | 69.1                             | 68.6                        | 69.6                       |                              |
| Caregiver age                       |                                  |                             |                            | Oneway ANOVA,<br>F-stat=1.11 |
| 18-24 years                         | 5.7                              | 7.2                         | 4.0                        |                              |
| 25-29 years                         | 9.4                              | 9.0                         | 9.9                        |                              |
| 30-39 years                         | 38.9                             | 38.9                        | 38.9                       |                              |
| 40-49 years                         | 32.6                             | 32.1                        | 33.2                       |                              |
| 50-59 years                         | 10.1                             | 10.9                        | 9.2                        |                              |
| 60+ years                           | 3.3                              | 1.9                         | 4.8                        |                              |
| Settlement                          |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's Chi-sq(1)=0.75     |
| Rural                               | 65.1                             | 62.9                        | 67.5                       |                              |
| Urban                               | 34.9                             | 37.1                        | 32.5                       |                              |
| Region                              |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's Chi-sq(4)=7.32     |
| Asia                                | 21.2                             | 20.7                        | 21.7                       |                              |
| ESA                                 | 22.1                             | 22.3                        | 21.9                       |                              |
| WCA                                 | 10.2                             | 9.2                         | 11.3                       |                              |
| LAC                                 | 23.9                             | 22.8                        | 25.0                       |                              |
| MEE                                 | 22.7                             | 25.1                        | 20.0                       |                              |

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Sample: Children's and Household Characteristics  
(cont.)

|              | Combined<br>Sample (%)<br>n=1186 | Girl<br>Sample (%)<br>n=632 | Boy<br>Sample (%)<br>n=554 | Bivariate Test           |
|--------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Country      |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's Chi-sq(9)=9.77 |
| Philippines  | 9.0                              | 8.3                         | 9.7                        |                          |
| Bangladesh   | 12.2                             | 12.4                        | 12.0                       |                          |
| Somalia      | 8.5                              | 8.2                         | 8.8                        |                          |
| South Sudan  | 13.6                             | 14.1                        | 13.0                       |                          |
| Colombia     | 17.7                             | 16.4                        | 19.1                       |                          |
| Peru         | 6.2                              | 6.4                         | 5.9                        |                          |
| Albania      | 8.1                              | 8.9                         | 7.2                        |                          |
| Egypt        | 8.1                              | 9.3                         | 6.9                        |                          |
| Lebanon      | 6.4                              | 6.9                         | 5.9                        |                          |
| Burkina Faso | 10.2                             | 9.2                         | 11.3                       |                          |

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the standard deviation of mean values of continuous variables; percentages are shown for categorical variables.

Statistically significance (p-value): ~p<0.10, \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

As seen from the descriptive statistics (Table 3), more than half of the children (52.9%) in our sample lived in a relatively economically deprived household that reported a loss of more than half their household income due to the pandemic.

The majority of the children (83.9%) also reported having negative feelings: less happy, less hopeful, more worried, sadder, less safe, more bored, or having less of their own space and time. Moreover, a significant number (33.8%) of children lived in a household where a report of violence occurred, around 32.2 percent of them boys and 35.5 percent girls. About half of the children reported having more chores and more caregiving responsibilities than before the pandemic; more girls than boys reported having more chores (64.6% versus 38.0%) and doing more caregiving work (51.8% versus 46.0%).

More than 7 out of 10 boys and girls in the sample reported that they learned "a little bit" or "nothing" when they were not in school. More than half (56.5%) reported not having access to textbooks, reading books, worksheets, or activity books while learning at home during the school closures. A small proportion of children reported having access to other learning materials: about 1 in 4 reported having access to educational TV and radio, and less than 1 in 10 reported having access to a computer, tablet, phone, or the internet.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Exploratory Variables

|   | Combined<br>Sample (%)<br>n=1186 | Girl<br>Sample (%)<br>n=632 | Boy<br>Sample (%)<br>n=554 | Bivariate Test                  |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Household: Lost more than half of their<br>income during the pandemic |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.22     |
| No  | 47.1                             | 41.3                        | 43.2                       |                                 |
| Yes   | 52.9                             | 58.7                        | 56.8                       |                                 |
| Reporting negative feelings   |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=4.65*    |
| No  | 16.1                             | 15.7                        | 16.5                       |                                 |
| Yes   | 83.9                             | 84.3                        | 83.5                       |                                 |
| Any violence reported by children/caregivers                          |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=2.26~    |
| No  | 66.2                             | 67.8                        | 64.5                       |                                 |
| Yes   | 33.8                             | 32.2                        | 35.5                       |                                 |
| Having chores to do   |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=38.05*** |
| More than before  | 52.0                             | 64.6                        | 38.0                       |                                 |
| Same or less than<br>before   | 48.0                             | 35.4                        | 62.0                       |                                 |
| Having to care for siblings/others                                    |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=9.52**   |
| More than before  | 49.1                             | 51.8                        | 46.0                       |                                 |
| Same or less than<br>before   | 50.9                             | 48.2                        | 54.0                       |                                 |
| Having access to textbooks/reading books                              |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.11     |
| No  | 56.5                             | 57.3                        | 55.7                       |                                 |
| Yes   | 43.5                             | 42.7                        | 44.3                       |                                 |
| Having access TV/radio programs                                       |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.7      |
| No  | 75.7                             | 74.9                        | 76.6                       |                                 |
| Yes   | 24.3                             | 25.1                        | 23.4                       |                                 |
| Having access to computer/tablet/phone/internet                       |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.12     |
| No  | 90.7                             | 91.5                        | 89.9                       |                                 |
| Yes   | 9.3                              | 8.5                         | 10.1                       |                                 |
| Cannot be bothered to learn   |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.02     |
| No  | 88.7                             | 89.4                        | 88.0                       |                                 |
| Yes   | 11.3                             | 10.6                        | 12.0                       |                                 |

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Exploratory Variables (*cont.*)

|   | Combined<br>Sample (%)<br>n=1186 | Girl<br>Sample (%)<br>n=632 | Boy<br>Sample (%)<br>n=554 | Bivariate Test              |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Do not understand homework                                    |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.04 |
| No  | 69.6                             | 70.6                        | 68.6                       |                             |
| Yes   | 30.4                             | 29.4                        | 31.4                       |                             |
| No available help   |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.01 |
| No  | 65.0                             | 66.0                        | 64.0                       |                             |
| Yes   | 35.0                             | 34.0                        | 36.0                       |                             |
| Not enough data to access internet                            |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.07 |
| No  | 92.8                             | 92.4                        | 93.4                       |                             |
| Yes   | 7.2                              | 7.6                         | 6.6                        |                             |
| Someone else always uses computer,<br>internet, TV, and radio |                                  |                             |                            | Pearson's<br>Chi-sq(1)=0.22 |
| No  | 96.9                             | 97.3                        | 96.5                       |                             |
| Yes   | 3.1                              | 2.7                         | 3.5                        |                             |

Note: Percentages are shown for categorical variables.

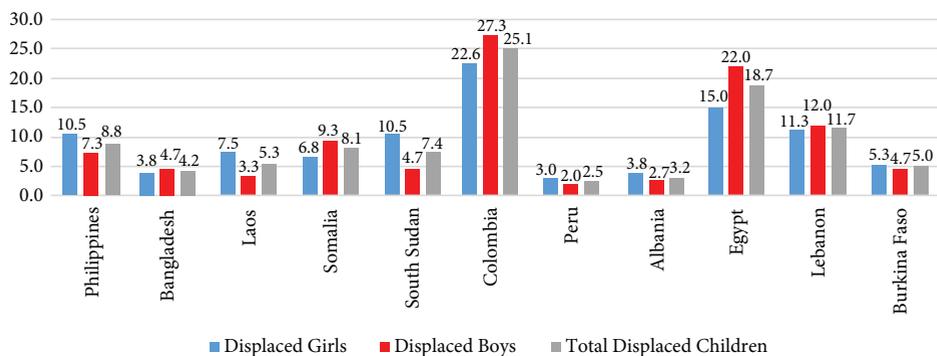
Statistically significance (p-value): ~p<0.10, \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

The learning obstacles the children reported most are “no available help” (35.0%) and “do not understand homework” (30.4%). More than 1 in 10 children reported that they “cannot/not bother to learn,” and around 7.2 percent reported “not having enough data to access the internet.”

### DISPLACED CHILDREN 'S PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING LITTLE OR NOTHING DURING THE SCHOOL CLOSURES

Of the displaced children in the sample (11%, or 130 children), the highest proportion were from Colombia (25.4%), followed by Egypt (18.7%), Lebanon (11.6%), Philippines (8.8%), Somalia (8.1%), and South Sudan (7.4%) (see Table 2). Displaced children in the other countries—Laos, Burkina Faso, Bangladesh, Albania, and Peru—account for 5 percent or less (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proportion of Displaced Children by Gender and Country (in percentages)



The data indicate that there is a strong association between children’s perception of learning “a little bit” or “nothing” during school closures and their displacement status. Results from our logistic regression analysis, as seen in Table 4, show that displaced children were nearly one and a half times more likely than the nondisplaced children ( $OR=1.44$   $p<0.05$ ) to report that they were learning “a little bit” or “nothing” during COVID-19-related school closures. Our models are robust in predicting perceived learning among displaced children after controlling for characteristics of the children, the households, or the caregivers, the children’s wellbeing, the available learning supports, and learning obstacles reported by the children in the survey. The models provide a relatively similar odds ratio and are statistically significant in predicting the likelihood of displaced children learning “a little bit” or “nothing,” and they provide a better indicator of goodness of fit (see Table 4, cols. 1, 2, and 3).

Table 4: Results of Logit Regression Predicting Children’s Perception of Learning (likelihood of perceiving learning “a little bit” or “nothing” during school closure)

|   | Combined Sample (1)       | Combined Sample (2)        | Combined Sample (3)        |                         |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
|   | Odds ratio                | Odds ratio                 | Odds ratio                 | 95% Confidence interval |
| Girls   | <b>0.79</b> <sup>*</sup>  | <b>0.77</b> <sup>*</sup>   | <b>0.69</b> <sup>**</sup>  | (0.53 0.91)             |
| Displacement status                                   | <b>1.44</b> <sup>**</sup> | <b>1.48</b> <sup>**</sup>  | <b>1.49</b> <sup>*</sup>   | (1.03 2.14)             |
| <i>Children’s/Caregivers’ characteristics</i>         |                           |                            |                            |                         |
| Child age   |                           | 0.83                       | 0.96                       | (0.73 1.27)             |
| Number of children in the household                   |                           | 1.05                       | 1.10 <sup>~</sup>          | (0.99 1.22)             |
| Child having disabilities                             |                           | <b>1.39</b> <sup>*</sup>   | 3.45 <sup>*</sup>          | (1.18 7.10)             |
| Caregiver: Female                                     |                           | 1.14                       | 1.13                       | (0.83 1.54)             |
| Caregiver age   |                           | 1.05                       | 1.09                       | (0.95 1.25)             |
| Household: Losing half of income during COVID-19      |                           | <b>1.77</b> <sup>***</sup> | <b>1.44</b> <sup>**</sup>  | (1.08 1.91)             |
| Settlement: Urban                                     |                           | 1.04                       | 1.13                       | (0.83 1.53)             |
| Region (Asia as ref)                                  |                           |                            |                            |                         |
| ESA   |                           | <b>7.47</b> <sup>***</sup> | <b>7.11</b> <sup>***</sup> | (4.42 9.44)             |
| WCA   |                           | 1.51                       | <b>2.54</b> <sup>**</sup>  | (1.45 4.46)             |
| LCA   |                           | 1.01                       | 1.12                       | (0.70 1.78)             |
| MEEE  |                           | <b>1.52</b> <sup>*</sup>   | <b>1.66</b> <sup>*</sup>   | (1.08 2.55)             |
| <i>Wellbeing</i>                                      |                           |                            |                            |                         |
| Having negative feeling                               |                           |                            | <b>1.39</b> <sup>*</sup>   | (1.01 1.89)             |
| Report of any violence at home                        |                           |                            | <b>2.16</b> <sup>**</sup>  | (1.27 3.68)             |
| Having to do chores more than before                  |                           |                            | 0.75                       | (0.47 1.22)             |
| Having to care for siblings/others more than before   |                           |                            | <b>1.50</b> <sup>*</sup>   | (1.06 2.70)             |
| <i>Learning supports</i>                              |                           |                            |                            |                         |
| Having access to textbook, worksheet, and readings    |                           |                            | <b>0.39</b> <sup>***</sup> | (0.24 0.83)             |
| Having access to radio and TV learning program        |                           |                            | 1.11                       | (0.76 1.63)             |
| Having access to computer, tablet/phone, and internet |                           |                            | 0.74                       | (0.51 1.07)             |

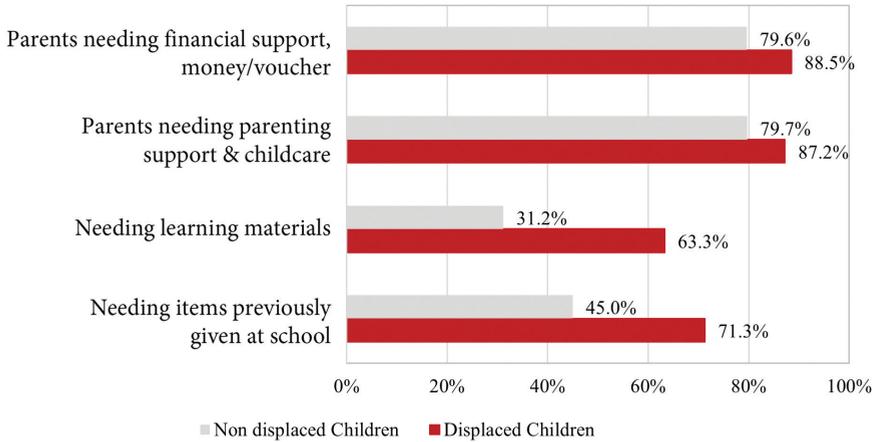
*Table 4: Results of Logit Regression Predicting Children's Perception of Learning (likelihood of perceiving learning "a little bit" or "nothing" during school closure) (cont.)*

|  | Combined Sample (1) | Combined Sample (2) | Combined Sample (3)    |       |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------|
| <i>Learning obstacles</i>                    |                     |                     |                        |       |
| Cannot be bothered to learn                  |                     |                     | 1.64 (0.89)            | 3.01) |
| Do not understand homework                   |                     |                     | <b>5.53</b> *** (3.72) | 8.24) |
| No available help                            |                     |                     | <b>3.96</b> *** (2.66) | 5.92) |
| Not enough data                              |                     |                     | <b>2.21</b> *** (1.50) | 3.26) |
| Someone else uses computer/internet/TV/radio |                     |                     | <b>1.89</b> * (1.00)   | 3.55) |
| Constant                                     |                     |                     | <b>0.17</b> * (0.03)   | 0.19) |
| Pseudo R-square                              | 0.07                | 0.109               | 0.291                  |       |
| Number of observations                       | 1186                | 1186                | 1186                   |       |

Note: Statistically significance (p-value): ~p<0.10, \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

The result suggests that the perceived decline of learning among the displaced children is associated with the lack of learning support they and their parents experienced while struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our bivariate analysis of several relevant variables from the survey data (seen in Figure 2) reveals that, during the pandemic, a higher proportion of displaced children than nondisplaced children (71.3% versus 45.0%) reported needing items such as learning materials, sanitary products, lunch, food to take home, health advice, and counselling; all of these were provided at the schools before they closed. A higher proportion of the caregivers of displaced children than those of nondisplaced children also reported needing parenting support and child care (87.5% versus 79.6%), as well as financial support and money/vouchers (79.6% versus 87.5%).

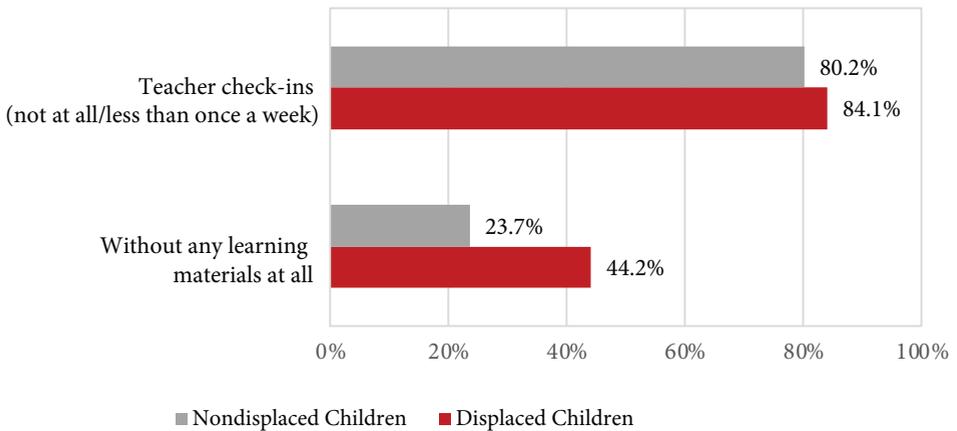
Figure 2: Proportion of Displaced Children Needing Supports during School Closures



Note: All percentages shown above are statistically significant (Chi-sq  $p < 0.05$ ).

As seen in Figure 3, the majority of displaced children (81%) reported having minimal check-ins with their teachers (less than once a week) during the school closures; more than half (53%) reported not having any. Nearly twice the proportion of displaced children as nondisplaced children (44.2% versus 23.7%) reported not having access to any learning materials, such as worksheets, textbooks, reading books, educational TV programs, radio, educational apps for a phone/tablet, a computer, or internet access.

Figure 3: Proportion of Displaced Children without/with Minimal Learning Supports during School Closures, as Reported by Caregivers



Note: All percentages shown above are statistically significant (Chi-sq  $p < 0.05$ ).

Children's responses to the qualitative question, "If you were asked to write a letter to the leaders in your country, what would you say?" put a wide lens on their perspective of COVID-19's impact on their home, food availability, education, household finances, health systems, and weak infrastructure. The children's responses can be framed around five overarching recommendations to protect them from COVID-19; provide educational support, help children, provide financial support for their families, help poor people, and deliver food.

For children from the displaced families in this study, the immediate needs of health, food, and economic security trumped requests for educational support. The children called for multidimensional responses and recovery strategies from the country's leaders. An 11-year-old boy from Colombia explained that he wanted leaders in his country to

find a way to help children like my brother and I who are migrants, and my mother who doesn't have a real job, to give help to those who need it, and to children who are on the streets, to grandparents that need help and attention, especially for children like my little sister who required psychological help so that she can communicate like us, and have opportunities to go to school and be able to study. Jobs for our parents so that they don't fight, shout, or abuse each other.

Of particular note in this study are the children's calls for cross-sectoral programming. Their responses demonstrate how intertwined and complex the issues are that affect their learning. For example, a 15-year-old girl from Kenya stated, "I would ask the leader to allow teachers back to school and put in place measures that will protect us and enable us to learn. To ensure that our families have food, since there has been a shortage."

Unlike the nondisplaced children, the displaced children identified infrastructure (or lack thereof) as a critical issue they want the leaders in their country to address. Many children mentioned issues such as a poor-quality healthcare system, lack of road access to the schools, and service delivery. Displaced children's answers differed from the overall population of children in their specific request that the government help children "like me" and a frequent request to return "home," particularly among the Latin American sample. A few children reported that their refugee or displaced status deprived them of adequate government support. For example, a 12-year-old girl from Peru said, "I am not in my country, what I would ask is that you please help us because, even if we are not from here, we are human beings . . . I study in this country and someday I will work here, so I think I also have the right to ask the government for support for refugee children like me."

These qualitative responses clearly demonstrate how children from marginalized groups, including refugees and displaced children, are more affected and vulnerable than the overall population of children and are aware that their displaced status contributes to the lack of services and quality education.

**GENDER VARIATION IN CHILDREN’S PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES**

Our results show that the extent to which children perceive they are learning varies by gender. The results of our logistic regression analysis (see Table 4) show that girls were less likely than boys (OR=0.69  $p<0.01$ ) to perceive that they learned “a little bit” or “nothing,” even after we include all control variables. These results may imply that girls are more likely to pursue learning outside of school, whereas boys are less likely to prioritize pursuing learning independently. Further study is needed to fully understand the gendered relationship of children’s self-directed and self-motivated learning.

*Table 5: Results of Logic Regression Predicting Children’s Perceptions of Learning, by Gender (likelihood of perceiving learning “a little bit” or “nothing” during school closure)*

|  | Girl Sample<br>(4) |                         |        | Boy Sample<br>(5) |                         |        |
|--|--------------------|-------------------------|--------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------|
|  | Odds ratio         | 95% Confidence interval |        | Odds ratio        | 95% Confidence interval |        |
| Displacement status                              | <b>1.53 *</b>      | (0.91                   | 2.56)  | 1.39              | (0.80                   | 2.40)  |
| <i>Children’s/Caregivers’ characteristics</i>    |                    |                         |        |                   |                         |        |
| Child age  | 1.06               | (0.72                   | 1.56)  | 0.91              | (0.60                   | 1.37)  |
| Number of children in the household              | <b>1.18 **</b>     | (1.03                   | 1.36)  | 1.00              | (0.84                   | 1.18)  |
| Child having disabilities                        | 3.63               | (0.73                   | 7.98)  | <b>3.56 ~</b>     | (0.81                   | 11.64) |
| Caregiver: Female                                | 1.29               | (0.83                   | 2.03)  | 1.07              | (0.68                   | 1.67)  |
| Caregiver age                                    | 1.08               | (0.89                   | 1.32)  | 1.07              | (0.87                   | 1.30)  |
| Household: Losing half of income during COVID-19 | <b>1.52 **</b>     | (1.03                   | 2.25)  | 1.41              | (0.91                   | 2.18)  |
| Settlement: Urban                                | 1.23               | (0.79                   | 1.90)  | 1.00              | (0.63                   | 1.57)  |
| <i>Region (Asia as ref)</i>                      |                    |                         |        |                   |                         |        |
| ESA  | <b>5.53 **</b>     | (2.95                   | 10.36) | <b>10.00 ***</b>  | (5.49                   | 11.25) |
| WCA  | <b>2.37 *</b>      | (1.10                   | 5.10)  | 3.16              | (1.30                   | 7.67)  |
| LCA  | 0.73               | (0.37                   | 1.46)  | <b>1.80 **</b>    | (0.93                   | 3.51)  |
| MEEE   | 1.29               | (0.72                   | 2.31)  | <b>2.57 ***</b>   | (1.29                   | 5.13)  |

Table 5: Results of Logic Regression Predicting Children's Perceptions of Learning, by Gender (likelihood of perceiving learning "a little bit" or "nothing" during school closure) (cont.)

|   | Girl Sample<br>(4) |       |        | Boy Sample<br>(5) |       |       |
|---|--------------------|-------|--------|-------------------|-------|-------|
| <i>Wellbeing</i>  |                    |       |        |                   |       |       |
| Having negative feelings                                | 1.32               | (0.84 | 2.07)  | <b>1.40*</b>      | (0.89 | 2.2)  |
| Report of any violence at home                          | 1.30               | (0.78 | 2.73)  | <b>3.98***</b>    | (1.80 | 8.78) |
| Having to do chores-more than before                    | 0.83               | (0.41 | 1.68)  | 0.69              | (0.34 | 1.38) |
| Having to care for siblings/others-more than before     | 1.00               | (0.52 | 1.92)  | <b>2.16*</b>      | (1.12 | 4.17) |
| <i>Learning supports</i>                                |                    |       |        |                   |       |       |
| Having access to textbook, worksheet, and reading books | <b>0.35</b>        | (0.25 | 0.62)  | <b>0.45***</b>    | (0.27 | 0.80) |
| Having access to radio/TV learning program              | 1.03               | (0.60 | 1.78)  | 1.34              | (0.76 | 2.38) |
| Having access to computer, tablet/phone, internet       | 0.64               | (0.37 | 1.10)  | 0.85              | (0.49 | 1.48) |
| <i>Learning obstacles</i>                               |                    |       |        |                   |       |       |
| Cannot be bothered to learn                             | <b>2.94</b>        | (1.23 | 7.02)  | 0.77              | (0.31 | 1.88) |
| Do not understand homework                              | <b>6.31</b>        | (3.65 | 10.91) | <b>4.78***</b>    | (2.62 | 8.75) |
| No available help                                       | <b>3.75</b>        | (2.22 | 6.36)  | <b>4.63***</b>    | (2.43 | 8.82) |
| Not enough data   | <b>2.47</b>        | (1.44 | 4.25)  | <b>1.95*</b>      | (1.09 | 3.51) |
| Someone else uses computer/internet/TV/radio            | <b>2.34</b>        | (0.94 | 5.80)  | 1.47              | (0.58 | 3.75) |
| Constant  | <b>0.05</b>        | (0.01 | 0.18)  | <b>0.06***</b>    | (0.02 | 0.25) |
| Pseudo R-square   | 0.319              |       |        | 0.282             |       |       |
| Number of observations                                  | 632                |       |        | 554               |       |       |

Note: Statistically significance (p-value): ~p<0.10, \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

When looking at gender differences in the children's sample, our logistic regression results (as seen in Table 5) reveal two distinct differences associated with the variation in learning between the boys and girls. Economic conditions, household shocks, and access to learning resources appear to play an essential role

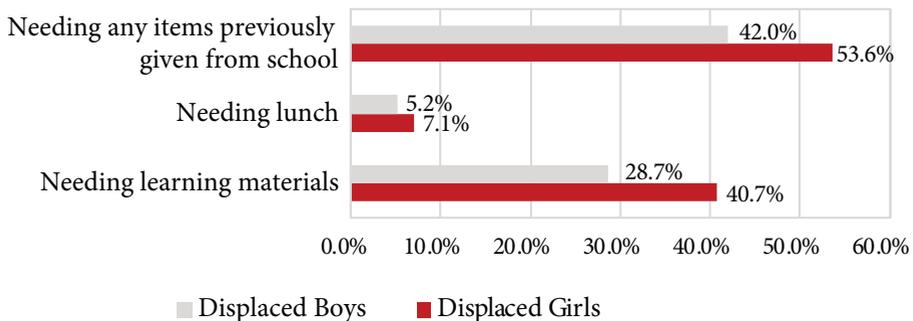
in determining whether a girl will perceive that she is learning. Disaggregation by gender and economic status showed that girls in the lower economic brackets are generally less likely to learn well than boys in that bracket. On the other hand, boys are less likely to perceive learning well when they are in an emotionally challenging situation, particularly those who experience family violence and increased negative feelings due to the pandemic.

**GIRLS’ LEARNING AND HOUSEHOLD SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

There is a significant relationship between economic shocks, the prevalence of income loss, and children’s perceptions of learning. Our results (see Table 5) show that girls with caregivers identified as being in displaced groups—also associated with needing financial support and learning resources—were more likely to perceive learning “a little bit” or “nothing” during school closures than girls with caregivers who did not identify as being in displaced groups (OR=1.53  $p<0.05$ ). In households that reported losing more than half of their income, girls were also more likely to perceive learning “a little bit” or “nothing” during school closure (OR=1.52  $p<0.01$ ) than the girls from households that did not report losing more than half their income. This suggests that girls who face more economic barriers were likely to perceive a decline in learning during the pandemic.

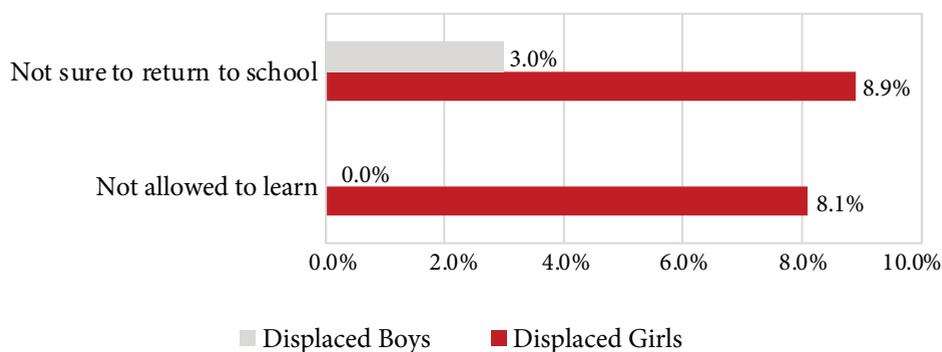
Our bivariate analysis drawn from a correlation between several relevant variables in our survey also reveals that a higher proportion of girls than boys reported needing learning materials (40.7% versus 28.7%), lunch (7.1% versus 5.2%), and many other items that were previously provided at school (53.6% versus 42%), as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Proportion of Displaced Girls and Boys Needing Supports Previously Provided at School



Note: All percentages shown above are statistically significant (Chi-sq  $p<0.05$ ).

Figure 5: Proportion of Displaced Girls and Boys Reported Not Being Allowed to Learn and Not Sure If They Will Return to School



Note: All percentages shown above are statistically significant (Chi-sq  $p < 0.05$ ).

Family composition, particularly the number of children in the household, seems to influence children's perceptions of learning, particularly among girls. There was a positive correlation between the number of children in a household and girls' likelihood of reporting learning only a "little bit" or "nothing." This appears to be in line with the general pattern of gender inequality among low-income groups, where households tend to respond to income shocks by varying the amount of schooling and resources provided to girls, while boys are largely sheltered from such shocks (Björkman-Nyqvist 2013). This affects girls' learning. Indeed, our data support this argument and reveal that a higher proportion of displaced girls (8.1%) reported the learning obstacle "not allowed to learn"; no boys made a similar report (see Figure 5). Furthermore, our data show that a higher proportion of displaced girls than boys reported that they were unsure or did not know if they will return to school once they reopen (8.9% versus 3%).

### BOYS' LEARNING AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Our logistic regression (Table 5) shows important and distinct results in the boys' perceptions of learning. Boys who reported having increased negative feelings due to COVID-19 were 1.4 times more likely than the boys who did not report such feelings to report learning "a little bit" or "nothing" during the school closures (OR=1.40  $p < 0.05$ ). Reports of increased negative feelings due to COVID-19 included being more worried, sadder, less happy, less hopeful, less safe, more bored, and having less of their own space or time. Our results show that the association between increased negative feelings and the decline of learning is not prevalent among girls.

To assess the children's emotional wellbeing, it is necessary to understand their individual emotional characteristics and the particular environments in which they develop those characteristics (Berger et al. 2011). In this study, we found that a higher proportion of boys than girls experience violence in their home, as reported by their caregivers and/or by the children themselves. Our logistic regression (Table 5) shows a strong relationship between boys' reports of violence occurring at home and their perceptions of declining learning. Boys living in households with any report of violence were nearly four times more likely than other boys not reporting violence to report learning "a little bit" or "nothing" (OR=3.98  $p<0.01$ ).

As seen in the qualitative data, when children were asked, "What worries you most at this time?" a negligible number of boys wrote about violence or child protection concerns, even among those who reported violence in the home. Given the high levels of violence reported, this suggests that the children interviewed either did not feel comfortable writing or speaking about these issues or that they did not perceive increased levels of violence to be a "worry." Although the intersection between wellbeing and learning is well evidenced (Gallagher 2018; Wang et al. 2020), these findings suggest areas for further programming, such as building trust with the children in these communities so that they are empowered to speak out or able to access protective services, or to educate these children more fully about their right to protection.

#### **GENDER VARIATION IN HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES AND THE ASSOCIATION WITH CHILD LEARNING**

Existing research highlights the fact that girls face increased caregiving and household responsibilities during virus outbreaks, such as Ebola (Bandiera et al. 2019). According to our data (see the descriptive statistics in Table 3), household responsibilities have increased for a higher proportion of girls than boys during the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 64.6 percent of the girls reported having more chores to do, and 51.8 percent reported having more caregiving responsibilities with their siblings or others. In comparison, only 35.4 percent of boys reported having more household chores and 48.2 percent more caregiving responsibilities with siblings or others. While the normative gender roles appear prevalent among our sample, the regression results show, interestingly, that increased household responsibilities did not seem to affect girls' perceptions of learning but they did significantly affect boys'. This suggests that girls may be used to doing caregiving work and thus were less likely to perceive this as a significant barrier to their learning. Boys, however, may find caregiving work to be a burden or a shock to

their daily routine. This suggests that having additional responsibilities influences boys' emotional wellbeing and that boys feel the psychological toll of changing environments more acutely than girls, both of which affect their perceptions of learning. Our regression result (Table 5) shows that boys who did more caregiving work during the COVID-19 pandemic than before were 2.2 times more likely than peers without increased caring responsibilities to perceive learning "a little bit" or "nothing" (OR=2.16  $p<0.05$ ).

### **CHILD CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR EDUCATION, LEARNING, AND LIFE TRAJECTORY DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES DUE TO COVID-19**

The qualitative research found a number of consistent themes across the countries studied. The most common concerns were about the impact school closures had on children's education and life trajectories; the limitations of remote learning, mainly due to access issues; and a desire for governments to invest in resources for those in need. When asked the qualitative question, "What worries you the most about the COVID-19 outbreak?" children reported being concerned about schools not reopening, having to drop out, not being able to take exams, and being uncertain about their grades.

Their education concerns were more long term, and many hoped for a return to "normal." A 16-year-old boy from Somalia wrote, "I am worried that [the pandemic] might not end anytime soon and that might be a problem to our already jeopardized education." Children's perceptions of learning lost and anxiety about their future education permeated their qualitative responses. When asked, "What can adults in your home do differently during the outbreak of COVID-19?" several children in Lebanon reported that barriers to accessing technology, the internet, and/or remote learning limited their learning and requested increased access.

When asked, "If you were asked to write a letter to the leaders in your country, what would you say?" girls and boys identified education as the second priority for their leaders to address, after protection from COVID-19. In their responses about education, children primarily asked officials to reopen their schools or provide remote learning support. A 15-year-old girl in Colombia wrote, "Help all the children, so that we can do better with our education, I don't have internet access or tech, so I haven't learned much over the past months."

The pandemic has also highlighted the challenges of a wholly digital approach to education. Despite increased digital connectivity, many displaced populations still lack access to internet-connected devices, and some learning environments

lack the resources to facilitate online learning. Of those who requested support for remote learning or educational supports, most were girls, especially among Asian respondents, which gives weight to the quantitative analysis and suggests that girls face more challenges in accessing learning materials at home than boys. Children’s requests—in particular those from displaced girls—for scholarships and for access to TV, internet, and remote learning illustrate the importance they place on educational supports, and their expectation that governments should provide them.

A 15-year-old girl from Bangladesh advocated for the leaders in her country to “improve school-based web side [sic] so that we can attend in online classes more effectively.” Other children expressed frustration at not attending school due to lockdowns and identified a lack of educational tools as a critical priority. In their answers, the children emphasised that support to children and families should be equitable and fair, with a particular focus on the poorest. For example, a 15-year-old boy from Burkina Faso highlighted the systemic digital divide between urban and rural children, saying, “*Que les enfants des villages veulent internet aussi*” (Children from the village also want internet).

This research supports our recommendation that governments should provide adequate resources and equitable access to education so that certain groups of children are not left behind. Children are acutely aware of the impact school closures have had on their perceptions of quality of learning and the potential impact on their life trajectories. Interestingly, many children who exemplify the multiple pressures displaced households face called for cross-sectoral programming. These findings suggest that the organizations that provide continuous access to (alternative) education services during school closures should consider and respond to the unequal connectivity and accessibility of learning platforms among displaced populations.

## CONCLUSIONS

Through a combined analysis of quantitative surveys of parents/caregivers and children in contexts affected by displacement, and the qualitative responses from the children, our findings largely support our hypotheses.

The first hypothesis—that boys’ and girls’ perceptions of learning outcomes differ, depending on the context and the gendered challenges they face—is supported by the findings. Girls were more likely to report learning “a little bit” or “nothing”

when their household characteristics indicated a lack of resources, displacement, a loss of more than half their income due to COVID-19, and having a large number of children in the family. The findings are consistent with literature showing that girls are disadvantaged in terms of access to learning resources within their households, especially after economic and other types of shocks. In fact, girls were more likely than boys to lack access to learning materials.

Our second hypothesis was that children's perception of a decline in learning is associated with their socioeconomic circumstances, including barriers to accessing learning materials, a lack of help in understanding the learning content, and a lack of interactions with teachers, parents, and peers. We found that displaced children were more likely than nondisplaced children to report learning "a little bit" or "nothing," and that boys were more likely than girls to report learning little or nothing since schools closed due to COVID-19, both of which support this hypothesis. Displaced children's own perceptions of learning "a little bit" or "nothing" were strongly associated with having limited (or no) access to learning materials and related supports during school closures.

The qualitative research shows that girls and boys were vocal about poverty, their demand for cross-sectoral interventions, and access to learning resources. Displaced girls and boys were particularly concerned that displaced children should be given access to learning resources, including internet-based learning. They also were concerned about the future of their education, a return to normality, and going home, which may have implications for their wellbeing.

Our third hypothesis, which addressed emotional or psychosocial wellbeing, was that children with increased household responsibilities, such as taking care of siblings and housework, and those who reported experiencing violence in their homes will perceive a decline in learning. The findings support this hypothesis to some extent, though there are important nuances, such as that boys were more likely to report learning "a little bit" or "nothing" when they reported having increased negative feelings due to COVID-19 (such as feeling sadder, more worried, or more bored), increased violence in the home, and having more chores and responsibility for the care of other children. While girls reported the same challenges (although girls were less likely to report increased violence in the home), they were not correlated to their perceptions of learning "a little bit" or "nothing." This may suggest that girls were more accustomed to pursuing learning despite challenges related to wellbeing, violence, and domestic chores. On the other hand, boys may have been less able to adapt their learning to these challenges during COVID-19. This gender difference was not expected. While

correlations between learning and wellbeing are well documented, there is a need for further research on the gendered aspects, especially in terms of boys' challenges in maintaining learning in the face of a decline in wellbeing and a challenging home environment. The possibility of girls underreporting violence in the home cannot be excluded and may need to be addressed in future research.

While our findings from the qualitative research include the recurrent themes of concerns about violence and wellbeing, they were not commonly voiced and were not at the forefront of responses to questions about the children's request to their countries' leaders and their parents. Reasons for this may include a reluctance to talk about violence and wellbeing concerns (especially among girls), an acceptance of harmful norms relating to violence, or limited awareness of their right to services that address their protection and wellbeing concerns. These areas may require further research and prioritization in programming and policy.

Overall, we see the importance of these findings being centered on girls' and boys' views on their gendered experience of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. We see the gendered obstacles these children have experienced when trying to access learning materials and supports during COVID-19, and have found that these challenges are more pronounced for children in contexts of displacement. We also have gained insight into the gendered connections between wellbeing and the experience of learning. We recommend that girls' and boys' requests for more support across sectors in humanitarian responses be addressed. The intersection of gender, displacement, and economic struggles should also be addressed in these interventions, with greater attention given than ever before to context-specific support for the social and emotional aspects of children's learning.

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## APPENDIX

Table A1: Definition of Variables Used in Analysis

| Name of Variables                               | Category | Definition   |
|---|----------|--|
| Learning Outcome                                |          |  |
| Child learning perception during school closure | 1        | Those perceived as learning a little bit or nothing  |
|   | 0        | Those perceived as learning as much as at school and/or more than at school                          |
| Main Predictors                                 |          |  |
| Gender of the child                             | 1        | Girls  |
|   | 0        | Boys   |
| Displacement status of the children             | 1        | Those with parents/caregivers identified as displaced group (i.e., refugee/asylum seeker and/or IDP) |
|   | 0        | Those who do not belong to displaced group   |
| Children’s/Caregivers’ Characteristics          |          |  |
| Child age                                       | 1        | Those ages 15-17 (mid-adolescence)   |
|   | 0        | Those ages 11-14 (early adolescence)   |
| Number of children in the household             |          | Continuous variable  |

Table A1: Definition of Variables Used in Analysis (cont.)

| Name of Variables                                  | Category | Definition  |
|--|----------|---|
| Child having disabilities                          | 1        | Those who cannot see at all or have a lot of difficulty hearing or seeing or remembering/ concentrating, or with self-care, walking, or communicating   |
|  | 0        | Those without any report of disabilities  |
| Caregiver gender                                   | 1        | Female caregivers   |
|  | 0        | Male caregivers   |
| Caregiver age                                      |          | Continuous variable   |
| Household: Losing half of income during COVID-19   | 1        | Those losing more than half of household income   |
|  | 0        | Those losing household income by half or below (including those who reported not losing income)   |
| Settlement: Urban                                  | 1        | Those living in urban area  |
|  | 0        | Those living in rural area  |
| Region (Asia as ref)                               | 1        | Asia  |
| ESA  | 2        | Eastern and Southern Africa   |
| WCA  | 3        | Western and Central Africa  |
| LCA  | 4        | Latin America and Caribbean   |
| MEEE   | 5        | Middle East and Eastern Europe  |
| <b>Wellbeing</b>                                   |          |   |
| Having negative feelings                           | 1        | Those who report negative feelings (either less happy and/or less hopeful and/or more worried and/or sadder and/or less safe and/or less feeling of having own space and time and/or more bored)  |
|  | 0        | Those who reported otherwise  |
| Report of violence at home by children/ caregivers | 1        | Those living in the household with any report of violence (i.e., violence happened at home; adults being hit or verbally abused; children being hit or verbally abused; adults yelling, aggressive, and resorting to physical punishment) by the children and/or caregivers |
|  | 0        | Those living in the household without any report of violence  |
| Having to do more chores than before               | 1        | Those reporting having more chores to do  |
|  | 0        | Those reporting having same number or fewer chores to do  |

Table A1: Definition of Variables Used in Analysis (cont.)

| Name of Variables  | Category | Definition   |
|--|----------|--|
| Having to care for siblings/others more than before      | 1        | Those reporting having to do more care work for siblings/others  |
|  | 0        | Those reporting having to do same amount or less work for siblings/others                                    |
| <b>Learning Supports</b>                                 |          |  |
| Having access to textbook, worksheet, and reading books  | 1        | Those with access to textbook and/or worksheet and/or reading books  |
|  | 0        | Those without any access to textbook and/or worksheet and/or reading books                                   |
| Having access to radio and TV learning program           | 1        | Those with access to radio and/or TV educational program   |
|  | 0        | Those without any access to radio and/or TV educational program  |
| Having access to computer, tablet/phone, and internet    | 1        | Those with access to computer, tablet/phone, and internet  |
|  | 0        | Those without access to computer, tablet/phone, and internet   |
| <b>Learning Obstacles</b>                                |          |  |
| Cannot be bothered to learn                              | 1        | Those who reported cannot be bothered to learn as the obstacle   |
|  | 0        | Those reported otherwise   |
| Do not understand homework                               | 1        | Those who reported they do not understand homework as the obstacle   |
|  | 0        | Those who reported otherwise   |
| No available help  | 1        | Those who reported no available help as the obstacle; 0 for those reported otherwise                         |
|  | 0        | Those who reported otherwise   |
| Not enough data  | 1        | Those who reported not having enough data to access internet as the obstacle; 0 for those reported otherwise |
|  | 0        | Those who reported otherwise   |
| Someone is always using TV, internet, computer, or radio | 1        | Those who reported someone using TV, internet, computer, radio as the obstacle                               |
|  | 0        | Those who reported otherwise   |

# INTERSECTIONALITY: EXPERIENCES OF GENDER SOCIALIZATION AND RACIALIZATION FOR IRAQI STUDENTS RESETTLED IN THE UNITED STATES

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## ABSTRACT

*Individuals from conflict-affected countries, such as Iraq, face formidable challenges when they resettle in the United States. Drawing from intersectionality theory, we explore the lived experiences of adolescent boys and girls from Iraq who have resettled in Texas and Virginia. In this qualitative study, we focus on the school as an institution that is positioned to enforce, or to combat, systemic and interpersonal inequalities among young refugees, especially in terms of gender and race. Our thematic analysis identifies the ways their interactions with teachers, peers, and family in the school context have shaped the socialization of these adolescent boys and girls from Iraq. The study findings reflect the importance of understanding how education settings can affect the intersectional experiences of conflict-affected youth who have resettled in the United States.*

## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2019, 4) has called the period from 2010 to 2019 the “decade of displacement,” as these were years in which multiple chronic crises around the globe resulted in a record-breaking number of refugees and asylum seekers. In 2019, 84 percent of the forcibly displaced persons worldwide were from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, a portion of whom resettled in high-income countries,

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including the United States. For refugees contending with the many hardships of displacement, the resettlement experience poses its own unique challenges, including the process of adjusting to a new social and cultural environment (Silove, Ventevogel, and Rees 2017; Fazel et al. 2012; Awad, Kia-Keating, and Amer 2019; Gibson 2001; Miller and Rasmussen 2010). Refugees who resettle during adolescence, a life stage marked by rapid biological and psychological changes, are particularly sensitive to social and cultural influences.

Adolescents spend a large proportion of their waking life at school or in school-related activities. As such, teachers and peers are “especially central to shaping and perpetuating [gender] norms” (Amin et al. 2018) in the school setting. A systematic review of the factors that shape gender norms globally found that schools can reinforce inequitable and harmful gender norms by, for example, prizing boys’ achievements over those of girls and enforcing systems that constrain girls’ equal participation (Kågesten et al. 2016). Schools can also have a positive influence on gender socialization, which is the process by which individuals learn to perform gender roles according to established norms (Ryle 2018; John et al. 2017). For example, in the evidence-based “coaching boys into men” program developed by Futures Without Violence and implemented around the world, school coaches are engaged as positive role models for boys as a way to challenge stereotypical gender norms and combat gender-based violence (Miller et al. 2014). Other programs engage female role models to encourage girls to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, which historically are male dominated (González-Pérez, Mateos de Cabo, and Sáinz 2020).

Schools are also the primary institutions where adolescents experience racialization and “othering.” Racialization, which is the “extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified social relationship, social practice or group” (Omi and Winant 2014, 13), may contribute to othering, which is the “set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality” (Powell and Menendian 2017, para. 8) based on group identities. As adolescent Iraqi refugees navigate their new school settings, they may have difficulty fitting in with their peers, and into the school climate more generally (Awad et al. 2019). Having these early and often ongoing experiences in the United States may shape the ways these young Iraqis perceive themselves, including their identification with a minority racial category. Racialization and othering challenge these adolescents’ sense of belonging, are detrimental to their academic success, and deplete their self-efficacy (García Coll and Magnuson 1997; Kia-Keating and Ellis 2007). Young Iraqis’ experience of being racialized also can contribute to extended poor physical

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and mental health outcomes (Abdulrahim et al. 2012; Bakhtiari 2020). Despite the growing literature on the racialization of refugees from the MENA region (Nojan 2022; Gowayed 2020), the literature on this phenomenon among Iraqi youth is limited.

The field of education in emergencies concerns itself with the access to and quality of education for displaced children and youth in crisis-affected contexts. Gender is a key consideration in the provision of education in emergencies. Evidence indicates that gender often shapes the educational expectations of and opportunities available to displaced youth in conflict-affected contexts (Schlecht et al. 2017). Conflict and displacement often exacerbate existing gender inequalities in education (INEE 2019). Furthermore, failing to recognize the diverse social identities and experiences of young people across and within the MENA countries, practitioners and researchers sometimes treat Muslim or Arab refugees as a monolith. In this paper, we delve into the intersectional experiences of a subgroup of MENA refugees, namely Iraqi boys and girls who have resettled in the United States. This population warrants attention, given that 144,400 refugees from Iraq have settled the United States since 2001 (Krogstad 2019).

We begin this article with a description of intersectionality theory, which guides our analysis. In the next section, we provide a brief review of the literature on gender socialization among Iraqis, and on the intersecting experiences of racialization in education settings for Iraqi youth who have resettled in high-income contexts. We then describe our research methods and present our findings, which illustrate the intersection of gender and race in school for Iraqi youth who resettled in Austin, Texas, and Harrisonburg, Virginia. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and programmatic implications of our findings, including how to respond to the intersectional challenges facing refugee youth from Iraq who have resettled in the United States.

We argue that the refugee youth included in this study experience gender socialization and racialization in their peer relationships, in their interactions with teachers, and in their familial expectations. Over time, this may result in girls and boys having differing levels of educational attainment, different aspirations and participation in school, and varying degrees of psychosocial wellbeing. Recognizing the socialized intersectionality of gender and race among refugee youth who have resettled in new countries may lead to the provision of more targeted and appropriate supports and interventions.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this study, we employ intersectionality theory to explore the role gender socialization and racialization have played among Iraqi youth who have resettled in the United States. Intersectionality theory critiques the notion of a universal experience and argues that any analysis that focuses exclusively on one dimension of identity, such as gender or race, is insufficient, as these dimensions are experienced simultaneously (Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim 2012; Crenshaw 1991; Cole et al. 2009; Collins 2019; Combahee River Collective 1977). Intersectionality theory was developed not only to understand the experiences of the marginalized but also to study (and resist) the intersecting power structures that create multiple layers of marginalization (Collins 2019). Intersectionality theory has been used extensively to understand the experience of intersecting identities in the United States, but only limited attention has been given to the ways larger institutions shape these experiences, specifically the experiences of refugees (Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012).

We draw from intersectionality theory to investigate the understudied dimensions of gender and race in the resettlement of youth from Iraq. Gender socialization is informed by structural, relational, and individual mechanisms (Stockard 2006; John et al. 2017), and there is strong evidence about the roles played by parental attitudes and actions, household gender responsibilities, peer dynamics, and school environments in propagating strict gender norms (Kågesten et al. 2016; Endendijk, Groeneveld, and Mesman 2018). Gender socialization during adolescence can have a significant impact on health outcomes, including differential patterns of morbidity and mortality across genders (Chandra-Mouli, Plesons, and Amin 2018).

Racialization involves treating an individual or group as “different,” based on their perceived racial or ethnic identity. Race is typically associated with phenotypical markers, such as hair texture or skin color, while ethnicity usually refers to a shared culture and common ancestry (Hughes et al. 2006). Racialization thus involves treating individuals differently based on their racial and ethnic identities. For refugee youth in the United States, racialization involves categorizing them into predefined groups, such as classifying Arabs as “white” in census records, which perpetuates unrecognized disparities and creates feelings of invisibility. Adolescents often endure racialization at school, where they are exposed to the prejudice and discrimination of peers, teachers, mentors, and even course curricula that may promote racial and ethnic othering (Rivas-Drake et al. 2020;

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Aldana and Byrd 2015; Bennouna et al. 2021). Even more pernicious are policies like the Trump administration’s “Muslim ban,” which invoked the events of 9/11 to justify restricting entry to the United States for the nationals of several Muslim-majority countries and to curtail refugee resettlement.

For adolescent refugees from Iraq, gender socialization and racialization are inextricably connected. Their racial identities shape the ways they are treated in their new social environments (Qin and Li 2020), while racism simultaneously pushes them to the margins. Although refugees’ identities are shaped by linguisticism, heteronormativity, classism, and other social influences, we focus in this study on gender and race as central to their experiences within the US education system. Combining gender socialization with experiences of racialization enabled us to conduct an intersectional analysis of the experiences of the refugee youth in our chosen study sites.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict-related displacement and subsequent resettlement often result in significant changes in a family’s household structure. Ethnic and racial differences in the host community may limit access to resources and social supports for newly arrived refugees (Awad et al. 2019), and access to employment and education may differ by gender, depending on local laws and customs (Kågesten et al. 2016). Adolescents are extremely susceptible to these new social influences, and the social ecology of the host environment may lead them to adopt behaviors that are stereotypically gendered or racialized (Abubakar et al. 2014).

Gender socialization occurs at multiple levels of the social ecology, from macro-level policies that sustain income inequality, to meso-level influences at school and in the social networks, and even in micro-level behaviors such as interpersonal communication (Ager 2006; John et al. 2017).<sup>1</sup> Displacement also may perpetuate existing gender inequalities, heighten exposure to gender-based violence, and end the community-based protections available in the refugees’ countries of origin, such as family or community support (Ní Aoláin et al. 2018; Caprioli and Boyer 2001). Inequities in terms of micro-level interpersonal treatment and meso-level access to services during displacement promote stereotypically gendered roles

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<sup>1</sup> Macro-level refers to legal, regulatory, and economic factors in the larger political environment; meso-level to institutional and community factors; and micro-level to individual, interpersonal, and familial factors.

among boys and girls, including prioritizing education and employment for boys, homemaking for girls.

Iraqi adolescents in the United States are subject to gendered racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice, which may affect their physical and mental health (Kira et al. 2010, 2008). Officially classified as white but typically racialized as non-white, refugees from the MENA region, including Iraqis, exist in a racially ambiguous space (Cainkar 2016, 2009; Jamal and Naber 2008; Tehranian 2008). Moreover, anti-Arab and Islamophobic rhetoric is pervasive in the United States and is often exacerbated by negative portrayals in the media of people from the MENA region (Rostam and Haverkamp 2009). The media and certain US policies such as the Patriot Act, the “War on Terror,” and the “Muslim ban” ascribe to the belief that Muslim people are “backwards, barbaric, uncivilized, oppressed women, men who oppress women, violent, unreasonable, terroristic” (Chan-Malik et al. 2014, 19). These racialized descriptions contribute to the othering of refugees from the MENA region and can have a significantly negative impact on their mental and physical health (Kira et al. 2010; Yako and Biswas 2014; Hess et al. 2018).

The US education system is a primary location of the racialization and gender socialization of Iraqi youth, and the implicit and explicit bias of administrators, teachers, and peers can further propagate racialized gender norms and roles. Studies also have found that language barriers and other acculturative stressors may make it difficult for Iraqi students to succeed in US schools (Nykiel-Herbert 2010). Furthermore, many Iraqi students experienced extended gaps in their education before arriving in the United States, due to precarious living conditions, residency restrictions, discriminatory treatment, and financial difficulties (Bang and Collet 2018). Studies have found that such adverse life experiences and gaps in education can negatively affect academic outcomes, including for Iraqi students who have resettled in the United States (Bang 2017). In what follows, we describe how we investigated these processes of racialization and gender socialization among adolescent Iraqi refugees and demonstrate how they can manifest in various facets of student life.

The challenges faced by adolescent refugees in the United States are not well-documented. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the intersecting experiences of racialization and gender socialization through an analysis of key findings from the Study of Adolescent Lives after Migration to America (SALaMA). SALaMA is a mixed methods study led by Dr. Lindsay Stark to gain understanding of the experiences of people from the MENA region, including

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Iraqi adolescents, who have been affected by crisis and are currently living in the United States (Bennouna, Ocampo et al. 2019).<sup>2</sup> It is hoped that the results will inform the development of more tailored and impactful approaches to support Iraqi adolescents who are resettling in the United States.

### METHODS

#### SETTING

The SALaMA research team focused on areas where the study sponsor, Qatar Foundation International, had strong partnerships, and where school leaders expressed interest in using the study findings to inform their future programming. Due to the high number of refugee families from Iraq who settled in Austin, Texas, and Harrisonburg, Virginia, our data collection focused on those two communities during the summer of 2017.

In recent years, Harrisonburg and Austin have been leading cities for immigration; from 2014 to 2018, approximately 17.2 percent and 18.5 percent of Harrisonburg's and Austin's residents, respectively, were born outside the United States (US Census Bureau 2019). Although the rate of refugee resettlement plummeted during the time data were being collected, due to the newly imposed ceiling on immigration imposed by the Trump administration, approximately 48 percent of the students at Harrisonburg City Public School (HCPS) were born outside the United States. After English and Spanish, Arabic and Kurdish were the most common home languages among HCPS students (10% and 7%, respectively) (HCPS 2020). In the 2017-2018 school year, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) served 81,650 students, 27 percent of whom were English language learners (ELLs) (AISD 2018). Approximately 19 percent of AISD's ELLs were immigrants, refugees, or asylees. After Spanish, Arabic was the most common home language among ELL students.

#### PARTICIPANTS

The primary data collection took place in July 2018. It consisted of (1) gender-disaggregated, school-based focus group discussions with high school students ages 13-23 who were born either in conflict-affected MENA countries or during their family's displacement from one of these countries; (2) semistructured interviews

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<sup>2</sup> While the study participants included students from multiple countries in the region, the present analysis focuses on students from Iraq.

with the caregivers of these youths; and (3) semistructured interviews with key informants, who included teachers, guidance counselors, school district/division administrators, case workers, therapists, and personnel from nongovernmental organizations. Although the SALaMA study included participants from Iraq, Syria, and Sudan, our results highlight the unique experiences of Iraqi participants, who were the majority of the study sample.

In Harrisonburg, the study team purposefully selected key informants with the assistance of a school administrator, who helped to recruit participants and schedule interviews. The study team contacted the key informants outside the school directly, via email, and asked them to recommend other participants. The study team worked with Christian World Service to identify potential youth and caregiver participants. A researcher and a trained Arabic interpreter contacted the adult caregivers by phone to explain the study and ask if they were interested in participating. Information on the study in Arabic and English was mailed to individuals who expressed interest. Of the 25 families contacted, 17 participated, one declined, and the rest could not be reached. A researcher and an interpreter visited each family that expressed interest in participating to answer their questions and obtain their written informed consent; this included adults' consent for their children to participate. To ensure that the children's participation was voluntary, they were subsequently invited to complete a written informed assent at the high school without their parents present.

In Austin, the study team worked with the AISD Refugee Family Support Office to develop a list of potential participants. They contacted potential key informants directly via email or phone, and all key informants provided written consent in person. Of the 48 families contacted, 14 participated, eight refused, five consented but were not present for data collection, and the rest could not be reached. To answer their questions and obtain written informed consent, the research team and interpreter visited all the families that expressed an interest in participating. The youth participants were invited to the public high school, where they completed written informed assent; only students whose parents signed and returned consent forms were approached for assent on the day of data collection.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

In both Austin and Harrisonburg, the data collection was conducted with the caregivers and adolescents by a study team consisting of two public health researchers, a Muslim Pakistani American woman and an American man of Moroccan and French descent. They were accompanied at each site by an Iraqi

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interpreter who was familiar with the local refugee community and the schools. Unless a participant requested otherwise, the researchers audio-recorded all the interviews and also kept detailed field notes. A team transcribed the audio files, including the interpreter's Arabic-to-English translation, and the research team then reviewed, edited, and de-identified all the English transcripts. All the records, including the audio and written transcriptions, were stored on password-protected computers to ensure confidentiality.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The research protocol was approved by the institutional review boards at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health (IRB-AAAR7830), AISD's Department of Research and Evaluation (R18.62), and the HCPS superintendent of schools.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

This qualitative analysis explores the experiences of Iraqi male and female adolescents, with a particular focus on their intersectional experiences in the education ecosystem. The research team analyzed the data using thematic analysis and the constant comparative method, which is a process developed by Glaser and Strauss (2017) wherein excerpts of raw data are sorted and organized into groups according to attributes in order to formulate a new theory (Silverman 2015). A lead analyst conducted the initial primary analysis of these data, which involved reviewing all the transcripts to develop the initial codes, comparing them to the relevant literature, and generating a codebook. A team of coders with backgrounds in public health, social work, psychology, and refugee resettlement were trained in the study protocol and codebook. Together with the research team, they finalized the codebook, which contained 56 codes, built intercoder reliability through an iterative process, and identified the key themes in the data (Bennouna, Ocampo et al. 2019).

The research team analyzed the data in order to gain an understanding of the intersectional experiences of adolescent Iraqi newcomers to the United States. The transcript segments originally coded as "gender system," "negotiating personal identities," and "acculturation strategies" were extracted and analyzed further. The code "gender system" included references to the ways gender constructs (e.g., gender schemas, norms, roles, identities, or stereotypes) contributed to differences in access to services and in how individuals were treated. This included direct comparisons between genders, and indirect comparisons in which one gender was highlighted as being subject to a certain phenomenon or tendency.

“Negotiating personal identities” included references to the tensions individuals experience in navigating the various dimensions of their multiple identities (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, refugee status, developmental stage, etc.). “Acculturation strategies” referred to the ways the adolescents and the host communities managed the newcomers’ socialization and acculturation to US norms and practices. This included integration (i.e., maintaining cultural continuity while also adjusting to a new culture), assimilation (i.e., shedding cultural heritage and adopting a new culture), separation (i.e., maintaining cultural continuity and avoiding other cultures), and marginalization (i.e., shedding cultural origins and also avoiding other cultures). To more fully understand the ways adolescents experienced their intersecting identities, the primary author re-analyzed these themes and identified subthemes related to education, gender, and race/ethnicity.

## RESULTS

In this analysis, we included Iraqi refugees (n=21) from the larger SALaMA dataset of adolescent respondents. We included the perspectives of key informants, caregivers, and service providers. The results underscore the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity. We considered the intersecting experiences of gender socialization and racial socialization within two overarching themes: the adolescents’ gendered and racialized experiences at school, and the gendered expectations within their families. The results highlight the socialization processes adolescents from Iraq experienced upon their resettlement in the United States.

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*Table 1: Adolescent Participants*

| Pseudonym | Site         | Gender | Age |
|-----------|--------------|--------|-----|
| Ali       | Austin       | M      | 16  |
| Fatima    | Austin       | F      | 17  |
| Zainab    | Austin       | F      | 14  |
| Hussein   | Austin       | M      | 14  |
| Ahmed     | Austin       | M      | 15  |
| Muhammed  | Austin       | M      | 16  |
| Mostafa   | Austin       | M      | 15  |
| Haidar    | Austin       | M      | 16  |
| Zahra     | Austin       | F      | 15  |
| Nour      | Harrisonburg | F      | 16  |
| Iman      | Harrisonburg | F      | 17  |
| Mariam    | Harrisonburg | F      | 17  |
| Shaimaa   | Harrisonburg | F      | 16  |
| Sarah     | Harrisonburg | F      | 19  |
| Hassan    | Harrisonburg | M      | 18  |
| Abbas     | Harrisonburg | M      | 17  |
| Omar      | Harrisonburg | M      | 16  |
| Abdullah  | Harrisonburg | M      | 17  |
| Saad      | Harrisonburg | M      | 16  |
| Ibrahim   | Harrisonburg | M      | 17  |
| Jassim    | Harrisonburg | M      | 18  |

**INTERSECTIONAL EXPERIENCES AT SCHOOL**

Refugee boys from Iraq reported dealing with ethnic stereotypes and gendered expectations while attempting to develop friendships with their peers in their new school settings. For example, some boys in Austin reported being bullied and called a terrorist (e.g., Ali).<sup>3</sup> These interpersonal dynamics often resulted in verbal and sometimes even physical altercations. One boy explained that, when he experienced a miscommunication with a peer, a school faculty member encouraged him to engage in violent behavior, a gendered norm in the United States. The faculty member allegedly said, “Yeah, like, they’re going to fight you to see how good you are, and if you’re not good, they’re just going to keep on fighting you again” (Hussein).

<sup>3</sup> Adolescents’ names have been replaced with pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

However, when others in the Austin focus group were asked about fighting, one boy responded that his “life is not that crazy,” while another said he “[had] no interest in that.” Other boys emphasized the importance of being “nice with other people, ’cause when you help them, they can help you,” and of responding to discrimination with humor rather than violence: “We make fun of the situation to make it less significant” (Ahmed).

The boys also reported having built positive relationships with their peers by participating in athletics, especially with others who had experienced racialization as outsiders in the United States. One boy recalled that “one of them is from Pakistan but he...lived most of his life here and he was helping me most of my time. After this, I start liking football ’cause we play together” (Ali). Iraqi boys in Harrisonburg often made friends with other boys from the MENA region, and they supported each other while learning English and participating in class. One boy recalled that the teachers “encourage us to ask questions, but sometimes we don’t know what to ask about because we...don’t know anything about [the system, so] getting another friend in the class [who can]...explain [the answer] better to you...would help you out” (Ibrahim).

Refugee girls from Iraq were also confronted with anti-MENA discrimination at school, but their experiences differed substantially from those of the boys. Both educators and their fellow students had fixed ideas about the roles and behavior of women and girls from the MENA region, including Iraqis, and the refugee girls’ interactions with teachers and other students often carried discriminatory gendered expectations. A girl in a focus group in Austin recalled a substitute teacher who used her as an example of how people from MENA “change cultures” after coming to the United States and “change their personality.” The teacher had pointed to the girl and said, “Whenever she got here, she took off her scarf.” The girl actually had never worn a hijab, and she was insulted by the conflation of country of origin and religious practices. As she recalls, “When I was in Iraq, Syria, Turkey...I didn’t even wear it...I didn’t take it off when I got here” (Fatima). Another girl in Austin recalled a conversation in which the teacher asked her if all girls from MENA wear a hijab, and she responded, “Do[es] everybody in Mexico just...carry around maracas and start shaking them everywhere?” (Zahra).

The refugee girls’ interactions with their peers at school were sometimes similarly fraught. While they, like the boys, encountered discrimination due to their ethnic identities, such as comments that Iraqi students might throw “bombs in schools” (Zainab), the girls also endured exoticization and objectification by both their peers and the teachers. For example, some girls reported experiencing unwanted

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attention from boys when wearing the hijab. One girl in Harrisonburg recalled a boy staring at her and talking about her negatively because she was wearing a hijab. The girl felt unable to respond adequately to him, due to her limited English proficiency, so she “was just silent and...was looking down” (Mariam). Another girl recalled a time when a boy harassed her at school, and although it took multiple attempts, she was assertive and continued to address the issue until she was heard. She explained:

There was a boy there and he kinda like[d] Muslim girls who wears hijab...[He] was like bothering me all the time and I was telling him to stop, “Please, I don’t like this.” And he kept talking about this, he was keep following me when I walk in the hallway...[and] at my lunch...he kept bothering me. And one time I was alone in the class and, uh, he came to the class and he close the door and I was really scared. And then I’m, like, “What do you want?” And after that, the teacher came and I was like, there’s God...I was really scared, and after that, um...I told the teacher, and it didn’t work and...I went to, uh, [the school liaison], I talked to her about that and she talked to other person and then I talked to principal. And then he [the boy] stopped. (Mariam)

In many cases, when a girl was stereotyped by a teacher or peer due to gendered racialization, she addressed the microaggression directly. However, as in the case above, it was not always easy to rectify discriminatory behaviors that were threatening and potentially dangerous.

Some service providers noted that the coed schools could be particularly challenging for girls from Iraq, as the schools in their country of origin had a vastly different environment. Service providers were particularly concerned about Iraqi students witnessing physical intimacy at school, such as “kids making out in the hallway,” and how this would conflict with ideas of the “parents at home, [who] want [their girls] to adhere more closely to...values and...customs of [their] home country” (Black female key informant, service provider in a community-based organization, Austin). Service providers also noted adolescents’ susceptibility to “social pressure” and gossip among girls: “If kids see kids in the schools doing something and they tell their parents...then all the families are now talking about that family, who lets their daughter speak to boys in the hallway, and then that family has pressure from the community to pressure their daughter” (white female key informant, community-based organization, Harrisonburg). Reflecting on their schools in Iraq, some girls said they could be suspended for physical

expressions of intimacy. In one girl's words, "They will suspend you or call your parents if you...hugged a person for a long time" (Mariam). "Here is so different," she added, saying that the students at her new school "can do everything they want." These conflicting norms prompted the refugee girls to reflect on their own behaviors and identities. They and their caregivers were particularly attuned to these different social norms in terms of how the girls would behave at school. The challenge of an unfamiliar learning environment was complicated by the actions of peers who adhere to different norms around gender and sexuality. In some cases, particularly in Austin, Iraqi girls experienced tensions with Latina-identified girls, whose style of dress and relationships with boys defied the traditional Iraqi concept of a "good girl."

Another site of gender socialization for girls was social media, which the girls described as platforms used for bullying. One service provider in Harrisonburg discussed the ways Iraqi girls bullied each other on social media: "The [Iraqi] girl posts a picture on her social media site where she is...showing her beautiful hair and is posing seductively...She has only allowed access to people that she can tell her mother are only girls, [but other girls send] those things out and [open] them up to the public" (white female key informant, school district leader, Harrisonburg). These behaviors reaffirm gender norms wherein girls are simultaneously objectified by boys and subject to gossip and ridicule by their girl peers.

School leaders in Austin are working to address the intersectional dynamics of both gender and race/ethnicity. One Latina key informant who is a school leader in Austin stated that

a lot of the equity work has to do with...very specific groups, and now you're throwing in a different subset that you have to consider. With Latinas and with African Americans, I think, when I'm at the race and diversity conversation, gender is not a huge part of that conversation, but you throw in Muslim refugees, it's huge...and it's been a massive learning curve for me...When I meet with families and I see the husband saying, "No, she cannot go to school because she needs to be doing x, y, and z," I have to be careful about how I approach that.

### FAMILIAL EXPECTATIONS

Boys commonly reported gendered expectations at the family level that influenced their educational experiences. Some stated that their parents trusted them and that they did not have to share their academic progress with them. Others recalled

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conversations where their parents had said, “Go to college, be a doctor. That’s all you hear” (Hassan). A boy in Harrisonburg stated that “going to America and getting [a] degree is...a big thing for...our family. Like, they’re counting on you to come here, get a degree, buy them a house or some[thing]...to pay them back, they brought you all the way over here and the struggles that they had is a lot” (Omar). Some male students perceived that their parents cared more about their grades and future career prospects than about other indicators of wellbeing, while others felt that their parents put pressure on them to earn an income as quickly as possible. Both of these attitudes affected these adolescent boys’ perceptions of parental support for their educational attainment. A service provider in Austin explained:

A lot of guys couldn’t wait, they wanted to leave school early. They wanted to get a job and get money in their pocket. And I was trying to explain to them the difference between an hourly wage and a salary, and why it was better to stay in school. Yeah, you don’t have money in your pocket today, but... in this country you can’t have a middle-class life [as] a truck driver or taxi driver...So, you want to...resist the temptation to get the hourly job now, work at CVS or whatever, and finish at least high school. (Black woman key informant, service provider in a community-based organization, Austin)

Parents also reinforced traditional expectations about sons’ responsibility to the family, such as translating for their parents at the school and, to a lesser degree, caring for their siblings. Older boys were often expected to act as the liaison between the school and their parents, due in part to Iraqi gender norms, wherein men are more active in their communities in terms of seeking employment and resources, and are responsible for their female family members. For example, one boy mentioned that his “mom uses me [as a translator] for the medical stuff” (Ahmed), while a mother in Austin described her son as “the point of communication between [me and the school] because I gave my son’s phone number and email. So, if they have anything, they contact my son, and my son will tell me.” These responsibilities were integral to the experiences of the families in this study. The boys were often contending with challenging school-based experiences, including teacher and peer dynamics that sometimes sanctioned violence, while at home they navigated significant familial responsibilities along with high expectations for their academic success. These socialized patterns were informed by the intersectional experience of being both male and from Iraq, a country where men are socialized to earn an income for their family and to hold a position of authority in their community.

Iraqi girls contended with a new reality upon resettling in the United States, where education and employment priorities are structured differently. At home, girls faced their parents' expectations about caregiving responsibilities that were similar to those of their male siblings. Girls were expected to care for their siblings, such as by walking them to school, and to help their mothers with housework, but unlike the boys, they did not report acting as a liaison between their parents and the school. One Iraqi mother in Austin reported that "my daughter...sometimes she helps me also [but] she's studying, so sometimes she will not be able to do that." In the United States, parents expected both girls and boys to contribute to the family finances, whereas in Iraq, girls were not necessarily expected to participate in the labor market.

Some parents were more open to the possibility of their daughters entering into romantic relationships in their new environment than they had been at home. One mother in Austin stated, "I can't prevent you from doing something that I personally was doing when I was your age. So, it's okay that you have a boyfriend. But the thing is that...you have to put kind of limitation with your relationship." Other parents taught girls not to spend time alone with boys. The girls said they were often more comfortable spending time with their female peers, especially those from the MENA region. One girl stated, "My dad, he didn't let me go because he didn't know the boy...or what he [might] try to do. He [thought it was] better to just let me go with the girls. And I agree with that" (Sarah).

## DISCUSSION

In this study, we investigated the intersectional experiences of adolescent Iraqi refugees who resettled in the United States. Our findings indicate that racialization and gender socialization are not independent processes but intersectional experiences that contribute to the othering of Iraqi adolescents in the US school setting. The Iraqi adolescents in our study navigated the multiple factors that shaped their racialization and gender socialization, including their parents' expectations of gender roles as defined in their home country; their teachers' and peers' perceptions of gendered behavior for Arab and Muslim adolescents, which often were influenced by stereotypes; and their own observation and internalization of the gender socialization process for their US-born peers. These intersectional patterns have important policy and practice implications for Iraqi youth and families who are resettling in the United States.

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Adolescent boys and girls from Iraq were influenced by the gender roles and norms espoused by their parents, many of whom engaged in quite equitable behaviors toward their children. It appears that the financial strain placed on families as a result of displacement and resettlement created opportunities for parents to treat their sons and daughters more equitably. While experiencing financial strain is not new to Iraqi families escaping crisis (World Bank 2016), women's legal right to work in the United States induced more parents to allow both boys and girls to participate in the labor market. Many participants said that the gender roles in their families had changed since resettlement, to the extent that girls were able to participate in more activities to help support their households financially. At the same time, however, it is important to note that refugee youth who had greater household responsibilities in their income-constrained households also had less time to engage with their studies.

Several features of the US school climate, including discriminatory behavior, shaped the racialization and gender socialization experienced by the Iraqi youth in this study, who were treated differently from their US-born peers in their teacher-student and peer relationships. We found, for example, that some teachers expressed stereotypical beliefs about how people from Iraq should behave and dress, especially in terms of their gender roles and norms. Adolescents from Iraq also were aware of the racialized and gendered stereotypes that were endemic among their classmates, who sometimes explicitly associated Iraqi adolescents with terrorism. Some Iraqi participants in our study sought community in one another, and with similarly racialized peers from the MENA region and from Pakistan. The participants described a range of strategies for coping with experiences of othering, such as using humor to deflect peer bullying, turning to trusted educators to escape unwanted and exotifying attention from boys, and joining sports teams to make new friends. Newcomers at both study sites made friends across racialized boundaries, and their new classmates exposed them to unfamiliar norms, which prompted them to reflect on their identities. Social media provided a space where Iraqi girls could experiment with new forms of self-expression, but it also enabled co-ethnic peers to monitor each other's adherence to Iraqi gender norms and to shame those who were perceived to violate those norms (Awad et al. 2019). Given the ubiquity of social media in young people's lives, its role in the social and educational adjustment of refugee adolescents warrants greater attention (Pottie et al. 2020).

The gender socialization process is different for US-born youth than for their Iraqi counterparts. Boys in the United States typically are socialized to be aggressive and competitive, while girls often are socialized to practice emotional, affectionate, caring, gentle, and overall benevolent behaviors while simultaneously being objectified (Stromquist 2007; Kessler and Milligan 2021; John et al. 2017). However, the parents of Iraqi adolescents whose families have resettled in the United States expect both boys and girls to engage in caregiving roles at home, engendering the children's need to take some responsibility for their family's wellbeing.

These findings have implications for the improvement of policies and programming for adolescent students resettling in the United States. This study also confirms the findings of previous research on gendered racialization in schools, wherein boys are socialized to adhere to aggressive masculinity and to be the breadwinners for their families, while girls are seen as timid and are objectified (Youmna 2018). Adult actors in the US school setting have an opportunity to protect crisis-affected adolescents from the stressors associated with resettlement. Efforts to do so have included social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, some of which promote positive ethnic-racial identity and critical analyses of privilege and power (Bennouna, Khauli et al. 2019). It is worth noting that the two school districts included in this study implemented specific programs and policies to promote social cohesion among students, and to discourage students from bullying and other forms of violence. For example, schools in both cities implemented SEL programming, which encouraged the development of interpersonal skills such as social awareness and creating healthy, caring relationships (AISD 2020; HCPS 2020). AISD implemented programs that included restorative practices, mindfulness, and a focus on building adults' capacity for SEL. HCPS offered an informal after-school program for girls that was led by an adult school liaison from Iraq who had resettled in the United States. This program was an invaluable source of psychosocial support that reinforced the in-school SEL activities the students were already engaged in. Additional aspects of these programs have been well documented elsewhere (Bennouna, Khauli et al. 2019; Seff et al. 2021; Stark et al. 2021; Bennouna, Ocampo et al. 2019). There is burgeoning interest in the development of programs that are culturally responsive and tailored to the intersectional dimensions of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, and other characteristics (Bennouna, Khauli et al. 2019). Lessons learned from these programs could lead to the development of initiatives for crisis-affected populations around the globe.

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Interpretation of these findings should be considered alongside some key limitations of this study. The first limitation is that the interviews included in this analysis were conducted with caregivers and students from Iraq. Therefore, there are no data on comparison groups, either refugee youth from different cultural backgrounds or US-born youth. It is not possible to determine the degree to which experiences such as exposure to violence at school would differ across the two populations. Second, the experiences described here are specific to the locations where the study was conducted and therefore are not generalizable to individuals who are resettling in other cities or states. Although these findings are relevant to the global context, gender socialization is culturally specific and bound to other culture schemas. Individuals fleeing conflict settings other than Iraq may have different experiences when integrating into the US setting. Finally, this analysis focuses primarily on adolescent Iraqi boys' and girls' experiences at school; other aspects of their wellbeing, including labor market participation, early childhood education, and health-seeking behaviors, were not addressed.

### CONCLUSION

Conflict- and crisis-affected populations face myriad complexities during their displacement journeys. Among other things, displacement can contribute to gender inequality, including unequal access to quality education. The gender socialization and racialization adolescents experience as a result of displacement are largely affected by the environmental context. In the United States, the schools are the primary environment where adolescents experience gendered socialization and racialization. Despite this, there is a dearth of literature about the intersectional experiences of Iraqi girls and boys who resettle and attend school in the United States.

This study highlights the gendered racialization of boys and girls from Iraq, with implications for adolescents from MENA more broadly who settle in the United States. The ways gendered behaviors are either reinforced or challenged for newcomer boys and girls would benefit from further research, and the ideologies and behaviors of service providers, teachers, caregivers, and youth must be better understood in order to ensure that newcomers have a smooth transition into US culture. Social norms in the adolescent ecology can have a robust impact on the safety of boys and girls by subjecting them to discriminatory practices and dangerous patterns of socialization. For example, encouraging aggression among boys can lead to physical violence. Further research should explore the experiences of girls and boys from the MENA region as they transition into a new social and

cultural environment. The findings of this study can have important implications for policies and programs aimed at supporting crisis-affected families settling in the United States, as they offer valuable lessons about the impact on students of gender socialization and racialization. It is vital to address harmful gender and racial/ethnic stereotyping, to promote gender equity, and to develop inclusive programming that addresses patterns of discrimination.

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# REFUGEE GIRLS' SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA: EXAMINING THE VULNERABILITIES OF REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN LOW-RESOURCE DISPLACEMENT SETTINGS

SHELBY CARVALHO

## ABSTRACT

*Refugee girls are one of the most marginalized groups in the world when it comes to school participation, and they are half as likely to enroll in secondary school as their male peers. Gender disparities can be made worse by conflict and displacement, and they often increase as children get older. As many low- and middle-income host countries move toward more inclusive models of refugee education, it's critical to identify barriers that may differentially limit the inclusion of refugee girls. I use two unique household surveys, conducted in Ethiopia, to examine the household and community factors that shape participation in secondary school. My findings suggest that the magnitude and sources of disadvantage vary across groups. Domestic responsibilities and concerns about safety in the community are more likely to limit secondary school participation for refugee girls than for refugee boys and host community girls. Other factors, including parental education and exposure to gender-based violence, are less likely to differ between refugee and host community girls. These findings have implications for education and social protection policies that target girls' education and wellbeing in both refugee and host communities.*

## INTRODUCTION

Barriers to girls' education in low- and middle-income countries are well documented throughout the academic and policy literatures, but substantial gaps

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remain in our understanding of the ways these barriers vary and may multiply in humanitarian contexts. The vulnerabilities associated with fragility can affect men and women differently, which often results in heightened gender inequality and greater risks to women and girls (e.g., Kirk 2007, 2010). Gender inequities within conflict-affected groups can be further exacerbated by displacement, thus making refugee girls one of the most marginalized groups in the world when it comes to school participation (Burde et al. 2017).

Low- and middle-income countries host 85 percent of the world's more than 80 million refugees. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2020) reports that sub-Saharan Africa hosts more than one-quarter of the world's refugee population, which totals more than 18 million people. Many of the top hosting countries in the region have signed global agreements that obligate them to offer education opportunities to refugees, but despite these formal agreements, many remain out of school.<sup>1</sup> UNHCR finds that refugee girls in sub-Saharan Africa are less likely to be in school than refugee boys across all levels of education. Moreover, these gender disparities increase as children get older. In Ethiopia and Kenya, refugee girls are 60 percent less likely than refugee boys to enroll in secondary school (UNHCR 2018).

Ethiopia is the second most populous country on the continent and hosts one of the largest refugee populations in Africa, thus it provides an important context in which to examine these barriers for two main reasons. First, gender gaps in secondary school participation also exist in host communities, which suggests that barriers to girls' education are relevant for both refugee and host communities in Ethiopia. Second, Ethiopia hosts refugees from Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan, thus the refugee population varies along several lines, including country of origin, length of displacement, and ethnic background, as well as in policy implementation, community safety, and quality of education across host regions. This variation allows for a unique within-country comparison of the ways that the sources of marginalization and vulnerabilities these refugees face differ across contexts and interact with education.

In preparing this paper, I asked several questions related to secondary school participation for refugee girls: Are gender gaps in education greater for refugee girls than host community girls? What factors shape the differences in school participation among girls from these two groups? What drives gender gaps in secondary education among refugees? How do these gaps vary across refugee

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<sup>1</sup> These agreements include the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, and the 2017 regional Djibouti Declaration.

groups and camp locations? To examine these questions, I used two unique household surveys that covered both camp-based refugees in Ethiopia and the host communities immediately surrounding them.

Across the sample, I found that domestic responsibilities and concerns about safety in the community disproportionately limited the secondary school participation of refugee girls as compared to that of refugee boys and host community children. Other factors that may affect refugee girls' education, including parental education, parents' perceptions of the value of schooling, and exposure to gender-based violence (GBV), did not disproportionately affect refugee girls. This suggests that refugee girls and host community girls in low-resource settings face many of the same challenges in accessing secondary school, but that refugee girls face additional compounding barriers that limit their secondary school participation.

Few quantitative studies to date have assessed the barriers to refugee girls' education. Several studies in health and child protection have quantitatively examined GBV, risks, and empowerment for refugee girls (e.g., Stark et al. 2017), but most of our knowledge about education related specifically to refugee girls comes from qualitative studies and international policy reports. I build on the important qualitative work done in these spaces to develop a conceptual framework for a quantitative analysis of the barriers to refugee girls' education in Ethiopia. My findings are relevant to similar low- and middle-income host countries, including Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda, each of which hosts between 500,000 and 1.5 million refugees and faces similar gender disparities in secondary school participation in their host communities.

## **CONCEPTUALIZING BARRIERS TO REFUGEE GIRLS' EDUCATION**

Persistent gender inequities and barriers to girls' education occur at multiple levels, including in households, communities, and schools, and in national laws. Humanitarian situations, including displacement, can further strain existing gender inequities, heighten safety concerns, and intensify the need for family members to contribute to household activities when experiencing a loss of income (Stark et al. 2017). Barriers that exist at multiple levels can compound each other and, as a result, girls may encounter more profound obstacles when trying to pursue an education. For example, girls from very poor households who live in communities experiencing conflict may face steeper obstacles to education access than girls facing only one of these challenges.

## HOUSEHOLD FACTORS

### DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES, OPPORTUNITY COSTS, NORMS, AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Domestic responsibilities are a well-documented barrier to education for adolescent girls in poor households. In households facing extreme budget constraints, the opportunity costs of going to school instead of contributing to housework can be elevated (García and Saavedra 2017). These challenges can be exacerbated during times of crisis (Ferreira and Schady 2009) and can have a disproportionate impact on girls (Björkman-Nyqvist 2013). In a study of Sudanese refugees who resettled in Australia, Hatoss and Huijser (2010) found that, even though families equally valued boys' and girls' education, adolescent girls had greater responsibility for household chores than their male counterparts, even after they had been resettled in a high-income country.

These opportunity costs can be more difficult to overcome in places where the perceived benefits of going to school do not outweigh the immediate needs of the household, whether due to the direct costs of schooling, a lack of clear economic opportunities following school completion, or the norms that put less value on girls' education and work outside the household (e.g., de Janvry et al. 2006). Read-Hamilton and Marsh (2016) found that such norms can become more pronounced and even prohibitive in humanitarian and displacement contexts. Furthermore, when the purpose of education and the future opportunities it can bring are "unknowable" (Dryden-Peterson 2017), it may become more challenging for the poorest households to rationalize investing in education over more immediate survival needs. In a study of learning outcomes among refugees in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, Piper et al. (2020, 93) found that refugees who believe they will return home within the next three years have higher average literacy scores than those who believe they will still be living in the camp for a much longer time. This might suggest that having a clearer picture of the future could shape refugees' school participation and performance.

### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND EARLY MARRIAGE

Globally, adolescent girls face the greatest risk of violence and exploitation of any age group (Glass et al. 2018). The risks of GBV and early or forced marriage for adolescent girls are heightened in humanitarian settings and can negatively affect their education (Stark et al. 2017; Noble et al. 2019), including by the added risk of sexual assault, harassment, and exploitation at school (Burde et al. 2017). Girls in

lower social positions often face disproportionate risks of GBV (e.g., Davies 2004; Stark and Wessells 2012). Refugees in many contexts occupy some of the lowest positions in society, and adolescent refugee girls thus often face a greater threat of GBV and exploitation than other girls (Glass et al. 2018). Experiencing increased GBV in conflict settings also can have a lasting effect on the physical and mental wellbeing of women and girls (Russell et al. 2016). Further illustrating this, Stark et al. (2017) found that exposure to sexual violence prior to settling in Ethiopia had a negative effect on refugee girls' sense of wellbeing and safety. Evidence from qualitative studies also suggests that frequent exposure to the threat of physical abuse can negatively affect refugee girls' participation in school, and can increase their feelings of vulnerability and the likelihood of early marriage (Bartels et al. 2018; Yaman 2020).

#### PARENTAL EDUCATION AND REFUGEE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Parental education is linked to education outcomes for boys and girls; it has been found to have a greater effect on girls than on boys in some contexts (e.g., Card, Domnisoru, and Taylor 2018; Iyer et al. 2020). In a recent study of first-generation learners in Ethiopia—defined as those whose parents have never attended school—Iyer et al. (2020) found that first-generation learner status adds an additional layer of disadvantage, which serves to widen gaps in both learning and school participation over time. In displacement settings, refugee parents' or caretakers' familiarity with the local school system and language may also play a role in shaping children's participation. In Kenya, Piper et al. (2020, 94) found that learning outcomes among refugees vary by country of origin. They suggest that this may be due in part to differences in refugee groups' length of stay in the host community, which can result in corresponding differences in parents' familiarity with the language of instruction in schools. Thus, it is possible that first-generation learner status may have more pronounced effects for refugee students whose parents are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the local systems and languages, or who are facing additional uncertainty about their future plans, than for those with more experience in the country or with more certainty about the future.

### COMMUNITY FACTORS

#### DISTANCE TO SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

The distance between home and school can affect school participation for both boys and girls and can become more important as girls get older (e.g., Muralidharan and Prakash 2017). Travelling a long distance to school can increase the cost of

schooling, due to the expense of transportation and the opportunity costs that stem from long commute times. Concerns about the safety of the school route and the area around the school can be heightened in humanitarian contexts, and parents thus may be less willing to let girls travel to school than boys (Burde and Linden 2013; UNICEF 2018). In a qualitative study of refugee women and girls in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, Dahya and Dryden-Peterson (2017, 297) found that women often experience harassment while walking alone, which can make going to school more difficult for them. In Ethiopia, secondary schools are located in the host communities surrounding the refugee camps, and the distance from home to school could be a particularly steep barrier for refugee girls at the secondary level.

#### HOST AND REFUGEE KINSHIP TIES

In low- and middle-income host countries, dominant social and political cleavages often fall along ethnic lines (e.g., Posner 2005; Lieberman and Singh 2012). Moreover, postcolonial borders can act as dividing lines across ethnic and kin groups, which means that refugees from neighboring countries may share ethnic, linguistic, or other background characteristics with host communities. When refugees share an ethnic background with the host community, the host community may be more welcoming and refugees' school participation may be more likely to mirror that of the host community. In contrast, host communities may be more exclusive toward refugees from other ethnic groups, in particular when they face high levels of competition for resources or political representation. In a historical analysis, Rügger (2019) found that, when a co-ethnic refugee influx enlarges the size and influence of the host community kin group, it can fuel clashes with other groups in the area. In such cases, refugees might be more likely to attend school in the host community if they share characteristics, or when their presence does not worsen existing tensions between host groups. As I discuss in more detail below, this is a component of the political economy in Ethiopia that may have an impact on refugees' participation in education, particularly that of girls, as these dynamics may heighten their safety concerns.

#### SCHOOL-BASED FACTORS

School-based factors, including having safe school grounds and an infrastructure that is appropriate for girls, can become more important in humanitarian contexts, and for girls as they get older. Classroom factors, including having female teachers (Winthrop and Kirk 2005) and a learning environment that is free from gender bias, can also play an important role in shaping girls' self-perceptions, aspirations,

and feelings of belonging at school.<sup>2</sup> When faced with high opportunity costs, the quality of the schools may also help parents determine whether or not they should send their children to school.

## REFUGEE EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA

Over the past three decades, the Government of Ethiopia has maintained a largely open border policy for refugees, with strict encampment rules. Like other countries in the region that host a large number of refugees, Ethiopia is a signatory to multiple global and regional agreements related to refugees, beginning with the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (Ethiopia Ministry of Education 2020). Ethiopia endorsed the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016 and is a signatory to the 2017 regional Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education. Reflecting these global commitments, the Government of Ethiopia also developed a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in 2017; in 2019, it announced major shifts in the law and in policy, which paved the way for broader integration of refugees, beginning with the education sector. However, concrete integration efforts have so far been slow, and they are likely to stall further, due to the outbreak of civil war Ethiopia in late 2020.

In addition to the 2019 integration law, policy shifts in the education space include identifying refugees as a priority group in Ethiopia's flagship education reform, the General Education Quality Improvement Programme for Equity. While vague plans are in place for greater physical integration, including sharing schools in the future, refugees at present typically attend the primary schools located inside the camps. The relatively small number of refugees who go on to secondary school may attend government schools in their host communities, which means that, in most cases, attending secondary school requires refugees to leave the camps.

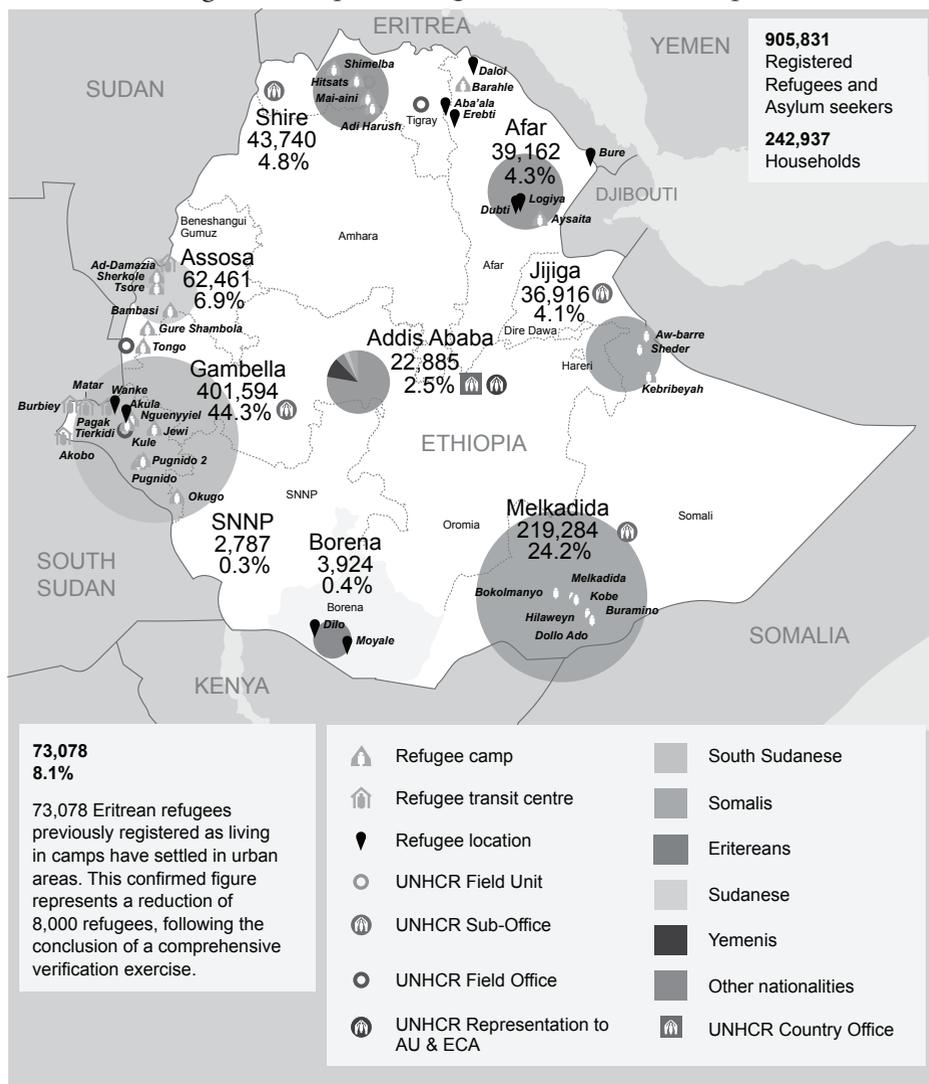
Refugee camps are primarily located in remote parts of the country, where access to public services often is limited, even for the local population. Education quality and outcomes thus vary across the regions hosting refugees. Primary education enrollment among refugees is typically lower than regional averages in the host areas. Secondary school participation among refugees is low, ranging from zero for both boys and girls in Samara (the Afar region) because there are no secondary schools near the refugee camps, to 47 percent for boys and 29 percent for girls

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on this subject is outlined in Carlana (2019).

in Jijiga (the Somali region). The map in Figure 1 shows where Ethiopia's refugee camps are located along the border regions

Figure 1: Map of Refugee Locations in Ethiopia



SOURCE: Nigusie and Carver (2019)

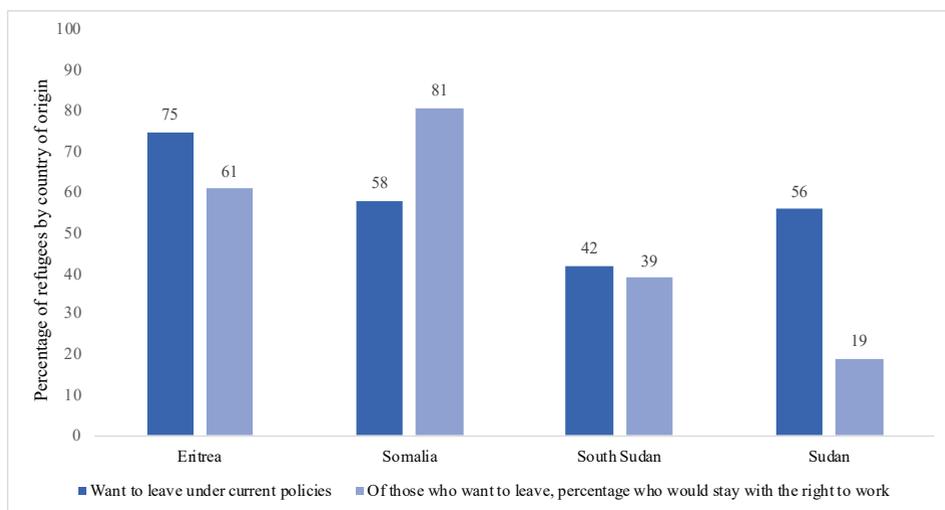
### REFUGEE HOUSEHOLDS

The refugees in the survey sample live in camps located in remote areas that are managed by the Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs and UNHCR. Refugee households are typically poor and have access to few financial resources.

Approximately 70 percent of the refugee households in Ethiopia are headed by females (Nigusie and Carver 2019) and, according to the World Bank's (2017) Skills Profile Survey (SPS), nearly 30 percent of those in the sample have been separated from a family member who would normally contribute to household earnings. Refugees living in camps do not have the right to work in Ethiopia, except for manufacturing jobs in the industrial parks funded by the World Bank. Only about 23 percent of the refugee survey sample reported having worked within the previous seven days, including informally or for incentive pay within the camp. About 6 percent of the refugee sample reported having received remittances from abroad within the past year; this varied by country of origin, with less than 1 percent of those from Sudan and more than 35 percent of those from Eritrea having received remittances (World Bank 2017). With few work opportunities, separation of household members, and limited resources coming in from elsewhere, refugees face severe poverty, which can increase domestic responsibilities, heighten the opportunity costs of sending children to school, and increase the risk of early marriage for adolescent girls. Qualitative findings from a small World Bank study in Ethiopia suggest that domestic responsibilities, early marriage, and pregnancy are key barriers to refugee girls' participation in secondary school (World Bank 2019).

Not having the right to work in formal jobs or a pathway to citizenship in the host country may also create greater uncertainty about the future, which can affect decisions about education, particularly when household resources are limited. Figure 2 shows that plans to stay in Ethiopia over the long term vary across refugee groups, with refugees from South Sudan being most likely to stay under current policies and those from Eritrea being least likely. However, refugees across all groups were more likely to report wanting to stay in Ethiopia over the long term if they were granted the right to work. Qualitative findings also suggest that a lack of certainty about their future prospects may contribute to low participation in school among refugees in Ethiopia (World Bank 2019). Thus, it is possible that improving labor market opportunities could also improve education outcomes for refugees.

Figure 2: Refugee Preferences for Onward Migration Depends on the Right to Work



SOURCE: Author's elaboration of Skills Profile Survey data (World Bank 2017)

Refugee adults have completed a similar number of years of education as Ethiopian nationals living in the host communities surrounding the camps (see Table 1). Refugees also have a prevalence of first-generation learners that is comparable to that of their host communities. In the SPS sample, 40 percent of adults in host communities and 35 percent of adults over the age of 18 reported that they had never been to school (World Bank 2017). Of the refugee adults who had been to school, about 28 percent had attended school in Ethiopia.

Table 1: Refugee and Host Community Parents Have Similar Years of Schooling

| Region                   | Women   |      |            | Men     |      |            |
|--------------------------|---------|------|------------|---------|------|------------|
|                          | Refugee | Host | Difference | Refugee | Host | Difference |
| <b>Afar</b>              | -       | 9    | -          | -       | 9    | -          |
| <b>Benishangul-Gumuz</b> | 5       | 7    | -2         | 7       | 8    | -1         |
| <b>Gambella</b>          | 7       | -    | -          | 10      | -    | -          |
| <b>Somali</b>            | 4       | 6    | -2         | 7       | 10   | -3         |
| <b>Tigray</b>            | 7       | 8    | -1         | 9       | 8    | 1          |
| <b>Total</b>             | 6       | 7    | -1         | 9       | 8    | 1          |

SOURCE: Author's elaboration of Skills Profile Survey data (World Bank 2017)

## HOST COMMUNITIES

Ethiopia's federal system comprises nine semi-autonomous regions organized largely along ethnic lines. In some regions, refugees share an ethnic background and language with the surrounding host community, such as Somalis hosted in the Somali region. In other regions, refugees have few ethnic or linguistic links with the host community, such as the Sudanese in Benishangul-Gumuz. The quality of education and public services available for the national populations varies considerably across regions.

The presence of refugees in some regions of Ethiopia is far more contentious than it is at the national level. In the Gambella region, for example, sporadic violence between refugees and people in the host communities is not uncommon, and schools are sometimes targeted (UNICEF 2018). Qualitative evidence from a UNICEF study found that this violence had prevented refugees from going to school in the region during times of heightened conflict (UNICEF 2018, 117). This violence is connected in part to ethnic tensions in the Gambella region, where many refugees are Nuer and have a common background with the Nuer ethnic minority group in that region (Nigusie and Carver 2019). Given the large number of Nuer refugees, the ethnic balance could shift if refugees were to gain citizenship in Ethiopia, which would change the current political representation from the region.

Apart from the presence of refugees, several host regions, including Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Somali, experience periodic violence and are considered fragile. Since late-2020, Tigray has become the epicenter of a growing conflict with the national government, and media reports suggest that refugee camps, which host primarily Eritrean refugees, have been the targets of attacks (BBC 2020). Heightened tensions between refugees and the host communities, or within the host communities surrounding refugee camps, may have a disproportionate impact on the adolescent girls who attend secondary schools outside the camps. If safety continues to be a concern in this region, it may discourage young refugees from finishing school or from pursuing work and other forms of community integration.

## SCHOOL LEVEL

A lack of female teachers and gender bias in the classroom may contribute to the gender gaps in education among refugees in Ethiopia. A recent study of teachers in regions hosting refugees in Ethiopia found the following ratios of female-to-male refugee teachers at the primary level: Gambella 1:26, Benishangul-Gumuz 1:13, and Tigray 1:16 (Bengtsson et al. 2020). This severe gender imbalance may

affect girls' persistence in school and their ability to learn. According to data from the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, the teacher gender gap continues at the secondary level. Regions hosting refugees had the following aggregate female-to-male teacher ratios at the secondary level: Afar 1:8, Benishangul-Gumuz 1:6, Gambella 1:12, Somali 1:10, and Tigray 1:4. These figures represent aggregate regional numbers and may be more severe in the remote areas where camps are located (Ethiopia Ministry of Education 2020).

Qualitative evidence from Ethiopia in which girls reported concerns about lagging behind boys in school also suggests that gender bias may be present in the classroom and that refugee girls have internalized gender-based learning discrepancies (World Bank 2019). Future research could explore whether and how feelings of inadequacy and bias experienced in the classroom due to being female may be compounded by refugee status at the secondary level, and thus could be an additional source of disadvantage for refugee girls.

## METHODS

I drew from the literature described above to inform a quantitative analysis of whether and how gaps in secondary school enrollment vary between refugee girls and host community girls, and between refugee girls and boys. My approach included a combination of descriptive statistical analysis and ordinary least squares regression, with location fixed effects.

## DATA

The data for this study came from two large-scale household surveys conducted by UNICEF (N=17,095) and the World Bank (N=27,370). They were implemented in refugee camps and the immediately surrounding host communities in Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Somali, and Tigray. My analysis is limited to households in these areas that had school-age children.

### BUILDING SELF-RELIANCE PROGRAM SURVEY

The Building Self-Reliance Program (BSRP) survey was conducted in 2018 by UNICEF as part of the Building Self-Reliance for Refugees and Host Communities by Improved Sustainable Basic Social Service Delivery Program. Data collected over a six-week period in early 2018 covered 3,000 households from one refugee camp and the surrounding host community in each region, including Afar,

Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Somali, and Tigray. UNICEF defines host communities as “the population living in *woredas* [districts] where the targeted refugee camps are located” (Kimetrica 2018, 19). Host communities with at least one border within a ten-kilometer radius of the refugee camp were included. The camps were randomly selected from a list of eligible sites; they were deemed eligible if they were a refugee camp rather than a location or point of entry and were slated to receive UNICEF assistance related to water systems. The rationale for including eligibility for water system assistance was to allow UNICEF to track indicators related to water, sanitation, and hygiene through the survey. Households were randomly selected from within the chosen refugee camps and host communities; recently arrived refugees were excluded. The household survey reached a total of 3,000 households from 150 urban host communities, 150 rural host communities, and 300 refugee households in each region. The questionnaires were intended for the primary caregiver in the household. The BSRP survey focused on opinions about and barriers to education, as well as on health, services, and safety conditions. It included sections on GBV and child protection.

#### SKILLS PROFILE SURVEY

The SPS was a household survey conducted in 2017 by the World Bank. Like the BSRP survey, the SPS was implemented in all five regions hosting refugees, and it targeted both refugee camps and the surrounding host communities. The SPS classified all communities within a five-kilometer radius of a refugee camp as host communities. The sample design was a multistage stratified random sample. It began with regions as the primary strata, within which the camps were divided into enumeration areas proportional to their size. Enumeration areas and households within the enumeration areas were then randomly selected from each stratum, which resulted in a total of 5,317 households and 27,370 individuals. The sampling frame initially intended to reach 900 refugee households and 500 host community households in each region, but the refugee sample fell short in Gambella (N=439), with a majority South Sudanese refugee population, due to security concerns. To compensate for this, Benishangul-Gumuz was oversampled (N=1,423), because 25 percent of the refugee population in that region is South Sudanese. The security concerns in the Gambella region at the time the survey was conducted also prevented the surveyors from reaching host community households. In Afar, all respondents were classified as host community members; in the other three regions, both refugee and host community respondents were represented. The SPS survey focused on skills, employment-related topics, migration history, and assets.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For more information about the SPS survey, including data collection, see World Bank (2018).

## METHODOLOGY AND MODEL

### DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

I used the BSRP sample to examine whether perceptions of education quality, satisfaction with the school, and opinions about the value of girls' education varied between refugee parents and host community parents. This provided insight into whether their perceptions of the quality of education varied and thus could affect their opportunity cost calculations differently (see Table 2). To determine whether differential exposure to GBV is likely to have been a contributing factor to divergent outcomes in secondary school participation (see Table 3), I also examined whether exposure to GBV varied between refugee and host communities. I used weighted t-tests for this portion of the analysis in order to assess whether the differences between the two groups are statistically significant.

### ORDINARY LEAST SQUARES REGRESSION WITH LOCATION FIXED EFFECTS

To analyze barriers to girls' education, I estimated four different versions of the following weighted ordinary least squares regression with data from the SPS sample:

$$y_{ijk} = \beta' X_{ijk} + \delta W_j + \gamma Z_k + \varepsilon_{ijk} ,$$

where  $i$  represents individuals,  $j$  represents households, and  $k$  identifies the refugee camp location. The outcome  $y_{ijk}$  represents the probability that individual  $i$  is enrolled in school,  $x_{ijk}$  is the vector of covariates,  $W_j$  is the vector of household fixed effects,  $Z_k$  is the vector of location fixed effects, and  $\varepsilon_{ijk}$  is the error term. The main outcome variables were school enrollment at the primary and secondary levels, in which respondents indicated whether their children were currently enrolled in school. This resulted in a binary 1-0 outcome variable.<sup>4</sup>

I included covariates at the household and community levels in each version of the model. At the household level, I controlled for domestic responsibilities, first-generation learner status, perceived community safety, plans to stay in Ethiopia, and the number of school-age children in the household. In most versions of the model, I included interaction terms to test whether the covariates fluctuated with refugee status and gender. At the community level, I included covariates that captured perceived safety.

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<sup>4</sup> I prefer ordinary least squares for ease of interpretation in the main body, but I also tested logistic regression specifications. Directions and significance of results are consistent between the two model specifications.

Domestic responsibilities were measured by a binary variable that indicated whether a girl child was responsible for gathering water for the household, and by the time it took to get to a water source, measured in five-minute increments. While girls are responsible for domestic tasks other than water collection, this task has been identified as one that disproportionately limits girls' school attendance (Nauges and Strand 2017; Demie, Bekele, and Seyoum 2016). I measured first-generation learner status by whether either parent had ever been to school (Iyer et al. 2020); given the prevalence of parental separation in displacement settings, I expanded this to include any adult living in the household. A binary variable captured whether or not respondents planned to settle in Ethiopia over the long term. Perceived community safety was measured by household responses to the question, "How safe do you feel walking during the day?" Responses were coded as "safe" if the respondent indicated that they felt safe or very safe on a five-point scale, and as "not safe" if they indicated that they felt neutral, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe.

In all versions of the model, I included location fixed effects. This reflected refugee camps in the refugee-specific models and the matched camp-host community pair for regressions, including the full sample. Including fixed effects allowed me to control for common community factors, including community location, safety, and access to public services, that may be constant across individuals within a location.

## FINDINGS

### COMPARING GIRLS FROM REFUGEE CAMPS AND HOST COMMUNITIES

#### DIFFERENCES IN SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

Refugee girls are substantially less likely to enroll in secondary school than host community girls. Table 2 reflects ordinary least squares regression results of primary and secondary enrollment for both refugee and host communities. Refugee girls in the sample were about 23 percentage points less likely to be enrolled in school than nonrefugee girls (column 3). This confirms the assertion that refugee girls, particularly those in camp settings, are more disadvantaged in their access to secondary school than other groups. These gaps do not exist at the primary level, which suggests that additional barriers may emerge as refugee girls transition to secondary school. This is consistent with Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2020) data at the regional level.

Having at least one parent who attended school was a positive predictor of enrollment across both samples. The number of school-age children living in the household was also positively correlated with the likelihood of being enrolled in secondary school. This could be because household chores are shared in households with more children, or it could be a sibling effect, whereby having one child in school makes it more likely that others will stay in school.

*Table 2: Gender and Refugee-Host Education Gaps Emerge at the Secondary Level and Disadvantage Refugee Girls Most*

|  | (1)           | (2)                    | (3)             | (4)                      |
|--|---------------|------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
|  | Primary (all) | Primary (refugee only) | Secondary (all) | Secondary (refugee only) |
| Refugee                                    | 0.05          | ..                     | -.14***         | ..                       |
|  | -0.04         | ..                     | -0.04           | ..                       |
| Female                                     | -0.02         | -.05**                 | .15**           | -.07*                    |
|  | -0.06         | -0.02                  | -0.06           | -0.04                    |
| Refugee female                             | -0.03         | ..                     | -.23***         | ..                       |
|  | -0.06         | ..                     | -0.07           | ..                       |
| In school prior to displacement            | ..            | .12***                 | ..              | 0.04                     |
|  | ..            | -0.04                  | ..              | -0.06                    |
| Adult ever in school                       | .08***        | .08***                 | 0.09            | .11**                    |
|  | -0.02         | -0.03                  | -0.04           | -0.06                    |
| Adult was in school in Ethiopia            | -.08*         | -.09*                  | -0.05           | -0.07                    |
|  | -0.05         | -0.05                  | -0.08           | -0.09                    |
| Number of school-age children in household | 0             | 0                      | .04***          | .04***                   |
|  | 0             | 0                      | -0.01           | -0.01                    |
| Includes linked location fixed effects     |               |                        |                 |                          |
| R2   | 0.05          | 0.05                   | 0.14            | 0.12                     |
| N  | 6,279         | 4,628                  | 2,591           | 1,818                    |

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

### PERCEPTIONS ABOUT EDUCATION

As I stated above, perceptions about the quality and value of education may factor into household calculations of the opportunity costs of going to school. If parents believe that their children are attending quality schools that will help them develop useful skills, they may be more likely to continue to send them to school. To assess whether divergent perceptions of school quality may have a differential impact on decisions about school participation, I examined refugee parents' and host community parents' perceptions of the quality and value of schooling (see Table 3).

The relatively high level of satisfaction with the schools among both refugee and host community parents suggests that concerns about the quality of schooling are unlikely to be the primary drivers of differences in participation. For example, respondents in the Tigray region reported the lowest level of satisfaction, yet education outcomes in Tigray are higher than in other regions (Ethiopia Ministry of Education 2020). This lower level of satisfaction with the schools may be due to the fact that the refugee camps and surrounding host communities in the Tigray region are in the most remote areas, where the services available, including schools, are of poor quality. It also could be because the parents in this region have higher expectations for the quality of service than the schools provide. On average, refugee and host community parents in Tigray have completed slightly more years of education than those in Somali or Benishangul-Gumuz, thus they may have higher expectations for the quality of schooling.

Attitudes about the perceived value of girls' education did not appear to be correlated with gaps in school participation between refugee and host communities. Parents from both communities were asked how important they feel girls' education is on a scale of 1-5, and a substantial majority (99%) reported that it is important or very important (see Table 3). While there is a risk that this positive response was shaped in part by social desirability bias, it seems unlikely that this alone would produce a near 100 percent favorable response rate, nor would such bias vary between refugees and hosts. If parents are generally satisfied with the quality of the schools and believe that education is important, it's likely that other factors are driving the refugee parents' decisions about educating girls.

*Table 3: Refugee and Host Community Parents Are Generally Satisfied with the Quality of Schooling and Think Girls' Education is Important*

|                          | (1)  |       |            | (2)   |       |            | (3)                   |       |            | (4)                           |       |            |
|--------------------------|--|-------|------------|---|-------|------------|-----------------------|-------|------------|-------------------------------|-------|------------|
|                          | Quality education<br>(% good or very good) |       |            | Quality of teacher<br>(% good or very good) |       |            | Satisfied with school |       |            | Girls' education is important |       |            |
|                          | Refugee                                    | Host  | Difference | Refugee                                     | Host  | Difference | Refugee               | Host  | Difference | Refugee                       | Host  | Difference |
| <b>Afar</b>              | 91   | 100   | -9         | 91  | 100   | -9         | ..                    | 77    | ..         | 100                           | 100   | 0          |
| <b>Benishangul-Gumuz</b> | 92   | 85    | +7         | 93  | 89    | +4         | 85                    | 80    | -5         | 99                            | 100   |            |
| <b>Gambella</b>          | 89   | 91    | -2         | 88  | 90    | -2         | 84                    | .     | ..         | 98                            | 100   | -2         |
| <b>Somali</b>            | 87   | 81    | +6         | 93  | 89    | +4         | 96                    | 90    | +6         | 100                           | 96    | +4         |
| <b>Tigray</b>            | 74   | 81    | -7         | 74  | 86    | -12        | 72                    | 86    | -14        | 100                           | 100   | 0          |
| <b>N</b>                 | 2,096                                      | 1,739 |            | 2,096                                       | 1,739 |            | 19,201                | 7,550 |            | 9,038                         | 8,049 |            |

*Note:* Data on the perceptions of the quality of education, quality of the teacher, and the importance of girls' education come from the BSRP survey (UNICEF 2018). Data on the satisfaction with schools comes from the SPS survey (World Bank 2017).

## PERCEPTIONS OF REFUGEE-HOST COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS AND SHARING EDUCATION SERVICES

Both surveys asked questions about household perceptions of the relationships between refugee and host communities. Host community attitudes toward refugees were worst in Benishangul-Gumuz (columns 1 and 2), where refugees are less likely than those in other regions to have the same ethnic background or language as their hosts, which may contribute to negative feelings. Conversely, host respondents in Somali have more positive perceptions of the refugees in their region, who are likely to share the hosts' ethnic identity and language.

From the perspective of refugees, relationships with the host communities were worst in Gambella and best in Somali (column 4). Gambella had the largest gap in secondary school participation between refugee and host communities, a difference of about 49 percentage points. It also had the largest host community gender gap in secondary school participation, with a 20-percentage-point difference between host community boys and girls (Ethiopia Ministry of Education 2020). As noted above, Gambella also has more frequent instances of violence in the areas surrounding the refugee camps, which may contribute to refugees' negative perceptions of their relationships with their host communities and could also limit school participation for both refugee girls and host community girls. Refugees in Gambella share an ethnic background with the minority Nuer group. Because the presence of these refugees threatens the status quo of the social and political demographics in the region as related to ethnicity (e.g., Rüeegger 2019), it could fuel tensions between refugees and non-Nuer host community members, and between Ethiopian Nuer and other groups. While these findings related to ethnicity are speculative, they do suggest that the specific social, cultural, and political dynamics between refugees and their host communities are important to consider when designing education policies and interventions, particularly when targeting at-risk populations, including adolescent girls. This is a critical area for further research.

*Table 4: Refugee and Host Community Relationships Vary across Locations and Ethnic Groups*

| Refugee and host community relationships (percentage who agree) |                              |  |   |   |
|---|------------------------------|--|---|---|
|   | (1)                          | (2)  | (3)   | (4)   |
|   | Hosts want refugees to leave | Refugees should be able to share education services with hosts | Refugees have made it more difficult to access health care or education | Refugees perceive good relationships with hosts |
| <b>Afar</b>   | 11                           | 62   | 27  | 87  |
| <b>Benishangul-Gumuz</b>  | 65                           | 40   | 39  | 80  |
| <b>Gambella</b>   | ..                           | 74   | ..  | 61  |
| <b>Somali</b>   | 17                           | 74   | 10  | 93  |
| <b>Tigray</b>   | 19                           | 79   | 43  | 87  |

#### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Refugee women reported slightly higher rates of GBV than host community women in all regions except Benishangul-Gumuz and Somali, where the difference in exposure to GBV between the two groups was not statistically significant (see Table 4). While there were small differences in the prevalence of GBV (2-9 percentage points) in Afar, Gambella, and Tigray, the scale of the difference does not seem large enough to suggest that variation in exposure to GBV is a primary factor shaping differences between refugee girls' and host community girls' secondary school participation across regions. The high prevalence of GBV among both groups instead suggests that this is a critical challenge for women and girls in general.

*Table 5: Women and Girls in Both Refugee and Host Communities Experience High Rates of Gender-Based Violence*

|                          | Experienced any GBV (%) |       |            | Experienced physical GBV (%) |       |            |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------|------------|------------------------------|-------|------------|
|                          | (1)                     | (2)   | (3)        | (4)                          | (5)   | (6)        |
|                          | Refugee                 | Host  | Difference | Refugee                      | Host  | Difference |
| <b>Afar</b>              | 15*                     | 13*   | +2*        | 6*                           | 1*    | +5*        |
| <b>Benishangul-Gumuz</b> | 23                      | 24    |            | 15                           | 16    |            |
| <b>Gambella</b>          | 36*                     | 28*   | +8*        | 26*                          | 19*   | +7*        |
| <b>Somali</b>            | 57                      | 54    | 3          | 32*                          | 29*   | +3*        |
| <b>Tigray</b>            | 51*                     | 45*   | +6*        | 45*                          | 36*   | +9*        |
| <b>N</b>                 | 7,492                   | 7,259 |            | 7,645                        | 7,463 |            |

*Note:* \* indicates a statistically significant difference in reported GBV between refugee and host community women. "Any GBV" reflects any form of gender-based violence, including verbal and emotional abuse. Physical abuse reflects physical violence.

### **GENDER GAPS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL PARTICIPATION AMONG REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS**

I next examined gender gaps in secondary school participation between refugee boys and girls. Table 6 shows estimations restricted to refugees to examine gender gaps between refugee boys and girls in secondary school participation. Girls in households in which girl children were responsible for gathering water were about ten percentage points less likely than other girls to be enrolled in school. This could be an indicator of relative poverty and domestic responsibilities, both of which can negatively affect girls' participation in secondary school. The time it takes to get to a water source was also negatively related to girls' school participation. With each additional five minutes it takes to reach a water source, girls were about two percentage points less likely to be enrolled in secondary school (see Table 6, column 1). Without data on the time it takes to travel to a secondary school, I was unable to examine whether distance to water or general distance to services, including schools, drives this relationship. Nevertheless, this finding indicates that the time it takes to travel to a necessary resource affects the likelihood that girls will enroll in secondary school.

Feeling safe walking during the day was positively correlated with girls' school enrollment; however, it was not significant for boys. Girls in households that reported feeling safe walking in the community were six to ten percentage points more likely to be enrolled in secondary school than those in households that reported feeling unsafe. This indicates that safety could be a more prevalent concern for girls than for boys, even in displacement settings. This is consistent with findings from the literature, which indicate that the perceived safety of the school environment disproportionately affects girls' school participation (Burdette and Khan 2016).

Living with at least one adult who had attended school was positively correlated with school participation. Whether the parent had attended school in Ethiopia or elsewhere and whether the household planned to stay in Ethiopia for the long-term were not significant predictors of enrollment. However, questions about intended length of stay were asked of the main survey respondent and may not represent the plans or aspirations of the secondary school-age individuals in their household.

*Table 6: Refugee Girls Face More Barriers to Secondary School Access Than Refugee Boys*

|   | (1)       | (2)                       |
|---|-----------|---------------------------|
|   | Secondary | Secondary<br>(girls only) |
| <b>Female</b>                           | -0.08     | ..                        |
|   | -0.06     | ..                        |
| <b>Girl responsible for water</b>       | -.10**    | -.09*                     |
|   | -0.04     | -0.05                     |
| <b>Time to water</b>                    | -.02*     | -.02*                     |
|   | -0.01     | -0.01                     |
| <b>Safe walking (male)</b>              | 0.07      | ..                        |
|   | -0.06     | ..                        |
| <b>Safe walking (female)</b>            | .10***    | .06**                     |
|   | -0.03     | -0.03                     |
| <b>Adult ever in school</b>             | .11**     | .21**                     |
|   | -0.06     | -0.09                     |
| <b>Adult ever in school in Ethiopia</b> | -0.04     | -0.17                     |
|   | -0.09     | -0.1                      |
| <b>No. of school age in household</b>   | .05***    | 0.04                      |
|   | -0.01     | -0.02                     |
| <b>Plan to stay in Ethiopia</b>         | 0.04      | 0.04                      |
|   | -0.04     | -0.04                     |
| <b>Includes camp fixed effects</b>      |           |                           |
| <b>R2</b>                               | 0.15      | 0.2                       |
| <b>N</b>                                | 1,769     | 790                       |

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## LIMITATIONS

I was not able to examine school-level factors in this analysis beyond parental perceptions of school quality. Future studies could examine the role of these factors in shaping gender gaps in school participation more broadly, including the number of female teachers, classroom practices, the curriculum, and the school social environment.

Data on GBV were not directly linked to the data on secondary school participation, as the two data points came from different surveys. This limited my ability to examine the direct relationship between GBV and school enrollment. Data on the distance from home to secondary schools and transportation were also not available, which limited my ability to assess distance and cost as potential barriers to participation at the secondary level. Due to community violence in Gambella at the time the SPS survey was being administered, I was missing SPS household data for the host communities. This limited my ability to examine whether the drivers of secondary school participation vary among girls in refugee camps, and between refugee and host community girls in the corresponding host communities in this region. For comparisons in Gambella, I relied on the BSRP survey and regional data from the ministry of education.

I conducted this analysis prior to COVID-19 and the recent escalation of violence in Tigray. Evidence from past health crises suggests that the figures I report are likely to have worsened during the pandemic, a time in which financial and other barriers, including sexual violence, early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy, could also have increased (e.g., Bandiera et al. 2019). Growing violence in Tigray is likely to have a negative effect on education for both refugees and host communities.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from this analysis confirm that refugee girls are more disadvantaged in gaining access to secondary school than refugee boys and host community girls, even when comparing refugee students in the camps to their immediately surrounding host communities. Gaps in enrollment for refugee girls emerge as they get older; they do not appear to the same extent in the surrounding host communities, even though refugee girls and host community girls attend the same secondary schools.

In the descriptive analysis, I found little evidence to suggest that differences in secondary school enrollment between refugee girls and host community girls were driven by parental attitudes about the value of girls' education, or by perceptions of the quality of schooling available. Parents across the sample almost unanimously reported that girls' education is important. While this finding could be driven in part by social desirability bias in the survey responses, it suggests that, at the very least, no strong outward attitudes are preventing girls from participating in school.

I also examined whether there were systematic differences between the education levels of refugee parents and host parents that could differentially shape their children's educational trajectories. On average, refugee parents and host community parents completed similar levels of education, and children across the two groups were comparably likely to be first-generation learners. First-generation learner status is a significant predictor of enrollment across the sample, but it does not appear to differentially affect refugee students or host community girls. Differences in parents' familiarity with the Ethiopian education system, as measured by whether parents attended school in Ethiopia, is also not associated with differences in participation within the sample. This finding is somewhat surprising; based on findings from Piper et al.'s (2020) work in Kenya, we might expect to see differences in school participation among refugees based on parental familiarity with the local education system. However, Piper and his coauthors were focused on learning outcomes, so it is possible that parental familiarity with the local education system may not be a predictor of participation but may still be important in shaping learning outcomes once children are in school. In either case, findings from this study suggest that, while parental education (measured by first-generation learner status) is correlated with schooling overall, it does not appear to affect girls and boys differentially, nor does it result in differences in parents' perceived value of education for boys and girls.

Exposure to GBV is common among both refugee and host community women, and it may have a negative impact on adolescent girls' school participation. Though the prevalence of GBV is slightly higher among refugee women than host community women in most regions, the differences are relatively small. It is thus unlikely that differential exposure to GBV alone is a primary factor in the education gaps between refugee girls and host community girls. It is possible, however, that exposure to GBV compounds other barriers that disproportionately affect refugee girls, including severe poverty, which may increase their domestic responsibilities or the need to engage in risky survival strategies, including transactional sex. More work is needed to disentangle whether refugee girls face a greater risk of frequent or severe exposure to GBV, and the extent to which GBV compounds other factors that disproportionately limit refugee girls' participation in school.

I also explored variations in secondary school enrollment between refugee boys and girls. I found that, while participation among refugees is low overall, girls are more disadvantaged than boys. While parents report that girls' education is important, household chores still fall disproportionately to girls and women, which could increase the opportunity costs of sending girls to secondary school.

Refugee households have limited access to work opportunities and other income-generating activities, which can increase household poverty and the need for children to take on domestic responsibilities. For example, in the Aysaita refugee camp in the Somali region—which has the largest gaps among all camps in the sample between refugee boys' and girls' secondary school participation, and between that of refugee girls and host community girls—girls report that the need to care for the home and for younger siblings is the top reason they are not enrolled in school. Adolescent girls in Aysaita are responsible for gathering water in 17 percent of refugee households, whereas no households in the immediately surrounding host community identify this as the primary responsibility of a girl child. Refugees in Aysaita are also more likely to report wanting to stay in Ethiopia, where their work opportunities are uncertain at best. When the future payoff of education is uncertain and current needs are acute, as they appear to be Aysaita, families face difficult choices that may be more likely to disadvantage the adolescent girls in the household (e.g., de Janvry et al. 2006; Read-Hamilton and Marsh 2016). Further research could explore the role future work opportunities for refugees play in shaping families' calculations of the current opportunity costs of sending girls to school versus the potential future payoff.

Community safety and the quality of relationships between refugees and their host communities are also correlated with secondary school enrollment. The perceived safety of walking during the day is associated with refugee girls' school participation but is not a significant predictor of refugee boys' participation. This is consistent with findings from earlier studies, which suggest that concerns about safety while traveling to and from school can be more severe for girls than for boys in humanitarian settings (Kirk 2011; Shemyakina 2011; Burde and Linden 2013); these concerns can increase as girls get older (Muralidharan and Prakash 2017). Gaps in secondary school participation between refugee girls and host community girls are the largest in Gambella, where refugees are also less likely than in other regions to report good relationships with the surrounding host community. Relatedly, violence around refugee camps is more common in Gambella than in other regions, which could heighten the risks associated with traveling to and from schools in the host communities. As discussed previously, this could be related to differences in ethnic or kinship ties across communities.

By examining differences in school participation at the camp-host level, as opposed to examining regional aggregate statistics, I was able to investigate how barriers vary across groups and explore how compounded disadvantages can create substantial barriers to education for refugee girls. The magnitude and drivers of these gaps vary by location, which suggests that policies and interventions to improve education for

refugee girls should reflect the specific barriers faced in each region. For example, in places where the distance to school and perceptions of community safety are the primary barriers, transportation interventions or other physical safety measures would perhaps be beneficial. In places where domestic chores and poverty are primary factors, targeted social assistance could be beneficial. In some cases, it could make sense to implement interventions that improve secondary education for all girls, including by hiring more female teachers and broadly combatting GBV. Political economy factors, including the social, cultural, and political dynamics between the refugee and host community groups in particular locations, are also important to consider in designing safe and effective policies to improve refugee girls' access to education. Finally, to ensure that efforts to improve girls' education address the full scope of the problem, it is critical to assess the ways multiple barriers can compound each other.

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# DATA DISAGGREGATION FOR INCLUSIVE QUALITY EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES: THE COVID-19 EXPERIENCE IN GHANA

ABDUL BADI SAYIBU

## ABSTRACT

*Organizations that are implementing interventions in emergencies undoubtedly face some major challenges in analyzing the necessary data. This is primarily due to their lack of direct access to beneficiaries and the rapidly evolving nature of emergencies. In this paper, I outline how the Plan International project called Making Ghanaian Girls Great!—generally known as MGCubed—used phone-based surveys to assess the uptake of a Ghana Learning TV program that the project implemented in partnership with the government. Due to the need for real-time information to guide the implementation of this intervention in an emergency context, there was little time to undertake a major statistical analysis of survey data. In this paper, I discuss how the MGCubed project adopted a simple data disaggregation method that used a logic tree technique to gain valuable insights from a phone-survey data. The method enabled the project partners to explore the insights the dataset provided in real time without conducting a more complex and time-consuming analysis.*

## INTRODUCTION

One major feature of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was the closure of all education institutions in most countries of the world. School closures were noted in a United Nations policy brief issued in August 2020, which stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had caused the largest disruption of education systems in modern history, affecting an estimated 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries on all continents. The brief also revealed that the COVID-19 crisis was exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for

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QUALITY EDUCATION IN GHANA

many of the world's most vulnerable children to continue their learning, including those living in poor or rural areas, girls, and individuals with disabilities. This created a need for education program implementers to adapt to the principles of education in emergencies (EiE), including providing remote learning methods.

To address these challenges and the consequences thereof, several governments introduced remote learning methods to facilitate home learning while the schools were closed. Almost every country introduced some form of remote learning during the pandemic (UNESCO 2020). In Ghana, in April 2020, the ministry of education (MoE) and Ghana Education Service (GES), in collaboration with Plan International Ghana, introduced a TV teaching and learning program for all schoolchildren ages 6-15. The MoE (2020, 4) estimated that 9.2 million children at the basic level were affected by the school closures, and it planned to reach all these children, including the most vulnerable, through televised lessons. Making Ghanaian Girls Great!—generally known as MGCubed—was part of the MoE's national distance learning education program that was funded by UK Aid and implemented by Plan International Ghana as part of the Girls' Education Challenge. It supported the MoE and the GES in their broadcast of televised lessons through the Ghana Learning TV (GLTV) channel. MGCubed worked with GES to produce lessons in English, mathematics, science, and social studies that were broadcast to millions of children nationwide. The aim of the project was to ensure that the beneficiaries could access teaching and learn at home.

In Ghana, the rate of transition to higher education levels disproportionately favors boys. Although there is near gender parity in primary and junior high school enrollment, the national gender ratio for completing senior high school is two girls to every three boys (Camfed Ghana 2012, 8). Girls have been identified as being disadvantaged in transitioning to higher education levels due to several factors, including over-age enrollment, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence. These factors are known to be exacerbated by school closures in times of crisis, which increases the risk to girls' continued education. World Vision (2020) estimates that teenage pregnancy during the COVID-19 lockdown may keep one million girls in Africa out of school. Aware of the increased risk of dropout among its female beneficiaries due to the pandemic, MGCubed considered the GLTV broadcasts to be key to ensuring that learning continued, especially among girls.

Data on the accessibility of the GLTV lessons was, therefore, crucial to ensuring inclusiveness and promoting access and participation among girls, in particular girls from vulnerable sub-groups. The problem of the availability of data was addressed with the launch of a phone-based survey to capture the rate of girls' participation in these GLTV lessons and whether they were making progress in their learning while at home. This discussion is important to EiE practices as a whole, given that the COVID-19 pandemic presented the world with a relatively unfamiliar kind of emergency. In this article, I present and discuss how a logic tree technique was used to gain insight into the data from these surveys to help improve the EiE program. The logic tree technique was critical in shortening the time needed to conduct data analysis to meet the real-time information needs of the EiE program in such a fast-evolving situation. With this simple but rapid data disaggregation method, the frequency of data analysis can be increased significantly in an otherwise challenging EiE context.

Before discussing the process of data analysis, I will take a short excursion into the broad meaning of the key concepts, which include inclusive education, data disaggregation, and the logic tree approach. I also provide an overview of MGCubed.

## **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Inclusive education is generally viewed as a system that integrates learners with and without special educational needs into the same learning environment. In most cases, the emphasis is on the full participation of students with disabilities and on respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. However, inclusive education can focus on a wider range of student characteristics and target those with various kinds of ability, language, culture, gender, age, and other human differences (OCAD University 2015). Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2010, 113) wrote, "Student performance and behaviour in educational tasks can be profoundly affected by the way we feel we are seen and judged by others. When we expect to be viewed as inferior, our abilities seem to diminish." Therefore, any characteristic that can make a learner feel inferior is a potential issue or area to consider for inclusive education. Therefore, all human characteristics, such as the vulnerable sub-groups identified by MGCubed, can be considered for inclusive education initiatives as long as the children within these sub-groups have the potential to feel inferior to other learners. Matters of inclusiveness become even more critical in EiE contexts, where these factors can be worse for certain groups of vulnerable people.

## DATA DISAGGREGATION

As noted by the US National Forum on Education Statistics (2016), disaggregation of student data refers to breaking down data on a student population into smaller groupings, often based on characteristics such as sex, race/ethnicity, or family income. The main aim of the data disaggregation in the context described here is to ensure that no one is left behind in the implementation of interventions due to marginalizing factors such as ethnicity, disability, or gender.

Data disaggregation in an EiE context can be used effectively when there is a clear mapping of the most vulnerable groups in terms of the emergency and the intervention. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, UNICEF identified the most vulnerable children in terms of home learning support as those with disabilities, already struggling learners, children from ethnic minorities, children on the move (migrants, refugees, and internally displaced children), children in the most hard-to-reach rural and poor communities, and girls tasked with caring for ill family members (UNICEF 2020, 1). The risks associated with the closure of schools are disproportionate among these vulnerable groups, and governments must ensure that they all are considered during any intervention (United Nations 2020). Any study relating to home learning during the pandemic that identifies these groups will provide more insights into equal access to and participation in educational activities. Data disaggregation strategies allow these vulnerable groups to be further divided into sub-groups. For instance, MGCubed’s vulnerable sub-groups include young mothers, pregnant girls, girls with disabilities, and girls with minority first languages, among others.

## LOGIC TREE

A logic tree is a graphic breakdown of a question that dissects its different components vertically and progresses into details as it reads to the right (Chevallier 2016). Logic trees are important in problem-solving, as they can help to identify the root causes of a problem and identify potential solutions. Logic trees also provide a reference point to see how each issue fits into a bigger problem.

There are two types of logic trees, diagnostic and solution (Chevallier 2010). Diagnostic trees break down a “why” key question and identify all the possible root causes of the problem. Solution trees break down a “how” key question and identify all possible ways to fix the problem (Culmsee and Awati 2013). A diagnostic problem tree allows for an efficient resolution of a problem by first

clearly outlining what the problem is and then showing the structure of the problem. The solution tree uses the same methodology to outline possible solutions to the identified problem.

The logic tree has been used historically during the design of programs and projects to explain the problems they are meant to solve. The project discussed here adopted the logic tree idea during the pandemic to allow for easy diagnoses of any intersectional barriers to education during the school closures. Another reason for adopting a logic tree approach is that it can be updated easily on a daily basis, which enables practitioners to follow a fast-evolving situation in real time. Note that, even though the logic tree discussed here was set up in detail only for girls in this specific situation, it can be expanded to include all beneficiaries to ensure a more comprehensive data analysis.

I now describe how MGCubed adopted a diagnostic logic tree model to fast-track the data analysis process in order to address the quickly evolving situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## THE MGCUBED APPROACH

MGCubed was designed to support vulnerable boys and girls in selected rural Ghanaian communities to improve their learning outcomes in school and to support their transition to higher education levels. The project uses satellite technology to broadcast live literacy and numeracy lessons to 72 selected rural schools across two regions of Ghana. UK Aid funds MGCubed through the Girls' Education Challenge-Transition fund, currently implemented by Plan International Ghana.<sup>1</sup>

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MoE in Ghana approached the project management with a proposal to pivot the MGCubed intervention into a TV-based one in order to reach a wider audience than the original project had planned. This proposal was made against a backdrop of school closures in March 2020, due to the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Ghana. The proposal and its subsequent acceptance culminated in the creation of GLTV, which provided continuous education to millions of Ghanaian children at the primary and secondary level who were out of school due to the pandemic. When the pandemic started, the

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<sup>1</sup> The Girls' Education Challenge for Transition is a flagship program of the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office.

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project had 16,932 (F=9,109, M=7,823) active beneficiaries, all children attending junior high school in the Oti and Greater Accra regions of Ghana.

### CONSTRUCTING THE LOGIC TREE

Constructing a logic tree of survey data involves two steps. The first step in designing an insightful logic tree is to understand the population's demographics, which in most cases become the building blocks of the logic tree analysis.

The second step is to break down the data into branches based on marginalization characteristics, starting with larger sub-groups and then creating smaller sub-groups; for instance, disaggregating by gender first and then disaggregating each gender sub-group by disability, and so on. In so doing, the logic tree enables its users to understand how each sub-group is affected. A branch or sub-group is not disaggregated further when the sub-group records 100 percent affected or close to 0 percent affected by the subject under focus at any level, as no further information can be gained from a further disaggregation. For instance, when boys score 100 percent or 0 percent in GLTV participation, there is no need to do further disaggregation by, say, disability.

### ANALYSIS OF DATA THROUGH THE LOGIC TREE APPROACH

MGCubed conducted a phone-based survey to capture girls' rate of participation in the GLTV lessons and to understand whether they were making progress in their learning while at home. In this section, I discuss the survey data analyzed through the data disaggregation approach proposed in this field note. The total number of children who participated in the survey was 319, 210 females and 109 males. The phone-based survey collected data on participants' characteristics, including gender, young mother status, disability status, and ethnicity.<sup>2</sup> It was conducted from May to September 2020, during the peak of the COVID-19-related restrictions in Ghana.

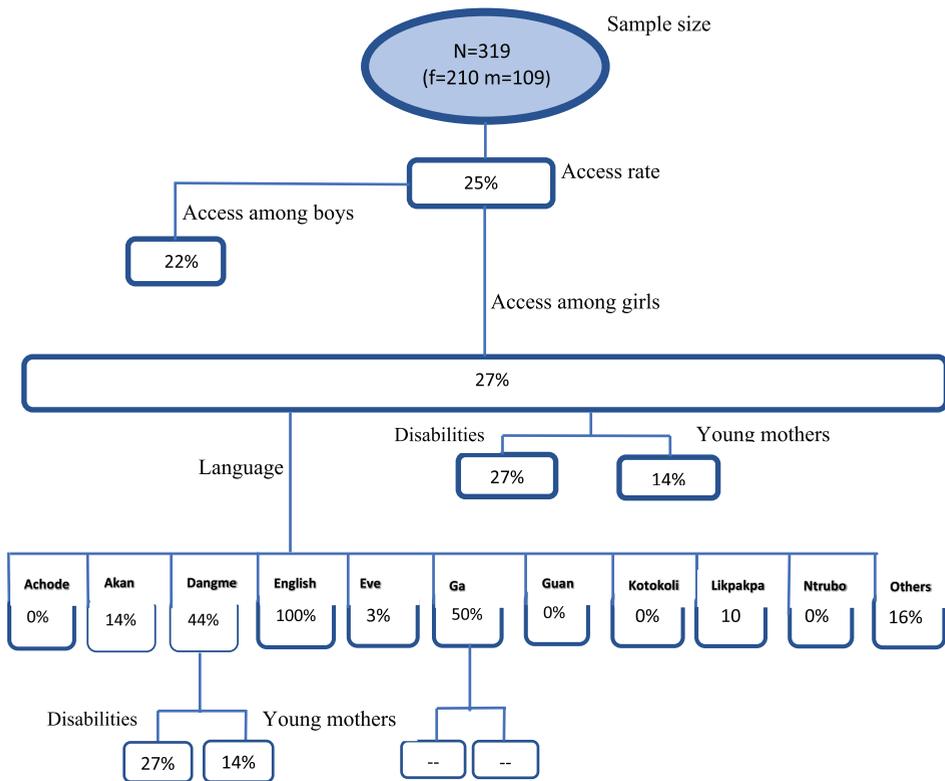
The rate of access to and participation in the GLTV lessons was 25 percent among all children in the survey. At 27 percent, the rate of access and participation was slightly higher among girls than among boys, at 22 percent. As shown in Figure 1, the logic tree further disaggregated the data for girls by sub-groups, as

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<sup>2</sup> Young mothers are girls under 18 years old who have children of their own and are project beneficiaries.

identified by MGCubed. Even though 27 percent of girls reported participating in the GLTV lessons, only 14 percent of the girls who identified themselves as young mothers were able to access and participate in the TV lessons. However, girls identified with physical disabilities had a similar participation rate as that recorded among all girls, 27 percent. A vast disparity was detected in accordance with participants' ethnicity or language (mother tongue). As shown in Figure 1, the 27 percent participation in the GLTV lessons among girls primarily includes those who speak one of the three out of eleven languages identified in the survey. Furthermore, no girls who spoke one of four particular languages participated in the TV lessons (0% participation).

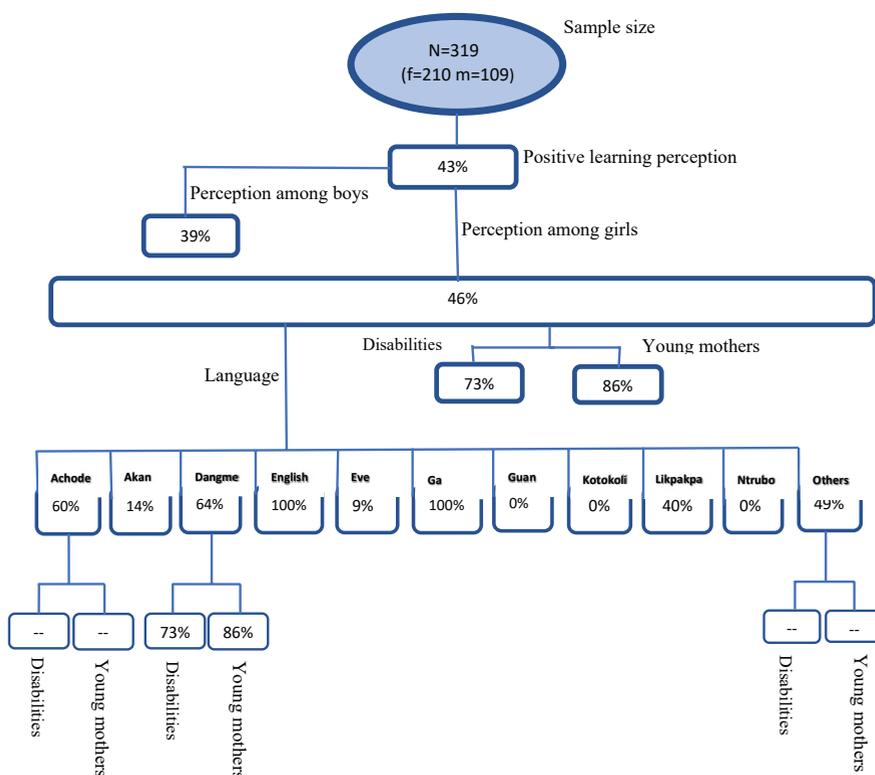
Figure 1: Rate of Participation in TV Lessons among Vulnerable Children



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Participants’ positive perceptions of learning were generally higher than the rate of participation in the GLTV lessons. On average, approximately 48 percent of the participants said they felt they were making progress in learning while the schools remained closed, which took into account all sources of learning support, including the GLTV lessons. Like the indicator on access to GLTV lessons, positive perceptions of learning progress were 47 percent among girls, lower than the 50 percent recorded among boys. The rates for girls with disabilities and young mothers were as high as 73 percent and 86 percent, respectively. The disparities among different language speakers are also visible under this indicator. As shown in Figure 2, 46 percent of girls’ positive perceptions of learning came from girls in six of the eleven identified language groups. Finally, girls from three language groups did not report making any progress in learning during the school closures; 0 percent of these girls said they felt they were making any progress.

Figure 2: Perceptions of Learning among Vulnerable Children



These kinds of analyses were instrumental in improving the uptake and inclusivity of the GLTV program. Due to the analyses presented above and the subsequent adaptations based on them, girls’ participation in GLTV grew from 32 percent in May 2020 to 72 percent in January 2021. This indicates the effectiveness of the data analysis procedure discussed above, and the subsequent adaptations made based on the analysis, in increasing the participation rate and inclusiveness of the GLTV lessons.

### VULNERABILITY INTERSECTIONALITY

Beyond its simplicity, a major benefit of the logic tree approach is the potential to detect intersecting vulnerability factors among the target beneficiaries. Although the project mainly targets vulnerable girls, a sample of boys is included in all activities to allow for a proper gender equality and social inclusion analysis. In this section, I present the intersections across boys, girls, and other vulnerabilities and how they affected access to and participation in the televised lessons.

A comparison of access to TV lessons among children with disabilities shows that 56 percent of boys had access to TV lessons, but just 27 percent of girls. This means that boys with disabilities were twice as likely to have access to TV lessons than girls with disabilities, even though general access among girls was almost twice the general access among boys. These comparisons are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1. Despite this disparity in access to TV lessons, however, 73 percent of girls with disabilities said they were positive about their learning progress, which is higher than the 67 percent among boys with disabilities.

*Table 1: Access to TV Lessons and Positive Perceptions of Learning among Boys with Disabilities*

|                                  | Yes | No  |
|----------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Access to TV lessons             | 56  | 44% |
| Positive perceptions of learning | 67  | 33% |

The second intersectionality to be considered is ethnicity, defined as the language beneficiaries predominantly speak at home. For this survey, boys were sampled from eight language groups, as shown in Table 2. Male and female speakers of two languages, Achode and Guan, still recorded 0 percent access to TV lessons. Also, male speakers of three language groups, Akan, Dangme, and Likpakpa, recorded better percentages in access and participation than the female speakers.

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Finally, speakers in three language groups, Eve, English, and other languages, recorded higher access and participation among girls than boys. Overall, of the eight language groups for which respondents were sampled, boys and girls had equal access for two groups, boys had more access than girls for three groups, and girls had more access than boys for three groups. The results can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 2.

In terms of positive perceptions of learning, note that Guan speakers still reported that 0 percent of boys think they are improving, a percentage that is similar among girls. The language groups in which boys performed better than girls include Akan, Likpakpa, Dangme, and other languages. Eve and Achode are the language groups where girls' percentages are higher than boys'. Overall, the rate of positive perceptions of learning is better for boys than for girls in four language groups, equal to the rate for girls in two language groups, and lower than the rate for girls in two language groups. The results can be seen in Figure 2 and Table 2.

*Table 2: Access to TV Lessons and Positive Perceptions of Learning among Boys, by Ethnicity*

|                                  | Achode | Akan | Dangme | English | Eve | Guan | Likpakpa | Other |
|----------------------------------|--------|------|--------|---------|-----|------|----------|-------|
| Access to TV lessons             | 0%     | 25%  | 5%     | 0%      | 0%  | 0%   | 1%       | 7%    |
| Positive perceptions of learning | 50%    | 25%  | 8%     | 100%    | 5%  | 0%   | 75%      | 53%   |

### CRITICAL REFLECTION

In this paper, I have discussed a functional approach to the data analysis challenges of the “new” EiE context created by the COVID-19 pandemic. I used the MGCubed-supported GLTV lessons as a case study. This kind of analysis can be a major source of information for implementers and decisionmakers as they assess the effectiveness of their interventions and adjust them accordingly during an emergency.

In the paper, I have shown how a simple data disaggregation method can provide valuable insights into the reach, inclusiveness, and participation of the most vulnerable sub-groups in education interventions implemented during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This method can enable a weekly analysis, which is essential to informing implementers how to adapt programming strategies during emergencies when it is hard to obtain data.

For MGCubed specifically, this kind of analysis has been helpful in reaching the most vulnerable sub-groups of girls. For instance, the data showing that general participation in the GLTV lessons was lower than the positive perceptions of learning helped the project adapt its programming and monitoring approach. It did so by launching surveys to help identify suitable ways to support learning for specific vulnerable female sub-groups, such as phone-based home learning support, the distribution of grade-specific learning packs, providing more guidance on home learning, and supporting caregivers. The analysis also has helped to amplify the voices of marginalized girls by identifying the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach sub-groups.

The MGCubed case study shows that proper data disaggregation techniques can be a suitable and efficient alternative to time-consuming statistical analysis during an emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic. It also showcases how this method informed transformative programming for a girls' education project. The logic tree can be applied to assist in the interpretation of complex situations at the regional, national, and global levels.

## LIMITATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic created a unique emergency that is different from the emergencies the world is used to, including conflicts and natural disasters, such as earthquakes. Therefore, EiE can learn a lot about this unique emergency, its characteristics, and how the wider EiE sector can prepare for similar emergencies in the future. This section discusses the limitations and challenges of the data analysis method discussed here.

Let's first look broadly at the challenges and limitations the program faced in conducting phone-based surveys. Respondents' different socioeconomic status meant that only those with access to mobile phone infrastructure could participate. There also was an increased risk of safeguarding issues, especially among women and girls. An article in the *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* (Boserup, McKenney, and Elkbuli 2020) estimated a 25 percent to 33 percent increase in global domestic violence in 2020, mostly related to the pandemic. Engaging people, especially girls, in lengthy phone conversations could further increase these risks. Due to some of these limitations, phone-based data collection during emergencies should be seen as a complementary method to traditional face-to-face methods.

It's important to highlight the fact that the logic tree approach presented in this article generates quick insights to support program adaptation in a fast-changing EiE context. This approach cannot be a substitute for rigorous statistical methods aimed at drawing major conclusions. The logic tree model can be a tool for monitoring progress and adaptation but it certainly is not an evaluative one, especially for those aiming to draw conclusions on a program's performance. In most cases, traditional statistical evaluation methods create counterfactuals by comparing treatment and control groups. The logic model approach, as presented above, cannot do that. The results of different groups using the logic model approach cannot be compared because the method cannot determine the statistical significance of the results obtained. Confidence interval and standard error are other statistical quantities needed when drawing conclusions and they cannot be determined reliably using the logic tree.

Finally, due to the volatile situation created by the pandemic, and by extension any other emergency, increasing the frequency of data analysis is key to ensuring that projects keep track of what is happening among their beneficiaries. For instance, during the first month of broadcasting TV lessons in Ghana, 30 percent of all children contacted were participating. However, this declined to about 25 percent by the next month, mainly due to the displacements caused as pandemic restrictions began affecting the economic situation of households. It's also important to note that contacting the same beneficiaries frequently can lead to respondent fatigue and increase potential data unreliability. Therefore, program managers should attempt to collect and analyze data from a different sample each time. This approach also ensures that the program gets information from as many beneficiaries as possible to help adapt activities.

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# BOOK REVIEW

**GLOBAL EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT GENDER REPORT 2019:  
BUILDING BRIDGES FOR GENDER EQUALITY<sup>1</sup>**

**BY THE GLOBAL EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT TEAM**

**UNESCO, 2019. 74 PAGES**

**ISBN 978-92-3-100329-5**

**MIND THE GAP:**

**THE STATE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN CRISIS AND CONFLICT<sup>2</sup>**

**BY THE INTER-AGENCY NETWORK FOR EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES**

**INEE, 2021. 93 PAGES**

The first edition of the *Gender Overview*, published by UNESCO as a companion publication to its 2011 *Global Monitoring Report*, was a slim pamphlet that summarized the gender-specific findings of the annual report. The *Gender Overview* (predecessor to the *Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Report*), which addressed the theme of armed conflict and education, reported that girls in crisis contexts were the farthest behind all other learners in terms of education access and achievement.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it reported that rape and sexual violence were rampant in crisis contexts, which was having a devastating effect on girls' education. This was a wakeup call for many readers, as it was one of the first global publications outside the education in emergencies (EiE) field to address the gender dimensions of education in these contexts.<sup>4</sup>

Over the last ten years, a small but growing body of literature has focused on girls' education and gender equality in EiE. It has provided evidence on trends, documented examples of promising projects, and shared tools and resources.<sup>5</sup> However, important gaps in the literature remain, including comparable sex-disaggregated data, case studies supported by evidence, and in-depth analysis of gender and education in crisis settings.

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1 The *Gender Report 2019* is available online in English, French, Spanish, and Arabic at <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/2019genderreport>.

2 *Mind the Gap* is available at <https://inee.org/resources/mind-gap-state-girls-education-crisis-and-conflict>.

3 The *Global Monitoring Report (GMR)* was renamed the *Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR)* in 2015. The *GMR Gender Overview* evolved to become the *GEMR Gender Report*; it is published annually to highlight gender considerations in education.

4 For early publications on gender dimensions in EiE, see Kirk (2006) and INEE (2010).

5 See, for example, Burde and Linden (2013); Burde and Khan (2016); UNICEF (2021); and Perezniето, Magee, and Fyles (2017). Other resources are available from the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and INEE at <https://inee.org/resources/inee-guidance-note-gender> and from UNGEI, Education Cannot Wait, and INEE at <https://www.ungei.org/publication/eie-genkit>.

Two reports help to fill this gap: the *Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Report 2019: Building Bridges for Gender Equality*, and *Mind the Gap: The State of Girls' Education in Crisis and Conflict*. While the scope and objectives of the two reports differ, both contribute to the evidence base on gender and education in a range of crisis contexts, including migration and displacement. They also summarize international, regional, and national legal and policy frameworks, draw from the literature to describe gender dynamics in education, and provide specific examples and case studies.

The core mandate of the *GEMR Gender Report* is to track the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the related Sustainable Development Goals on education and gender equality. Using a conception of gender equality that extends beyond parity in education participation, attainment, and learning, the *GEMR Gender Report* examines social and economic contexts (e.g., gender norms and institutions) and key education system characteristics (e.g., laws and policies, teaching and learning practices, learning environments, and resources). While most of the 2019 report focuses on monitoring gender equality in education, it also addresses intersections between gender, education, migration, and displacement. A series of text boxes illustrates how gender relations, social and gender norms, and institutions influence educational opportunities in contexts of migration and displacement.

The *Gender Report 2019* argues that, in a limited number of cases, migration creates opportunities for education and employment that can benefit women and girls. However, migration and, in particular, displacement typically exacerbate gender-based vulnerabilities. The report notes that, across all geographies and contexts, intersections between education, migration, and displacement are not gender neutral: “Being on the move, whether as a migrant or a forcibly displaced person, has gender-specific implications for education responses and outcomes alike” (5).

The report illustrates how gender norms and gendered social relations influence the education of children left behind by migrating mothers or fathers, how migrant remittances are used differentially for the education of girls and boys, and how educated women are often deskilled when they join the “global care chain” through the process of migration (see Boxes 2, 3, and 6). The report also documents that, while forced displacement negatively affects all people, refugee women and girls are the most vulnerable, due to the lack of privacy, protection, and security in conflict contexts. This has a direct impact on their access to education and skills training. Boxes 8 and 9 provide examples of the increased

risk of child marriage and gender-based violence in displacement settings. Boxes 10 and 11 address the shortage of female teachers in refugee contexts, and the role teachers and teacher training can play in promoting gender equality in education. While the focus on migration and displacement in *Gender Report 2019* is largely descriptive and includes few recommendations, the overarching message is that a gender lens must be applied in all education analysis and provision. This remains an essential lesson for donors, policymakers, academics, practitioners, and all others involved in EiE.

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A second report, *Mind the Gap: The State of Girls' Education in Crisis and Conflict*, was commissioned by INEE to support G7 leaders' commitment to quality education for girls and women during conflict and crisis, as stated in the 2018 Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls, and Women in Developing Countries. In the Charlevoix Declaration, G7 leaders pledged to improve sex- and age-disaggregated data on girls' and women's education in conflict and crisis settings. To allow progress to be monitored in coming years, *Mind the Gap* established a baseline on the status of girls' and women's access to quality education and training in contexts of crisis at the time the Charlevoix Declaration and associated financing were agreed to.<sup>6</sup>

*Mind the Gap* provides a review of the most recent global data available at the time it was written (2018-2019) from 44 crisis-affected countries, as well as of international and national laws and policies, research studies, and case studies. It also summarizes recent progress and the remaining gaps in education provision, legal and policy frameworks, data, and funding.

*Mind the Gap* highlights the important progress made in recent decades: the gender gap in access to education in crisis contexts is closing, legal barriers to girls' education are being dismantled, more humanitarian aid is now allocated to education, and an increasing proportion of overall education aid to crisis-affected countries is focused on gender equality and women's empowerment. The report also notes improvements in the collection of sex- and age-disaggregated data on crisis-affected populations. However, important gaps remain, including large gender gaps in access to education among the poorest communities, the

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<sup>6</sup> The Charlevoix Declaration acted as a catalyst for generating international funding that targeted girls' and women's education and training in contexts of conflict and crisis. At Charlevoix in 2018, Canada, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the World Bank together committed CAD 3.8 billion to support its goals. At the UN General Assembly meeting later that year Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Qatar committed a further CAD 527 million.

forcibly displaced, and people with disabilities. Moreover, in too many crisis situations, girls are not safe in school, humanitarian aid to education remains limited and unpredictable, and too little funding is dedicated to girls' education in contexts of crisis. Data on displaced girls is another major gap, as is data related to intersecting vulnerabilities, in particular gender and disability, and comparable data on gender-based violence in schools.

The primary audience for *Mind the Gap* may be policymakers, but practitioners will also find the report accessible and relevant, given the clearly written text, useful graphics, and a series of case studies illustrating the social and cultural context of girls' education in EiE. The report also provides researchers with useful statistical tables and an overview of recent literature that reflects in-depth knowledge of the field. A summary of findings and recommended actions to address the gender gaps is provided in the companion policy brief, *Closing the Gap: Advancing Girls' Education in Crisis and Conflict*.<sup>7</sup>

*Mind the Gap* and, to a certain extent, *Gender Report 2019* help to establish a foundation of evidence on the status of girls' education in crisis contexts. Both also point to critical concerns that should drive our agenda to advance the ambition of the Charlevoix Declaration. First, reporting on data and evidence, or the lack thereof, can only take us so far. In order for data to be collected, analyzed, and used by and for those who need it most, we need to encourage the development of national education data systems that are gender and conflict sensitive, and to expand the capacity of national and local education stakeholders to use data for advocacy and programming.<sup>8</sup> Second, small projects implemented by nongovernmental organizations that operate outside national education systems, however exemplary, are not sustainable and are unlikely to address chronic gaps in the provision of education. Ministries of education must be given ample support to integrate gender-responsive programs for refugees and internally displaced persons into their national education plans and budgets. Finally, as documented in *Gender Report 2019*, *Mind the Gap*, and other reports, many critical barriers to girls' education fall outside the education system, especially in crisis contexts. More than ever, data on health, poverty, early marriage, teen pregnancy, disability status, child welfare, and gender-based violence must inform education investment, policy, and programming. Innovative approaches to collecting and sharing data

<sup>7</sup> This report is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic at <https://inee.org/resources/closing-gap-advancing-girls-education-crisis-and-conflict>.

<sup>8</sup> New research commissioned by Equal Measures 2030 and funded by Global Affairs Canada details the importance of engaging women's rights organizations in the collection of education data in EiE. See Equal Measures 2030 (2021).

across sectors and between international, national, and local education actors are critical to enabling schools to respond adequately to the lived realities of girls in crisis contexts.

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## BOOK REVIEW

***FORGING THE IDEAL EDUCATED GIRL:  
THE PRODUCTION OF DESIRABLE SUBJECTS IN MUSLIM SOUTH ASIA***  
**BY SHENILA KHOJA-MOOLJI**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2018. XI + 202 PAGES**  
**\$34.95 (PAPER)**  
**ISBN 978-0-520-29840-8**

In *Forging the Ideal Educated Girl: The Production of Desirable Subjects in Muslim South Asia*, Shenila Khoja-Moolji gives us an overview of how debates around gender and education have unfolded over the course of one hundred years. The author takes the readers on an intellectually rigorous but accessible journey across South Asia and from 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial India to present-day Pakistan, to show the dynamic, shifting, and contested articulations of the figure of the educated Muslim girl. Khoja-Moolji explains that education, girlhood, and womanhood are not static formulations but outcomes of dynamic and complex social negotiations that necessarily produce diversity in what signifies the educated Muslim girl at different periods and locations, and within different power relations. The figure of the Muslim woman emerges as a fluid subject as opposed to a stable object.

Those who read about education in emergencies will find this book highly useful. Khoja-Moolji dismantles homogenous assumptions about Muslim womanhood and girlhood that are embedded not only in the Western aid-industrial complex and Western foreign and domestic policies but within institutions internal to Muslim societies. Khoja-Moolji succeeds in disrupting the tiresome storyline of the Muslim girl/woman as an example of backward womanhood that is oppressed by religion, tradition, and patriarchy and is, therefore, unable to fulfill her potential in the modern social order unless saved by modern education. The most insightful aspect of the book is that it turns the generalized assumption of the mute, secluded, and subjugated Indian Muslim woman on its head by centering on women's historical narratives that show them to be "fully human and political subjects" (22). Khoja-Moolji reminds readers that the contemporary development regime's portrayal of Muslim women is remarkably similar to those circulated in colonial India in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when "Mosalman women" surfaced as figures to be rescued from regressive cultural norms of *pardah*, seclusion, early marriage, and superstitions. Colonial officers and Christian missionaries, as well as Muslim social reformers, claimed that education would save, civilize, or reform these women.

Rich in historical detail, this book will interest a wide-ranging audience: students, academics, policymakers, journalists, women, activists, and practitioners. It also speaks across several disciplines: gender studies, postcolonial feminist studies, South Asian history, education studies, citizenship studies, and religious studies. Deploying Foucauldian genealogical insights, Khoja-Moolji offers a critical analysis of historical records, magazines, government documents, speeches, campaign adverts, novels, commercial advertisements, television programs, and fieldwork.

*Forging the Ideal Educated Girl* unfolds in six chapters, each offering a different entry point into how the figure of the ideal educated Muslim girl/woman is constructed. The first chapter analyzes the contemporary production in the works of journalist Nicholas Kristof and former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in policy briefs, campaigns, articles, and speeches. Using such examples as Malala Yousafzai and the Nigerian girls kidnapped by Boko Haram, they create a larger-than-life, abstract, ahistorical, and monolithic collective of “the girl in crisis” by erasing particular histories, contexts, and diversity: “If we know one (Malala), we know them all (Nigerian girls). If we design a development intervention for one, we can apply it to all” (3). Chapter two goes back in time to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where we encounter the intense debate raging on the education of the “Mosalman” girl/woman in political speeches, writings, and didactic novels written by male and female Muslim social reformers. We see the figure of the ideal Muslim woman and her education constructed against the backdrop of expanding colonial hegemony, the decline in the wealth and prestige of many north Indian Muslim families, and the prevailing trepidation and adjustments based on class, caste, gender, and access to power. In chapter 3, we are in the early decades of independent Pakistan, where we encounter the making of the ideal citizen-subject on whose shoulders rest gendered responsibilities for nation-building, modernization, and development. Chapter 4 brings us back to the present day, where the image of the ideal girlhood is launched through transnational girls’ education and empowerment campaigns. Chapter 5 interrogates two Pakistani television shows based on Nazir Ahmed’s 1869 novel *Mirat-ul-uroos* (*The Bride’s Mirror*). The final chapter traces the key storylines that overlap across these various periods. On our tour across a century, we are delightfully offered a glimpse of women’s voices, writings, novels, and speeches in which they narrate their educational desires and aspirations and their construction of an ideal educated girlhood. Their archival writings in periodicals and novels from the past and voices from today offer a rich understanding of how women participate in making respectable Muslim women and girls.

Together these chapters give us an overview of how debates around gender and education have unfolded over a hundred years. The figure of the Muslim girl/woman repeatedly encounters the discourse of *sharafat* (respectability), but through time it acquires different registers mitigated by class, religion, and political demands. The ideal Muslim girl/woman is required to do many things: reform civilization, reproduce class, boost GDP, perform modernity, and uphold religious identity. Contemporary policymakers, development workers, and globally powerful patriarchs assume that an ideal modern, educated girl will help solve practically every problem in the Global South, including poverty, terrorism, extremism, and gender-based violence, all while they lead their nations to prosperity, participate in the labor market, and serve global capitalism. Muslim women and girls are simply expected to receive the kind of education that enables them to successfully manage these societal tasks. However, education also serves as a discursive site in which women actively participate in shaping education and religious reform projects despite colonization, Western military interventions, patriarchal pressure, and socioeconomic constraints. Even the contemporary neoliberal tropes of the entrepreneurial “empowered girl” as “successful”/developed girls are contested and adapted locally.

The most significant contribution this book makes is curating, preserving, and giving context to women’s writings about their educational concerns that were written at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women’s writings have been relegated to the margins in the broader telling of history, nation-building, and development in South Asia, and they have not been preserved well. Moreover, the rich historical account that encapsulates an entire century alone makes this book an essential collection for those interested in gender and South Asia. Finally, and importantly, Khoja-Moolji’s text punctures the tendency of current development agendas to caricature all Muslim women and girls with one broad stroke—that is, as a universally repressed, monolithic, and ahistorical figure.

The limitations of this important work are not many, but they are significant. Khoja-Moolji draws predominantly from elite Muslim men’s and women’s experiences and voices, and she correctly acknowledges that the book is geographically limited to north India in its invocation of the past. Moreover, while the diversity of India’s Muslim populations includes the historically oppressed Adivasi Muslims (indigenous populations), Dalit Muslims (formerly the “untouchables” in the Hindu caste system), and Shudra Muslims (formerly the lowest caste in the Hindu varna system), their voices and feminist education movements remain beyond the author’s gaze. This is a significant lacuna, as their voices remain in the margins even in this broad story of Muslims in South Asia. The book does mention caste, but it misses out on a vital discussion of how centrally caste affected gendered

subjectivities and educational discourse in colonial India (and continues to do so). A glaring absence is that of Fatima Sheikh, a social reformer, educator, and anti-caste activist who, along with Savitribai Phule, in 1848 founded a school for girls irrespective of their caste, class, or religion, which was a revolutionary act at that time. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan did not establish the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (Aligarh Muslim University) until 1875, but Fatima Sheikh has not received the same praise and status for her pioneering work as Ahmed Khan has for his. This may be because women's activism in South Asia is less esteemed than that of men, but also because her radical humanist work went against the sensibilities of *ashraf*, the upper caste Muslims and Hindus who frowned upon mixing with people from the lower castes.

This book should nonetheless help advocates of girls' education, particularly those embedded in the aid-industrial complex, to stop uncritically abstracting girls and their education from "broader concerns related to social class, domestic and foreign politics, and missionary impulses of international development" (157). Khoja-Moolji calls on education reformers to go beyond putting the onus on girls and women to fix the social and political problems caused by global and local patriarchs, and to critically reveal "the underlying conditions of women's subjection—a move away from the service-delivery model and toward a more politicized feminism" (158). Without this level of critical understanding and effort, schooling will continue to reproduce old and new hierarchies and to put added burdens on girls.

I end with Khoja-Moolji's powerful call to action (157):

Move away from interpreting Muslim women's lives in absolute terms—as either always-oppressed or free, always-silent or empowered. Instead, they (the complex stories) point to how different social forces regulate the lives of women as well as how women who suffer, resist, strategize, withdraw, and overcome, are crucial players in such stories.

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## BOOK REVIEW

***BORDERLESS HIGHER EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES:  
LESSONS FROM THE DADAAB REFUGEE CAMPS***  
**EDITED BY WENONA GILES AND LORRIE MILLER**  
**BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING, 2021. 248 PAGES**  
**\$34.95 (PAPER), \$100.00 (HARDCOVER), \$31.45 (E-BOOK)**  
**ISBN 978-1-350-15124-6**

*Borderless Higher Education for Refugees: Lessons from the Dadaab Refugee Camps*, Wenona Giles and Lorrie Miller's edited book, takes readers on a journey that reveals the possibility for hope and achievement amid the "chaos" and complexities of life in a refugee camp. On this journey, we are introduced to Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER), a project that provides free accredited higher education programs to refugees in two of the world's largest refugee camps, Dadaab and Kakuma, which are located in the northeastern and northwestern regions of Kenya, respectively. The contributors to the book recognize from the beginning that higher education for refugees is often perceived as a luxury, a complex (and often unattainable) dream. However, as these authors reveal, achieving this dream can sometimes become a reality for refugee learners, who use the opportunity to secure new skills, employment, and the possibility of giving back to their communities. Instead of dismissing or downplaying the seriousness of the social, material, and political constraints operating in these spaces, the authors engage directly with these factors and show that it is not only possible but necessary to provide higher education for refugees so that they will be able to navigate ongoing systems of inequality and overcome some of the social, political, and economic barriers they face.

This book demonstrates that, despite its complicity in (re)enforcing Eurocentric ideals that reflect ongoing experiences of colonialism, higher education has the potential to transform the lives and experiences of these refugees, and that it is "only through education" (3) that such unequal structures and systems of oppression can be challenged and resisted. For example, although the refugees feel that designating English as the language of instruction deprives them of their right to speak their mother tongue, they simultaneously recognize that it gives them the potential to gain "marketable" skills. The contributing authors also counter the misrepresentation of refugees' lived experiences in national and international narratives and policies with stories of potential and possibility. This is apparent in chapter 4, in which the authors explain that the community health education

degree program offered in the camps was developed collaboratively with the local populations. As a result, its content is meaningful and relevant to local realities and it equips graduates with skills and credentials they can use to improve health services for both the refugees in the camps and the host communities in Dadaab.

Some of the other ways BHER equipped learners with skills and knowledge that enhanced their understanding of their abilities and their overall position in society include giving them opportunities to be critical (chap. 6), allowing educators and staff members to be flexible (chap. 7) and collegial (chap. 3), and providing a curriculum that could be adapted to students' needs (chap. 8)—all of this despite the ongoing constraints of life in the camps. This was eloquently articulated in chapter 9 through Dahabo's and Seraphin's accounts of learning as children in the refugee camps. The idea of giving back to the community is present throughout the chapters of *Borderless Higher Education for Refugees*. BHER clearly recognized the potential of higher education to redress global inequalities and promote peace and development, thus it focused on teaching learners so that they “may improve living conditions in the camps” but also “catalyse sustainable recovery in their home societies” (127).

The transformative potential of education is also recognized in BHER's approach to the refugee camps as “places of possibilities” and “new beginnings” (chap. 1). Even though they “contain” and “restrict” the refugees, the camps provide refugees with protection, access to essential social supports, and opportunities for resettlement. They inevitably create additional hardships, including gendered constraints (chap. 2) and hostility and threats from the host communities over resources (chap. 1), but instead of letting these challenges get in the way, BHER providers have found creative ways to minimize their impact. For example, including the host communities in BHER programs has helped some local residents overcome their feelings of disconnect with the refugees and their worries about the limited availability of resources, all of which has promoted a culture of understanding and connectedness (chap. 6). Likewise, offering female-only WhatsApp discussion groups (chap. 7) also helped to expand the physical and symbolic confinement of the camps and provided spaces where female students could participate without worrying about compromising their social beliefs and culture.

Finally, what makes this book more invigorating to read than some other texts on refugee learners is its conviction that refugees do in fact have agency and, consequently, the potential to transform their lives and the systems of inequality around them, including gender inequalities, and the ability to address the needs of the camps and to contribute to the development of their home countries.

This approach not only challenges common depictions of refugees as passive and lacking voice or power, it also presents higher education as a powerful tool that empowers refugees (chap. 10) and enables them to act on their agency (chap. 5). The contributing authors emphasize the importance of including refugees in meaningful decisionmaking and of putting this into practice by recognizing learners as educators and educators as learners (chap. 8). The authors of chapter 9 describe how they used storytelling to give refugee students the opportunity to share their own experiences of learning in the camps. Through these accounts, we learn of the refugees' resilience (e.g., Dahabo's mother's insistence that Dahabo continue to go to school despite facing social and cultural barriers), and their ongoing struggles (e.g., Seraphin's account of learning English in the camps as a "new form of colonialism and weapon to intimidate"; 154). While these personal accounts of refugee students provide deep insights into their lived experiences, a possible shortcoming of this book is that it does not share the experiences of other BHER students who are living in Canada or describe how the program affected their understandings, perceptions, and experiences of learning alongside students who are located in precarious and necessitous environments. Ultimately, this book teaches a familiar yet indispensable lesson about persevering and succeeding, despite the odds and obstacles. The BHER project reveals and enables this possibility. This book will appeal to those who recognize the transformative potential of higher education broadly, and to those working more specifically for the empowerment of refugees.

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