



Shaping Aspirations and Outcomes: Gender and Adolescence in Young Lives

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September 2016

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the children, families and communities who have collaborated with Young Lives over the years. We thank the research teams who collected the data and prepared four country reports on gendered trajectories, and members of our advisory group on gender inequality and transitions to adulthood. We benefited enormously from comments received on an earlier draft of the paper from Gina Crivello, Paul Dornan, Emily Esplen, Marta Favara, Padmini Iyer, Kirrily Pells, Virginia Morrow, Caine Rolleston and Nikki van der Gaag and would like to thank Bridget Azubuike and Patricia Espinoza Revollo for excellent research support.

This report is part of a stream of work entitled 'Changing women's lives in social context: economic growth, cultural norms and the dynamics of gender inequality in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam', funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and draws particularly on a number of papers produced under this initiative, including an initial policy brief and four papers exploring young people's trajectories in each of the Young Lives study countries.

Gina Crivello and Emma Feeny (2015) *How Gender Shapes Adolescence: Diverging Paths and Opportunities*, Young Lives Policy Brief 22

Yisak Tafere and Nardos Chuta (2016) *Gendered Trajectories of Young People through School, Work and Marriage in Ethiopia*, Young Lives Working Paper 155

Uma Vennam, Anuradha Komanduri and Jennifer Roest (2016) *Gendered Trajectories through School, Work and Marriage in India*, Young Lives Working Paper 156

Vanessa Rojas, Gabriela Guerrero and Jimena Vargas (2016) *Gendered Trajectories through Education, Work and Parenthood in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 157

Ina Zharkevich, Jennifer Roest and Vu Thi Thanh Huong (2016) *Gendered Trajectories through School, Work and Marriage in Vietnam*, Young Lives Working Paper 158

Young Lives is funded by UK aid from the Department for International Development (DFID) and co-funded by Irish Aid from 2014 to 2016.

The views expressed are those of the author. They are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, Young Lives, the University of Oxford, DFID, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, or other funders.

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Foreword

In September 2015, leaders from across the globe agreed an ambitious vision for 2030. That the world's 1.2 billion adolescent girls and boys are central to this vision is beyond doubt. As the recent Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Well-being put it, 'we have come to new understandings of adolescence as a critical phase in life for achieving human potential' (Patton et al. 2016: 2423). High-profile campaigns have shone a light on the rights violations faced by adolescent girls. Governments are working to turn the 'youth bulge' into a 'youth dividend': strengthening access to jobs and decision-making processes, and promoting resilience in the face of insecurity and environmental instability for the largest generation of young people the world has ever known.

In a world of uncertainty and limited resources, evidence is vital. Young Lives unique dataset provides 15 years of information about the factors that shape poor children's lives as they have grown to adulthood in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. It shines a light on inequalities and how they play out across childhood and adolescence, showing clearly who is left behind and who is not.

The things that adolescents told researchers mattered to them – financial security for their families, a good education, equality and hope, freedom from violence, and a job in the future – are the same things that global community leaders want to provide for them. Many of the young people in the study have been able to stay at school for longer than their parents, and some are studying at university. New roads and health centres have been built, and the digital economy is a growing part of young people's lives.

But there are serious challenges ahead. The most disadvantaged young people typically started their second decade already behind. In contexts of poverty and in the face of economic shocks, gender and age narrow young people's options. Once hopeful of entering university, many rural boys were forced to leave school as they entered their teens, in order to help provide for their families. On reaching puberty, girls in some places found their mobility restricted, and worries about their safety and reputation made it hard for some to travel the longer distances to secondary school.

In this report, we bring Young Lives evidence to bear on gender equality, by exploring the impact that gender, social norms and poverty have had on adolescents in the Young Lives study between the ages of 10 and 19 years. We show how girls, boys and their families have negotiated the real-life demands of work, school, family, relationships and marriage, and how norms, economic circumstances and local public services such as health and education have made their choices easier or harder. While gender shaped children's experiences every step of the way, this did not in every instance mean that girls were disadvantaged relative to boys. And while all children faced big changes during adolescence, these did not occur in a predictable, ordered sequence.

The message for policymakers is clear: that the underlying drivers of change for disadvantaged adolescents are effective education, job and economic opportunities to look forward to, robust social protection arrangements which improve the chances of their hopes being realised, and protection from violence.

Jo Boyden, Professor of International Development
University of Oxford, and Director, Young Lives

Executive summary

This report is based on findings from the Young Lives study of child poverty in Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam. It explores how children's lives changed during adolescence – the period between 10 and 19 years of age – and the difference that gender inequalities and social and gender norms made to their pathways.

For disadvantaged adolescents, transitions rarely resembled a predictable pathway from school to higher education, then work, marriage and parenthood. Work started early, whether paid or unpaid, and was often combined with schooling. Progress through school was sometimes interrupted, and sometimes protracted. Some girls' marriages were arranged early as a response to economic and social risk, while many boys feared they wouldn't be able to marry at all unless they found regular work and a steady income, goals which appeared elusive. By the age of 19, many young people were engaged in precarious work, or straddling education and the labour market.

Girls and boys, even those from poor backgrounds, began their second decade with high aspirations for the future and particularly for education. At the age of 12, the vast majority of children from all backgrounds were at school. However, young people born into poorer families started adolescence already behind in their learning and growth: the result of accumulated disadvantage over their first decade. Inequalities linked to poverty, location, and sometimes ethnicity and caste, continued to have an impact on young people's outcomes during adolescence.

At the age of 8, gendered differences in children's time use, and gender gaps in parental aspirations provided early evidence of gendered expectations and bias. Between the ages of 12 and 15, gender gaps opened up in school enrolment and learning outcomes. Girls were not always disadvantaged relative to boys. In India these gaps favoured boys, but in Vietnam, girls had better learning outcomes and remained in school for longer. In Ethiopia, boys were less likely to be enrolled in school at 15, but on average their learning outcomes exceeded that of girls. In Peru, patterns were complex, with the poorest young women least likely to be in education and the least-poor young women most likely to be in education at the age of 19.

Social and gender norms played a growing role in decisions about education, work, marriage and fertility during adolescence. Safety and reputation became key features of many girls' lives. Norms which positioned girls as the property of future in-laws in India and Ethiopia, appeared to reduce parental aspirations for girls' education, as well as investment in it. Marriage and parenthood marked an abrupt change to girls' lives. There were signs that child marriage was declining, but delaying marriage entails risks for young women and their families in contexts of economic insecurity. The influence of social norms could also be seen in young people's experience of violence across multiple environments during adolescence, with highly gendered patterns of corporal punishment and bullying reinforcing harmful and violent masculine identities, and leading to fears about girls' safety and mobility. Boys were not immune from social pressures, with a large number falling behind or leaving school in order to support their families through paid work, and poor young men struggling to find decent work and to stay optimistic.

Young Lives findings show that gender gaps widened during adolescence and gender played an important role in young people's day-to-day experience and their pathways through

education, work marriage and parenthood. Girls were not always disadvantaged compared to boys. Many constraints on life choices were due to economic factors and to inadequate services, which dampened aspirations and heightened discriminatory norms, so that disparities were most stark when gender interacted with poverty, rural location and minority social status (such as ethnicity).

Policy implications

Drawing on Young Lives findings, we have identified ten overarching recommendations for policies to support girls and boys to realise their full potential during adolescence, and to reduce gender inequalities and discrimination. These draw on the more detailed recommendations set out in each section of the report.

1. Tackle the global learning crisis

It is difficult to over-estimate how important education was for many Young Lives adolescents. Education was the foundation for their hopes for a good future life, but too often it did not deliver its promise, and school quality appeared to be declining in India and Ethiopia. Secondary schooling can have lasting benefits for women's empowerment, and is linked to later marriage and child-bearing, but poor learning experiences, and concerns about safety and sanitation put off many young women. The example of Vietnam demonstrates the positive difference an effective, equitable education system can make for disadvantaged young people.

2. Take an evidence-based approach to interventions that address gender and other inequalities

Our findings show that gender inequalities do not always favour boys, and have to be understood in combination with other sources of disadvantage. There is a place for initiatives which work specifically with adolescent girls, or with boys or young men. However, to realise the rights of *all* adolescents, such initiatives need to be set within a wider evidence-based framework which takes into account different dimensions of disadvantage and discrimination, and addresses the pervasive impact of poverty on children and adolescents from their earliest days.

3. Promote gender equality across the life-cycle to benefit adolescent girls

Young Lives has found that gender gaps in parents' and then children's aspirations started appearing between middle childhood and early adolescence, when children were 8 to 12 years old. Later on, marriage and parenthood had a profound impact on girls' and young women's well-being and agency and on their outlook on education. These periods represent windows of opportunity for support for girls and young women. However, caregivers and young people themselves adjusted their plans according to current opportunities and perceived future prospects. Interventions for adolescent girls need to go hand in hand with action to tackle wider inequalities in the labour market, and with the promotion of women's empowerment and leadership, which would signal the future value of present investments in girls.

4. Ensure that data reflect the complexity of girls' and boys' transitions in adolescence

Disadvantaged adolescents rarely followed a predictable path to adulthood. More comprehensive data on 10–19 year olds, disaggregated by gender and age, are needed to capture the rapid changes in young people's needs during adolescence and to inform policy.

5. Redesign education and training systems so they meet the needs of all adolescents

Too often, girls and boys whose learning was interrupted when they worked, migrated, had a child or married, found it hard to go back to school. Many ended their school careers abruptly when they failed national exams, leaving them with few options other than low-paid work or early marriage. A more accommodating education system, combined with alternative routes to learning, would help prevent temporary setbacks turning into permanent disadvantage.

6. Recognise, reduce and redistribute young people's caring and domestic work

By mid-adolescence, girls (and some boys) had many domestic and caring responsibilities, sometimes with negative consequences for their education. It is important that the demands on these young people are recognised and addressed as part of the growing focus on addressing women's unpaid care burden.

7. Take action to reduce violence and bullying in schools

Some young women and men faced violence in several different settings. Practical action to address violence and bullying in schools offers an opportunity to begin to break cycles of violence, some of which are based on gendered identities, and to address some of the safety concerns that lead girls to leave school early.

8. Tackle the underlying drivers of child marriage

Young Lives findings are in line with other research indicating that rates of child marriage are declining, although not uniformly, and that child marriage has complex causes, including poverty and discriminatory norms. There is a clear association between remaining in school and marrying later. Strategies to address child marriage need to be based on a firm understanding of the cultural logic underpinning the practice in contexts of poverty and insecurity, and be rooted in a broader agenda of empowering and valuing girls – married and unmarried. Caregivers, men, brothers and husbands must be involved in these efforts.

9. Reduce the impact of risks and shocks through effective social protection

Shocks – illness in the family, bereavement, crop failure, bad weather or loss of livestock – loom large in the accounts of disadvantaged adolescents. Depending on their gender and their position in the birth order, young people were required to take on extra work or leave school to help their families make ends meet. Worries about future insecurity also led some families to try and secure a positive future for daughters through early marriage. Effective social protection and health insurance arrangements play an important role in enabling households to sustain investments in adolescents and plan for the future.

10. Invest in decent, productive work opportunities for young people

Young people from poor backgrounds were more likely to be working, rather than studying, at the age of 19, often in agriculture or marginal, poorly paid jobs. In many locations, social connections were important for getting work. Where jobs and economic opportunities were available locally, young people were optimistic about the future. These early findings underscore the importance of economic growth strategies which create accessible jobs and opportunities, with protection, information and guidance for young women and men who need it.

1. Introduction

This paper explores how gender shapes adolescent girls' and boys' pathways and life chances.¹ We focus on adolescence, generally defined as the period in a person's life between 10 and 19 years of age. The paper draws on Young Lives survey rounds conducted when respondents were 12, 15 and 19 years old, as well as on qualitative longitudinal research. Our interest is in gender equality – how far both girls and boys are able to realise their rights and to thrive. We also look at how social and gender norms – the informal rules governing behaviour (Marcus and Harper 2015) – affect girls' and boys' daily lives and decisions about their future. Throughout, we consider how adolescents' lives are affected by poverty, where they live, their age and a range of other factors which have an impact together with gender.

We ask three questions:

- What difference does gender make to adolescents' aspirations and outcomes?
- How and when do gender inequalities emerge and in which areas of adolescents' lives?
- Are there windows of opportunity or particular kinds of investment that are likely to support girls and boys to reach their full potential?

About Young Lives

Young Lives is a longitudinal study of childhood poverty. Since 2001 it has followed 12,000 children and young people in Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh in India,² Peru and Vietnam. Two age cohorts of children – one born in 1994–95 and the other in 2001–02 – have been part of the study. This report looks at the older group of children, who were 8 years old when the study began. At the age of 12, the vast majority of them were at school. By the age of 19, many had left education and some had started their own families. Here, we describe what happened in between, and summarise what we have learned about the things that matter during adolescence, and about the role that gender plays in shaping opportunities, well-being and rights for girls and boys as they grow up.

By working in 80 communities across four countries Young Lives has built up a rich picture of the different places where these young people live and how these contexts shape their pathways. The power of Young Lives research lies in its potential to link children's early circumstances to their later outcomes, and to illuminate the links between economic growth, social change and the daily lives of children and young people. Qualitative longitudinal research conducted over the years provides a unique insight into how children and adolescents themselves view their lives.

The research can tell us more about when and how gender inequalities emerge, and how gender interacts with poverty, location, age and ethnicity in shaping children's life chances. It offers the potential to identify 'windows of opportunity' where intervention can be particularly

1 It builds on previous Young Lives publications, including *Poverty and Gender Inequalities: Evidence from Young Lives* (Pells 2011), *From Infancy to Adolescence: Growing Up in Poverty* (Dornan and Pells 2014) and *How Inequalities Develop through Childhood* (Dornan and Woodhead 2015), as well as drawing on the four working papers on and policy brief on gendered trajectories mentioned in the Acknowledgements section, above.

2 The state of Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated in 2014 into the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. We use 'India' when referring to Young Lives findings in united Andhra Pradesh, but do not claim that Young Lives findings are representative of India as a whole.

helpful, and to pinpoint particular points of transition where gender and other inequalities open up (Dornan and Woodhead 2015).

Nevertheless, the study is not designed to provide ready answers about the impact of specific interventions, and the sample does not allow analysis of the needs of some specific groups, such as disabled or LGBTQ children, children who do not grow up in households, or young people affected by conflict.

There are some questions that Young Lives will be able to answer once the 2016 survey round is complete. The younger group of children are now 15, and the older group are 22 years old. New information from this round is expected to yield a more complete picture of what happens to young women and men when they leave education and enter the labour market. New survey questions will explore attitudes to gender equality. Comparing the experiences of the younger and older groups of young people at the ages of 12 and 15 will tell us about what has changed for adolescents in the past eight years. These findings will be incorporated into a report on Youth and Gender in 2017.

Why does adolescence matter?

Just like younger children, adolescents up to the age of 18 have rights to the care, services and protection they need to flourish. Under international law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is binding on governments that have ratified it, and requires governments to do all they can to support families and children so that all children fulfil their potential, whatever their gender, background or circumstances.

“[T]he Committee observes that the potential of adolescents is widely compromised by the failure to recognise or invest in the measures needed to enable them to enjoy their rights.”

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Draft General Comment on the Implementation of the Rights of the Child during Adolescence, April 2016

Following the Millennium Development Goals, many of the adolescents of today have benefited from improvements in health, education and incomes since 2000, and gender disparities in access to education have narrowed. Adolescence is a time when these gains can be lost, and also a second window of opportunity for those who are already left behind.

During adolescence, greater involvement with peers, and sexual maturity bring not only new opportunities for love and friendship, and new role models, but also new risks and sometimes restrictions. In many contexts, there are increased expectations from early adolescence onwards that boys and girls will conform to stereotypical norms, which perpetuate gender inequalities (Kågesten et al. 2016). These norms affect girls' and boys' daily lives – for example, their experience of violence, their safety and the work they do – as well as their long-term pathways through education, work, marriage and parenthood. Good support during adolescence can enable young people to make positive transitions into adulthood, while poverty, discrimination and poor services do lasting damage to girls' and boys' health, education and life chances.

“Adolescence is characterised by dynamic brain development in which the interaction with the social environment shapes the capabilities an individual takes forward into adult life.”

Our Future: A Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Well-being, May 2016

Finally, investing in adolescents and in gender equality has wider economic and social benefits. Supporting human capital development for girls and young mothers, improving the socio-economic status of households and addressing gender discrimination all contribute to stemming the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Recent reports have set out how gender-equitable development can help countries to meet development objectives for children in a faster, more cost-effective and more sustainable way (UNICEF 2016); to promote productivity, better outcomes for children and more effective institutions (World Bank 2011); and to contribute to a more equal income distribution in emerging markets and low-income countries (Gonzales et al. 2015). Meeting the needs of the world's largest-ever population of young people for full and productive employment is a vital way of supporting economic growth, poverty reduction and social cohesion (S4YE 2015). Box 1 shows how Young Lives evidence about adolescence relates to some of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Box 1. Adolescence and the Sustainable Development Goals: Young Lives Evidence

“Young people around the world were crucial in designing the Sustainable Development Goals ...The goals focus on [their] priority issues: quality education; empowering women and girls; ensuring decent work for all.”

UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-moon, Speech at McGill University, Canada, February 2016

With a global population of 1.2 billion 10–19 year olds, effective interventions for adolescents are critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The ‘Leaving no one behind’ agenda embeds equality and human rights principles into the goals, requiring action to tackle discrimination and meet the needs of the most disadvantaged (Stuart et al. 2016). A longitudinal study such as Young Lives provides evidence about what matters and when for disadvantaged adolescent girls and boys, and how wider social and economic forces shape individuals’ life courses.

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Young Lives evidence shows how and why poverty persists through childhood and across generations, what impact families’ investments in children have on their life chances, and how social protection, public services and policy choices affect children and adolescents.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages

Young Lives provides insights into the links between ill-health and poverty, nutrition during adolescence, and child-bearing during adolescence, and its impact on young parents and the next generation of children.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Young Lives shows how secondary school enrolment, retention and learning outcomes vary across different settings and are linked to background, location and gender as well as expectations for the future. Qualitative research explores girls' and boys' educational aspirations and experiences, and looks at how families invest in education and for their sons and daughters. By 2017, new data from school surveys will allow us to explore what makes secondary schools effective in supporting girls and boys to make progress in their learning.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Young Lives provides insights into when and how gender inequalities open up and persist during childhood and adolescence. It examines girls' and boys' paid and unpaid work, and how social norms shape adolescents' trajectories. The study has also explored which young people are most likely to experience child and early marriage.

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Young Lives has gathered information about adolescents' work, and some early data about young women's and men's work and labour market activities at the age of 19. From 2017, Young Lives expects to have significant data about young women and men's employment-related skills, their work activities, and how their early experiences have affect their labour market outcomes.

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Young Lives has collected information on children and young people's experiences of violence and bullying in the home, school and beyond, how this varies by gender and age, and how violence affects young people's development.

2. A decade of change: pathways during adolescence

Background

Adolescence is seen as a window of opportunity for promoting a country's overall development, and for addressing marginalisation, changing social norms and driving economic growth (DFID 2016; USAID 2012). Most recently, there has been a strong focus on adolescent girls through initiatives such as the 2014 Girl Summit, the United States Adolescent Girls Empowerment Strategy, the World Bank's Adolescent Girls Initiative, and the DFID-funded Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme, which, between them, have highlighted the importance of providing girls with access to education, enhancing their empowerment and economic opportunities, ending violence against girls (including child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation), and understanding what works to enable poor adolescent girls to make a positive transition to adulthood in low- and middle-income countries. There has been a recent focus on the needs and vulnerabilities of very young adolescents (McCarthy et al. 2016), and on engaging adolescent boys and young men positively in debates about sexual and reproductive health rights and gender equality (Kato-Wallace et al. 2016)

The Young Lives longitudinal survey design offers evidence of how girls' and boys' pathways through childhood and adolescence differ, and of the impact of early life on later outcomes.

What Young Lives has found

Children experienced many transitions

Between the ages of 10 and 19, adolescents went through many changes, including puberty, a change of school, leaving school, entering post-secondary or higher education, starting paid work, migration, beginning sexual relations, intimate relationships, marriage, parenthood and sometimes divorce. Some gained new family members, while others experienced bereavement, loss, estrangement or a change in their family structure.

Transitions were not necessarily orderly and they often overlapped

Pathways through adolescence rarely followed a linear progression from school to higher education to work, marriage and family. Young people and families juggled future aspirations with current hardships and social expectations, reputation and risk.

For example:

- Most girls and boys worked from an early age. By adolescence many were contributing significantly to their household through paid or unpaid work, with workloads depending on gender, wealth and where young people lived.
- Progress through school was often fitful – hampered by poor learning experiences, family hardship or the demands of work.

- Some changes were abrupt and life-altering. Failing key exams in India and Ethiopia forced many less advantaged adolescents into a sudden end to their education, and into poorly paid work and (for girls) marriage.
- In times of family need, such as ill health or a crop failure, children often changed course to contribute to family incomes.
- At the age of 19, many young people were still in education or they combined education and work: a large minority were in full-time work, and many of the young women who were married had become parents.

Adolescents' pathways were gendered, and shaped by family composition and urban/rural location

Throughout the teenage years, norms shape the way that girls and boys are expected to behave, and how they anticipate that their future lives will develop. These differ in each of the four Young Lives countries, and vary according to young people's age, their place in the birth order and where they live. Many norms were common to girls and boys: for example, expectations that young people would make an active contribution to their family, and increasingly (and most notably in Vietnam) that young people would study hard in order to be successful.

The onset of puberty ushered in significant changes in girls' lives in all countries, although most evidently in Ethiopia and India. Restrictions were placed on their mobility as a result of fears for their safety and reputation. Some girls avoided school during menstruation, while some hid the fact they had reached puberty in order to carry on at school. Many more girls than boys married or became parents during adolescence, experiencing profound and abrupt changes to their lives (Pells 2011; Boyden and Crivello 2011).

Boys also experienced pressures – notably from their families' and their own expectations that they would help support their households financially. In rural Ethiopia for example, hunger, inflexible paid work and disappointment with school led many boys to leave school early and work full time (Boyden et al. 2016). Poor job prospects left disadvantaged young men in Ethiopia feeling they were 'simply counting their age' because they were unable to follow their expected path through work and financial security to marriage (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016).

Service providers and officials reinforce gendered expectations

It was not just families, communities and young people who had gendered expectations. Young women in Peru and Vietnam reported being advised to study for stereotypical careers such as social work or nursing. Young women at university in Vietnam were not encouraged in the same way as young men to join the Communist Party, an important way to build social connections. Although not always welcome, military service in Vietnam provided a pathway for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop their skills, but was only compulsory for young men.

Risks linked to negative pathways were different for young women and men

In Peru, boys – particularly those from urban areas and single-parent households – were more likely to engage in so-called 'risky behaviours', some of which risked blighting their pathways into adulthood, such as drinking, smoking, illegal drugs, carrying weapons or criminal activity, although girls were more at risk of unprotected sex (Favara and Sanchez 2016).

Box 2. Different transitions – pathways to adulthood

From primary to secondary school

In Vietnam, Y Mich – a boy from an ethnic minority background – found the transition from primary to secondary school difficult and left school early. According to one of his friends, “he said it was boring for him in the class, as he felt an outsider there, he had no friend to talk to in the class”. Ethnic minority girls and boys often reported feeling isolated at secondary school, experiencing language barriers and finding the curriculum difficult.

Restricted movement following puberty

Kareena is from Hyderabad, India. When she was 12, she described changes following puberty. “Mother gave me restrictions ... ‘You have to stay in the house only You should not talk to anybody, now you are a grown-up child.’”

An only son supports his parents

Esteban, a young man from Rioja in Peru, decided to work rather than go on to higher education. As the only son in the family, he felt responsible for supporting his parents, whose coffee crops had been damaged by disease. He also wanted to earn enough to live with his girlfriend.

NGO support enables a disadvantaged girl to go to university

Triveni had vital external support which helped her go to university, despite being brought up in poverty by her grandmother in Katur, in rural India. A local NGO funded her education, on condition that she passed her exams. By the age of 19, she was taking a degree and hoped to become a teacher.

Pregnancy brings major changes

When Isaura, a young woman from urban Peru, got pregnant at 19, her life changed dramatically. She was sent away from home and left from the naval academy. She moved in with her boyfriend, looking after the baby while he worked. She was considering tertiary education, but said she would have to study accountancy in line with her boyfriend’s wishes.

³ To protect the identities of children and adults interviewed by Young Lives, all names are pseudonyms. Pseudonyms are also used for communities with fewer than 40,000 inhabitants.

Policy implications

During adolescence, young people deal with many different transitions, sometimes all at once and not necessarily at predictable age points. Interventions which are narrowly targeted at a specific age band – for example, supporting skill development or sexual and reproductive health – risk excluding young people who might otherwise benefit.

1. *School systems need to be more responsive and welcoming* to children and young people who have to work, who have returned to school after leaving, or who are married or pregnant, so that a temporary change or setback does not turn into a permanent disadvantage.
 2. *Alternatives to 'cliff edge' exams* – where young people have to pass or leave school entirely are needed if disadvantaged adolescents are to avoid an abrupt or premature end to their education. Those who do not pass these exams are often left vulnerable to underemployment, exploitation and early marriage. *Continuing education or vocational training options* should be made available for them.
 3. Young people's lives change rapidly in their second decade. These changes cannot be adequately captured through household surveys that collect data from people aged 15 or over, or those which report in age bands from 10 to 19 years. *Survey data collection* in narrower age bands across the period from 10 to 19 years would help to provide a better picture of adolescents' needs at different ages.
 4. *Effective social protection and health insurance arrangements* can help cushion adolescents against the consequences of economic and health shocks.
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3. Aspirations and expectations

Background

Understanding how poverty affects people's aspirations – 'the social grounding of individual desires' (Ray 2006) – and how in turn poor people's aspirations affect their ability to escape poverty, can provide important insights into the interaction between individuals and their circumstances, and what this means for poverty reduction strategies.

Young Lives has asked caregivers and children at different points about their aspirations for children's future education and life, and has already highlighted the importance of maternal aspirations in driving household investment in children's education (Serneels and Dercon 2014). This evidence allows us to explore whether aspirations are different for girls and boys, and what impact this has on their outcomes.

What Young Lives has found

Girls and boys and their parents had high aspirations at the start of adolescence, and aspirations matter

Among the most striking findings is that both girls and boys had high aspirations for their future. At the age of 12, between 75 per cent (Ethiopia) and 92 per cent (Peru) of the Older Cohort of young people aspired to vocational training or university. A high proportion of them expected to reach their goal (Dornan and Pells 2014).

Caregivers also had high hopes for both girls' and boys' education, and this influenced their children. Children's own aspirations at 15 were strongly linked to caregivers' aspirations for them at 12 (Dercon and Singh 2011).

Although many young people's aspirations are not fulfilled, they do matter. Aspirations shape young people's actions in the present and are affected by their current realities and relationships (Crivello 2015). In Ethiopia, early educational aspirations strongly predicted the number of years of schooling children would complete by the ages of 15 and 19 (Favara 2016).

There were differences in aspirations along gender and other lines

Young Lives evidence suggests that there is not a fundamental problem of low aspirations for girls or poor children. However, there is evidence of lower aspirations for girls' education in India and to a lesser extent in Ethiopia, and for the length of time boys spent in education in Vietnam.

Gender biases were first apparent in parental aspirations when children were 8. These were reflected in young people's own aspirations at 12, and were manifested in learning gaps between girls and boys at the age of 15. In India, where the bias against girls was greatest, there was greater gender bias in parents' aspirations than girls and boys showed in their own aspirations: in other words, Indian girls' aspirations exceeded those their parents had for them (Dercon and Singh 2011).

Nevertheless, gender was not always the most significant factor in shaping aspirations. For example, at the age of 15, the statistical effect of living in a rural area in Ethiopia on a child's educational aspirations was twice as great as the effect of being a girl (ibid.).

Aspirations vary according to a combination of gender and other factors. However, the evidence on whether gender differences are greater among young people from the poorest backgrounds is mixed. For example, analysis of the aspirations of 12-year-olds regarding the number of years they would attend school showed that there was no difference in male bias between richer and poorer households (ibid.). However – also in Ethiopia – male bias in children’s aspirations regarding study at university level was greatest among the poorest households, while within the richest households boys and girls had similar aspirations. When the children were 15, harsh economic conditions were more detrimental to girls’ capacity to aspire than to that of boys. Girls living in poor households, when all the other characteristics held constant, were 12 percentage points less likely to aspire to university than boys living in similar contexts. (Favara 2016)

Aspirations remained high, but changed in response to experience

In Ethiopia, parents and children revised their aspirations over time, adapting to external circumstances and social expectations, so that after the age of 15 the gender bias in aspirations in favour of boys was reversed (ibid.). In Peru and India some young people’s aspirations shifted during adolescence from university education to post-secondary vocational training, a more realistic goal and still a higher level of education/training than most of their parents experienced (Dornan and Pells 2014)

Policy implications

1. Since the educational aspirations of and for girls and boys are high, successful interventions are likely to be those which understand and address the real reasons why children and young people leave education early. Interventions which focus on individual motivation alone or provide incentives for particular kinds of behaviour in relation to education, are a priori less likely to be effective.
 2. Our finding that gender biases appeared first in parental aspirations (when children were 8), and were later reflected in children’s aspirations (at the age of 12) and then in learning gaps (at the age of 15) indicate that middle childhood and very early adolescence are key windows of opportunity for addressing early gender bias. Findings that aspirations shift over time in response to social expectations and young people’s experiences suggest that getting the transition from primary to secondary school right and supporting both girls and boys in their learning progress at the start of lower secondary school are important, given that this school transition often coincides with early adolescence. However, interventions for adolescents need to go hand in hand with action to tackle wider inequalities in the labour market, and with the promotion of women’s empowerment and leadership, which would signal the future value of investments in girls.
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4. Families, communities and decision-making

Background

There is considerable policy focus on the importance of empowering young people, with particular attention being paid to the role that adolescent girls in 'girl-led' development can play in challenging inequitable norms and in taking up new economic opportunities. This approach is believed to have particular benefits for meeting development objectives (Crivello et al. 2014).

Young Lives evidence can inform this debate by contributing evidence about the relationships between young people, their caregivers and the wider community, showing how young people's relationships affect decisions about their futures, and how gendered norms are reinforced or challenged. Our starting point is a view of empowerment as a process of change that increases people's ability to make strategic life choices. (Kabeer 1999).

What Young Lives has found

Family support was vital to young people, but was often limited by poverty and workloads

Families and communities have sometimes been portrayed as having a limited or negative role, and holding young people back. Young Lives findings highlight how important intergenerational and social ties were for young people, but also show how poverty limits caregivers' scope to provide support. Young people – particularly girls, but sometimes boys – described that they had learned 'not to ask' for things that were beyond their families' means (Crivello et al. 2014).

Phuoc and Quoc, both from Vietnam, provide examples of the difference family support can make to a child's trajectory. At the age of 19, Phuoc was studying at Da Nang University in Vietnam, despite the poverty his family experienced during his school years. His mother explained, "[S]o whatever was convenient, so that the children could study, that's the decision of the parents. Everything we do is for our children. I save everything for my children."

In contrast, Quoc's mother, from Van Tri, said she had been unable to pay much attention to her son's education. She explained,

"At that time we were in too poor condition, and we just tried our best to earn money, but didn't pay any interest to the children's education ... I was too busy at work place, so I forgot to pay attention to my son."

Quoc also had jobs in the household to do. When he failed his high school exams and refused to continue in education – a decision which he later regretted – his mother was not surprised).

Our findings also underline the vulnerability of adolescents who break away from family support and how this vulnerability is intensified by gender and age. Diana, from Rioja, a rural area in Peru, ran away at the age of 14 because she was pregnant and being maltreated by her brother. She was abused and eventually abandoned by her boyfriend and his mother, but could not leave and travel home because she was a minor. After her ex-partner temporarily kidnapped their son, she moved to Lima, living with her son and her cousin and undertaking insecure factory work.

Many young people lived with, or were supported by, their wider families and siblings

Many young people were growing up in extended families and some were brought up by cousins, aunts or grandparents. Siblings often played an important role in supporting young people.

Afework and his older brother Bekele have been brought up by their cousin in a densely populated area of Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, since Afework's mother died when he was 7. Afework had a scholarship to go to a private school because he was an orphan and was supported by his sister who was working in the Middle East.

Many young people moved away from home – often to stay with relatives or to board in hostels – in search of a better secondary education (Boyden 2013). Sibling networks were vital for young people wishing to migrate to the cities for school and work (Crivello 2015) and so was wider family support. Maria from Rioja in Peru trained to be a nurse in the city. Her aunt provided her with food and a place to stay. Maria thought that otherwise her father would not have agreed to pay the tuition fees.

In contexts of limited resources, caregivers' decisions were sometimes influenced by gendered norms and risks

Eva is from Andahuaylas, a rural area of Peru. She was always a good student. Her family supported her brother through three failed applications to the police academy before he succeeded, but they refused to pay for Eva's entrance exam to the university. She worked for a year to contribute to the family income. Eventually she found that the exam for admission to a private higher technical institute was free, and passed it after studying on her own in her spare time. When she began her course, her parents provided some support, and Eva worked as a maid and a nanny to supplement their contribution).

Luis' mother felt that young men in Peru who worked in the fields were at risk of developing alcoholism, like Luis' father. She sent Luis to Lima, where, with the help of his elder brother, he found a steady job. In Peru, many parents, especially those in urban areas, tried to shelter their sons from alcohol, drugs and gangs by restricting their access to money for as long as possible.

In India, early marriage was seen as a response to the risks faced by unmarried post-pubertal girls. A mother in rural India put it like this: "When the girl becomes disobedient, they say that they have to get her married off at some point, so why not marry her off now? ... There are many such reasons for an early marriage."

Young people felt a strong sense of obligation to their families

Subbaiah left school in India after failing his Grade 10 exams. He spoke about his regret:

"I knew how well my parents brought me up, but I didn't live up to their expectations, so I felt bad" and described how his mother told him her problems: "I feel very sad. I feel I have to take care of her well. ... I will see to it that she never faces any problems."

Long worked at a leather factory in Vietnam and lived in the workers' compound. With both her parents ill and a disabled brother, Long considered herself the household's most capable worker. She worked six days a week, returning home on Sundays to help her mother on their farm. She gave most of her earnings to her mother.

Young people also acted independently to direct their own future, sometimes with support from local organisations

Mesih, from Zeytuni in Ethiopia, joined school late because of work and then left after Grade 1 because of illness. But he rejoined four years later, living in a nearby town with his older sister. Although regarded by some in his community as disobedient, he was encouraged by his parents, who provided him with educational materials. He worked hard and was first in his class by Grade 11.

In India, Sarada's family had fallen heavily into debt. Sarada and her siblings were taken out of school and sent to work in the cotton fields. But Sarada became ill because her disability meant the work was too much for her. With the support of the self-help group for disabled people, her schoolteachers and her friend, Sarada lodged a complaint with the labour inspector against her parents and the landowner. As a result she was withdrawn from the work, although her younger sister and older brother continued working on the cotton farm to clear the debt.

There were some differences between girls' and boys' sense of agency

In its surveys, in order to measure children and young people's 'self-efficacy' or agency, Young Lives asks them whether they feel they can achieve what they hope for. In India and Ethiopia, 15-year-old boys reported a greater sense of self-efficacy than 15-year-old girls. Girls reported slightly greater self-efficacy than boys in Vietnam, and there was no apparent difference in Peru. Gender differences in young people's self-efficacy were associated with a gender bias in parental aspirations, though not with the household's wealth.

More generally, Young Lives findings throughout this report show how gendered norms circumscribe expectations about education, work, marriage and parenthood during adolescence. These expectations change with age, and vary according to the kind of decision involved. For example, Sarada (described above) had surmounted many barriers to continue her education, and would have preferred to remain single, but still said "I would marry whom my parents select".

Both young people and their parents report that these norms are changing. Seble's mother, in Ethiopia, spoke about changes in the way that marriages take place:

"A woman has the right to choose her partner, unlike in older times. In those days when I was a child, young men dominated women and they could not exercise their rights. But today, there is mutual agreement and respect between partners."

At the age of 15, girls in three out of the four Young Lives countries (Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam) had lower trust in members of their immediate society than boys, possibly reflecting personal, parental and community values and fears related to girls reaching marriageable age (Dercon and Singh 2011). Young Lives evidence on bullying (see Section 5) shows how violence can be used by peers as well as adults to reinforce and control gendered identities (Pells et al. forthcoming, 2016).

Policy implications

1. As the differences between countries and rural/urban locations make clear, there can be no single way to empower adolescent girls and boys. Young people weigh up their decisions within the context of their relationships, obligations and changing household and societal circumstances (Crivello et al. 2014). Across all settings, interventions need to recognise both the inter-generational bonds that link young people to their caregivers, families and communities, and the contexts of poverty and disadvantage which are disempowering both to young people and their caregivers.
2. There are risks for girls and boys – particularly those from the poorest backgrounds – who challenge social and gender norms. They may risk intergenerational conflict, and many of the young people who did pursue unusual paths were those who had the backing of their caregivers. In some cases, local self-help organisations or support programmes played an important role in nurturing young people's agency and ambition.

5. Interpersonal violence during adolescence

Background

Violence against women and girls has become a visible and important element of the development policy agenda over the past decade. At the same time, the impact of violence on children's development in the short and long term has received greater policy attention in the Global Goals, and in high-profile initiatives such as UNICEF's End Violence campaign and the Know Violence in Childhood Global Learning Initiative.⁴

The risks of violence change over the course of childhood: violence during early childhood has particularly profound consequences, while during adolescence, young people can be exposed to violence in many forms and in different settings (UNICEF 2014). However, data and research into adolescents' experiences of violence in low- and middle-income countries are limited. Surveys on violence against women and girls tend to collect data on girls/women over 15 years old, while surveys on violence against children focus on younger children, with little data available on 10- to 15-year-olds. Specific practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) have received significant attention but much less is known about other aspects of adolescents' experience such as violence in informal non-cohabiting relationships (Guedes et al. 2016).

While Young Lives is not a specialist study of violence, it provides valuable insights into children's experience of violence, and its longitudinal design allows us to explore children's vulnerability to violence as well as the consequences of violence later in childhood and during adolescence.⁵ In addition, specific data on corporal punishment and bullying have been collected at particular survey points, and analysed with support from the UNICEF Office of Research as a contribution to UNICEF's *Multi Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children*⁶ (see Jones and Pells 2016; Pells et al. forthcoming, 2016).

What Young Lives has found

Bullying by peers is common and is associated with a range of negative effects

Exploratory analysis carried out by Young Lives (Pells et al. forthcoming, 2016) found that 15-year-olds across all four countries experienced bullying, defined as the systematic abuse of power (Rigby 2002) involving the repeated infliction of negative actions intended to cause harm or discomfort, over time.

⁴ <http://www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org/>

⁵ We do not have data on children as perpetrators of violence, or systematic data on children's experience of sexual harassment and abuse, or sexual violence.

⁶ See www.unicef-irc.org/research/260

Table 1. Experience of bullying of 15-year-olds in Young Lives study countries (2009)

		Ethiopia	India	Peru	Vietnam
		%	%	%	%
Physical bullying	Yes	5.4%	22.4%	8.2%	7.0%
Verbal bullying	Yes	14.2%	26.5%	33.8%	20.3%
Indirect bullying	Yes	15.0%	28.1%	31.9%	27.4%
Attacks on property	Yes	10.5%	27.2%	31.9%	9.0%
Number of observations		971	958	631	960

Source: Pells et al. (forthcoming, 2016).

Verbal bullying and indirect bullying such as social exclusion and humiliation were particularly common. Experiences of bullying were shaped by gender, background and whether adolescents were attending school. Girls were more likely to say they had experienced indirect bullying and boys were more likely to report being bullied physically or verbally. Young people from a poorer background were consistently more likely to be bullied in India, and in Vietnam certain types of bullying were more common (physical bullying, social exclusion and attacks on property). Young people who didn't attend school were more likely than those attending school to be bullied verbally in Ethiopia, India and Vietnam, physically in Ethiopia and Vietnam and indirectly in India and Vietnam.

Bullying at the age of 15 was associated with a range of negative effects on self-efficacy, self-esteem, peer and parental relations at the age of 19. All types of bullying – not just physical bullying – had negative effects on psychosocial outcomes. Qualitative research found that young people who were bullied reported finding it difficult to seek help from peers, teachers and parents, often fearing retribution (Pells et al. forthcoming, 2016). In other work, Young Lives has found that young people from the poorest quintile were more likely to report feelings of shame – notably in Vietnam, Peru and India (Dornan and Ogando Portela forthcoming).

In Peru, discussions with groups of boys highlighted how they became 'used to' violence, as well as the importance of hiding pain in front of peers, and how peer violence and bullying was used to reinforce the masculine and authoritarian system of discipline of the school (Rojas 2011).

Girls, particularly in India and Ethiopia, talked about the impact that boys' bullying had on their learning. Haftey, from Ethiopia, was harassed on her way to school when she was 12. She said, "We cannot study because we always worry about the boys' threat. We are frightened always."

Corporal punishment is highly prevalent in schools although it declines as children get older

Corporal punishment in schools is now prohibited by law in India, Vietnam and Ethiopia and a new law in 2015 outlawed physical and humiliating punishment in all settings in Peru. The reported use of corporal punishment did decline with age: the incidence of corporal punishment when children were 8 was more than double the rate reported by 15-year-olds, in all four countries. Analysis by Young Lives has shown that corporal punishment at the age of 8 was more commonly experienced by boys and children from disadvantaged backgrounds and was associated with poorer cognitive outcomes at the age of 12 (Jones and Pells 2016).

Qualitative research from India, for example, suggests that physical punishment tends to be regarded as inappropriate for older girls (Singh and Morrow 2015). It is important to note that girls are often perceived to be at greater risk of other forms of humiliating treatment as well as sexual violence. This in turn, contributed to worries about girls' mobility and resulted in restricted access to education and work.

In Peru, boys described how their resentment grew after years of violent discipline at school:

Felipe: At the end of the school year, the fifth-year students say goodbye to the assistant [teacher] they hate the most.

Interviewer: How?

Felipe: They beat him up.

Interviewer: Do they?

Felipe: They leave his face, his eyes all bruised.

Interviewer: Do you want to do that when you finish fifth grade?

Felipe: Yes.

Violence within the home is a reality for many adolescents

At 15, over a third of girls and a quarter of boys in Peru and 11 per cent of girls and 15 per cent of boys in Vietnam reported being physically hurt by a family member. Children also frequently witnessed violence between their parents. While young children reported hiding or running away, adolescents often tried to intervene in some way: adolescent boys in Vietnam described directly intervening to try and protect their mothers from abuse, whereas adolescent girls tried to support their mothers indirectly, for example by earning money and giving it to them. Few adult women had access to support services to address violence and many relied on informal support, including from their children (Pells and Woodhead 2014; Pells et al. 2015).

Policy implications

Young Lives found that violence was very common in children's and adolescents' lives. Adolescents experienced several different forms of violence in different environments, and their vulnerability was shaped by age, gender, poverty and social disadvantage. Girls were perceived to be vulnerable to sexual harassment, and some found their mobility and opportunities restricted as a result. Boys were significantly more likely to experience corporal punishment and physical bullying in a way which reinforced gender stereotypes and notions of violent masculinities.

1. Adolescence offers an important opportunity to work with boys and girls, families and communities to break cycles of violence, including those based on gendered identities. *Urgent action to reduce violence affecting children in schools* is therefore required if girls and boys are to enjoy a safe adolescence and develop respectful healthy relationships as adults. Schools are the obvious starting point for promoting an agenda of non-violence and respect and for providing information about rights and support services. However, addressing the current prevalence of violence and bullying in schools entails going beyond prohibition to making practical changes at school level – effective governance, child-centred reporting and support systems, and training and guidance for teachers – backed up by system-wide policies on violence and bullying across education systems, and by resources and employment policies (for example, ensuring that the use of corporal punishment constitutes misconduct and leads to disciplinary action) (Jones and Pells 2016, and for examples of initiatives see Devries et al. 2015).
 2. Evidence from wider research, of the shared risk factors and frequent co-occurrence of violence against women and against children, and of the intergenerational effects of child maltreatment (Guedes et al. 2016), suggests that interventions need to go beyond schools, and address other forms of violence – including in the home and in adolescent intimate relationships. This would include working with caregivers and the community and identifying practical routes for breaking the intergenerational transmission of violence. Social protection programmes offer an example of a potential entry point for addressing violence: a current collaboration between the UNICEF Office of Research and the Know Violence in Childhood Initiative is exploring the potential of social protection to reduce violence affecting children (UNICEF Office of Research 2016).
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6. Education

Background

Globally, there has been impressive progress towards achieving universal schooling. Almost every child enrolls in formal schooling at some point and the majority complete primary education. However, many young people leave school without the competencies they will need as adults. Attention is needed, to ensure that the most disadvantaged children can stay in school, that all children they make good progress in their learning, and that the skills they are taught are useful to them (RISE 2015).

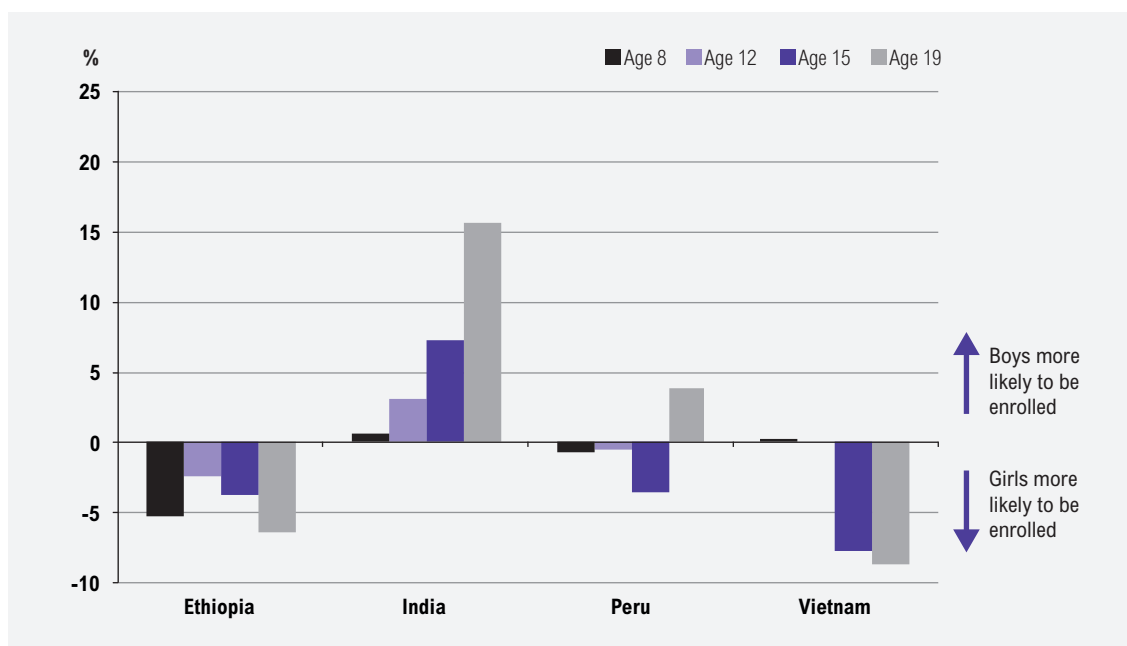
Between, 2000 and 2015 the gap between girls' and boys' enrolment at primary and secondary school narrowed. These overall gains mask variations between countries and at different ages. Overall, gender disparities in secondary school attendance are diminishing but can be significant, while on aggregate, boys are more likely than girls to leave upper secondary school early. Early marriage, pregnancy and gender-based violence are persistent barriers to girls' continuing at school, whereas boys (and some girls) may leave education early to work. Globally, more women than men were enrolled worldwide in higher education institutions in 2012, but men outnumber women in sub-Saharan Africa and south/west Asia (UNESCO 2015).

Young Lives household survey data on enrolment and learning outcomes at the ages of 8, 12, 15 and 19 years, are complemented by a wealth of qualitative research exploring girls', boys' and families' experiences of schooling and tertiary education. From 2017, data from secondary school surveys (building on previous primary school surveys) in Vietnam, Ethiopia and India will allow us to explore and explain school effectiveness and children's learning progress at secondary school.

What Young Lives has found

Nearly all children were enrolled in school at the start of adolescence, but the rate declined after that

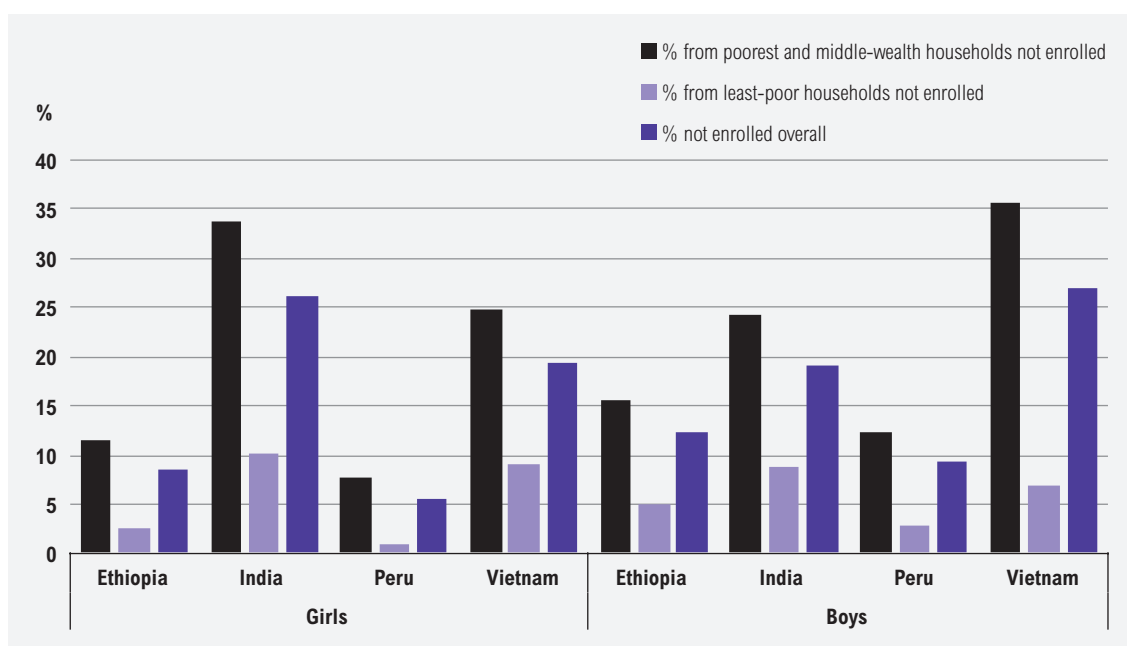
When each cohort of children was 12 years old (in 2006 and 2013), nearly all children were enrolled in school in all four study countries (except among the Older Cohort in India). Between 12 and 19 years of age, gaps between the numbers of girls and boys in school widened and there were differences between the proportions of girls and boys who completed their education. There were different patterns across the countries, with girls more likely than boys to be in school in Vietnam and Ethiopia, less likely to be enrolled in India, and with a mixed picture in Peru.

Figure 1. Difference between girls' and boys' enrolment at the ages of 12, 15 and 19 years

Source: Young Lives data from Rounds 1 to 4.

In every country, differences by poverty and across the rural–urban divide were larger than those by gender. For example, in India, where pro-boy bias was greatest, 77 per cent of boys and 66 per cent of girls completed school. However, the gap between completion by children from the least-poor third of households (86 per cent) and poorest third of households (60 per cent) was even greater (Singh and Mukherjee 2016).

Combining gender and socio-economic background reveals complex patterns. In Peru by the age of 19, the poorest third of young women were least likely to be in education, but the least-poor third of young women were actually more likely to be enrolled than the least-poor third of young men (Dornan and Pells 2014).

Figure 2. Who is out of school at the age of 15?

Source: Young Lives data, Round 3.

Boys and girls had different reasons for leaving school

The reasons boys and girls left school sometimes differed. While 21 per cent of boys who had left school in India report having done so to do paid work, 30 per cent of boys reported a problem connected with the school, and 11 per cent had been excluded (for prolonged absence or bad behaviour). Girls more commonly reported that they had left school to work, either because they were needed at home (19 per cent) and or because they needed to earn money (12 per cent) (Morrow 2013b). Qualitative research highlights young people's experiences of conflict at school, inflexible school days which clash with children's work obligations, and poor sanitation, which may disrupt girls' attendance particularly during menstruation.

"We do not have bathrooms there. They have started but the construction is not yet completed and I don't like that aspect in the school. It is very difficult, particularly [for] girls, and those who come from neighbouring villages. During the monthly cycles it is more difficult, so some girls don't come to school on those days."

Rural girl, aged 15, Andhra Pradesh⁷

Gemechu, from Leki in Ethiopia, started school when he was 7 and hoped eventually to be a teacher, but lack of educational materials, conflict with his teacher, and his work herding cattle meant he only attended sporadically. When he was 13, his family insisted he leave school to earn income as a guard. He rejoined school, first close to home, and then in a different area where he was staying with his aunt, but faced problems. He experienced continual conflict with his teacher: "When I was fishing, I was not arriving at school on time. Because of that he sent me out of the class picking me from my classmates, and he said 'Go back to your home.'" Finally, after becoming ill and returning home, he left school entirely. Gemechu's experience shows how both poverty and the quality of the school experience impact on retention, but it also demonstrates the role of gender norms: as a boy Gemechu was expected to contribute financially to the household, and his experience of conflict and confrontation with teachers echoes the accounts of other boys in the Young Lives study.

⁷ India's Right to Education Act 2009 includes provision for separate toilet facilities for girls and boys, and a construction programme has been implemented to meet the requirements of the Act.

Box 3. Staying in and leaving secondary education in India

In India, boys were more likely to complete secondary school than girls. Children from the poorest households and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, those children whose parents had little or no education and those with many older siblings were less likely than others to complete secondary school (Singh and Mukherjee 2016).

Qualitative research highlights how social norms, threats to girls' and young women's safety and reputation, and the lack of job opportunities for young women led many girls to leave school:

"[E]ven if she were educated it is still not possible to get a job ... so what's the point in getting schooled?"

(Rural mother, India)

"[P]eople would be apprehensive ... they would say that educated girls didn't know how to work manually. With this excuse they would demand 50,000 rupees as a dowry."

(Rural mother, India)

Interviewer: OK, but why did you stop studying?

Thulasi: I became mature ... people at home were scared to send me back to school. That's why I had to discontinue.

Interviewer: Do people still stop mature girls from going to school?

Thulasi: No, not as much as before. They just keep it a secret and send them to school ... There are also people who study till they are 16, but the village here follows a lot of sentiments [customs] and moreover, there is a lot of eve-teasing [sexual harassment]. The girls discontinue because they know that they have to get married and have to go to another house.

Gender gaps in learning outcomes opened up in early adolescence

Gender gaps in learning followed a broadly similar pattern to those in enrolment. There were no gender gaps in children's maths and receptive vocabulary scores at the age of 5: these gaps emerged later, widening particularly between the ages of 12 and 15, and then largely persisted until early adulthood. Gaps typically favour boys in Ethiopia, India and Peru, and girls in Vietnam. These gaps can be partly explained by differences in investment, time use and school-level factors, although not entirely (Singh and Krutikova 2016). Gender gaps in learning outcomes are associated with differences in girls' and boys' aspirations, and these in turn are linked with gender bias in parental aspirations during middle childhood (Dercon and Singh 2011).

Poverty, location and ethnicity, as well as gender, influenced outcomes during childhood and adolescence

Gender is central to understanding learning trajectories, but Young Lives evidence shows that gender inequalities are specific to context and need to be considered in conjunction with poverty, location and ethnicity. From their earliest years, children from rural and poorer households were at greater risk of stunting and low levels of learning, with the effects of

disadvantage accumulating as time went on (Dornan and Woodhead 2015). During middle childhood, the quality of schooling played an important role in children's learning progress: in Vietnam, equitable and high-quality schooling acted to narrow inequalities in children's learning (Rolleston et al. 2014).

There were stark differences between countries in the progress adolescents made at school

Learning progress varied between different countries. A large part of this variation can be explained by how effective schools were at teaching. Between the ages of 12 and 15 years, disadvantaged pupils in Ethiopia and India made little progress. By the age of 15, Vietnamese and Peruvian pupils were achieving maths scores twice as high as pupils in India and Ethiopia. Vietnam has achieved learning outcomes which are higher than those in many OECD countries, in part through a strong focus on minimum standards and attention to equity between and within schools (Rolleston et al. 2014). These differences point to the potential as well as the urgent need for school systems which can support adolescent girls and boys from all backgrounds to make good progress in their learning.

Learning outcomes appear to be declining in India and Ethiopia

In Ethiopia and India, Young Lives data showed a decline in the maths scores of 12-year-olds between 2006 and 2013, with particularly large falls in Ethiopia for the poorest pupils and pupils from rural areas and in India for the poorest pupils and those attending government schools. In Peru, there were overall improvements in scores, but growing inequality, with the poorest pupils and non-Spanish-speaking 12-year-olds making smaller gains than other students. In Vietnam, better learning outcomes were combined with greater equality: 12-year-olds in 2013 had better maths scores than those seven years previously, with the biggest gains seen among poorest and ethnic minority pupils (Rolleston 2016).

Many young people face difficult trade-offs between school and other options

As young people near adulthood, they and their families weigh up the costs and benefits of remaining in school, taking into account future opportunities, current costs, social norms and children's successes and experience at school, which tend to be different for girls and boys.

Many young people stayed in education, and at the age of 19, between 45 per cent (Peru) and 59 per cent (Ethiopia) were in some form of education, often combined with work. However, many had made slow progress. Some young people, especially boys, repeated grades, which meant that they were much older than their classmates. In India, of the 49 per cent of 19-year-olds still in education, one in five had not completed secondary school. In Ethiopia, of the 59 per cent of 19-year-olds still being educated (who would normally have been expected to have reached Grade 12), one in five had not reached Grade 8.

Where young people did not make the progress expected, they faced hard choices. Poor performance in tests at the age of 12 was a key risk factor for not being in school at the age of 15 (Dornan and Woodhead 2015). Faced with failure in key exams – such as the Grade 10 national exams in India and Ethiopia – poorer students were often unable to continue with their schooling.

Family decisions about investment in education in India are gendered

In Peru, Vietnam and Ethiopia, there were no significant gender-based differences in the money families spent on school fees and extra tuition. In India, parents typically spent more on schooling for boys than girls, and this gap increased with age (Himaz 2009; Pells 2011a). As private schools have expanded into poorer and rural areas, gender gaps have opened up, as less-advantaged households make choices about their limited resources and enrol boys in private schools, with girls increasingly concentrated in government schools (Woodhead et al. 2012), although Young Lives has found little evidence that private schools provide a better education.

Wealth – and to a lesser degree, gender – affects access to post-secondary education

By the age of 19, a significant number of the Young Lives Older Cohort had progressed to post-secondary education. There were gaps in enrolment favouring young men in India, and young women in Vietnam: these gaps were larger in rural areas and among poorer families.

Table 2. Percentage of young women and men in post-secondary education at age 19

	India		Peru		Vietnam	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Enrolled in post-secondary education	44%	36%	42%	36%	32%	41%

Note: In Ethiopia, a substantial proportion of the sample were still in secondary education at 19, and so are not included here.
Source: Young Lives data, Round 4.

Wealth played a role: young people from the least-poor third of households in the Young Lives sample were more likely to be enrolled in post-secondary education than those from the poorest third: by 21 per cent in India; 18 per cent in Peru and 16 per cent in Vietnam. Household wealth appeared to matter for access to higher education even once the relationship between wealth, aspirations and investments in children in the earlier years of their lives had been taken into account (Sanchez and Singh 2016).

Some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds lacked information about the opportunities available to them

For young women this lack of guidance could be particularly limiting. For example, Natalia studied nursing, one of only five courses available at the public technical institute in Rioja in Peru. Her older sister had studied nursing and she was expected to do the same. Lien from Vietnam decided to study social work, influenced by the advice of a visiting careers advisor.

“He went to my school and talked about many fields, but he said the girls should do social work ... I could take care of the elderly or children, work at the ward or companies that need social workers ... I didn’t know so much. I heard about it and I just chose it.”

Neither Natalia or Lien had easy access to other sources of advice, which could have opened up alternative, less stereotypical career choices.

Policy implications

Despite the high aspirations many young people and their parents have for education, many are not able to stay at school, make the progress they should, or go on to tertiary education.

1. The most striking differences in adolescents' learning are those between – not within – countries. Equitable, high-quality schooling systems such as Vietnam's are central to ensuring girls and boys from all backgrounds make good progress. In order to reverse declining learning levels such as those identified in Ethiopia and India, rapid improvements in educational systems, focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning and attaining equitable outcomes, are urgently needed. This would also help to reduce the number of young people who leave school abruptly after failing national exams.
2. Young Lives evidence demonstrates the need for *evidence-based and context-specific approaches to addressing inequalities* in enrolment and learning. Although adolescents from poorer and rural backgrounds do worse in all four countries, gender inequalities do not always favour boys. Children from ethnic minority (Vietnam) and non-Spanish-speaking households (Peru) are also disadvantaged.
3. Our evidence shows that many factors are taken into account when families and children make decisions about staying at school during adolescence. They consider costs, the quality of learning, achievement so far, and children's safety, dignity and well-being at school, as well as future opportunities and current demands on the child's time. Gender is central to these decisions. *Free, effective education, shifts where needed, good sanitation, an absence of violence and bullying and the opportunity for pupils to rejoin school* after illness, pregnancy, or time out for work, could all help to relieve the pressures that keep girls and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds out of school.
4. More and more young people are in school for longer. In general, there is potential for much greater synergy between education and youth policies – for example by building on the potential for *schools to play a much greater role in meeting the diverse needs of adolescent girls and boys*, for example by providing advice on health, careers, and nutrition, information about relationships, sexual and reproductive health and mental health, and as a place where discriminatory norms and violence are challenged.
5. Emerging market economies need to make the most of their 'youth dividend', through *accessible post-secondary education systems* and vocational training which enable young people to acquire skills for economic and social progress. Young Lives findings that poverty and rurality are barriers to young people suggests that tertiary education systems need to do more to attract disadvantaged students, and financing arrangements are required which enable young people from poorer families to pursue post-secondary education.
6. Young women and men from disadvantaged backgrounds face serious information barriers when they need to make decisions about studying, training or work, and often have to rely on social connections. While good information and advice services are resource-intensive, they have an important part to play in developing economies by supporting social mobility, and encouraging young women and men to think beyond gender-stereotypical study and career choices.

7. Young people's work and transitions to the labour market

Background

This section brings Young Lives evidence to bear on several linked areas of policy interest: children's work in low-income countries, adolescent girls' domestic and care work burdens, and youth employment.

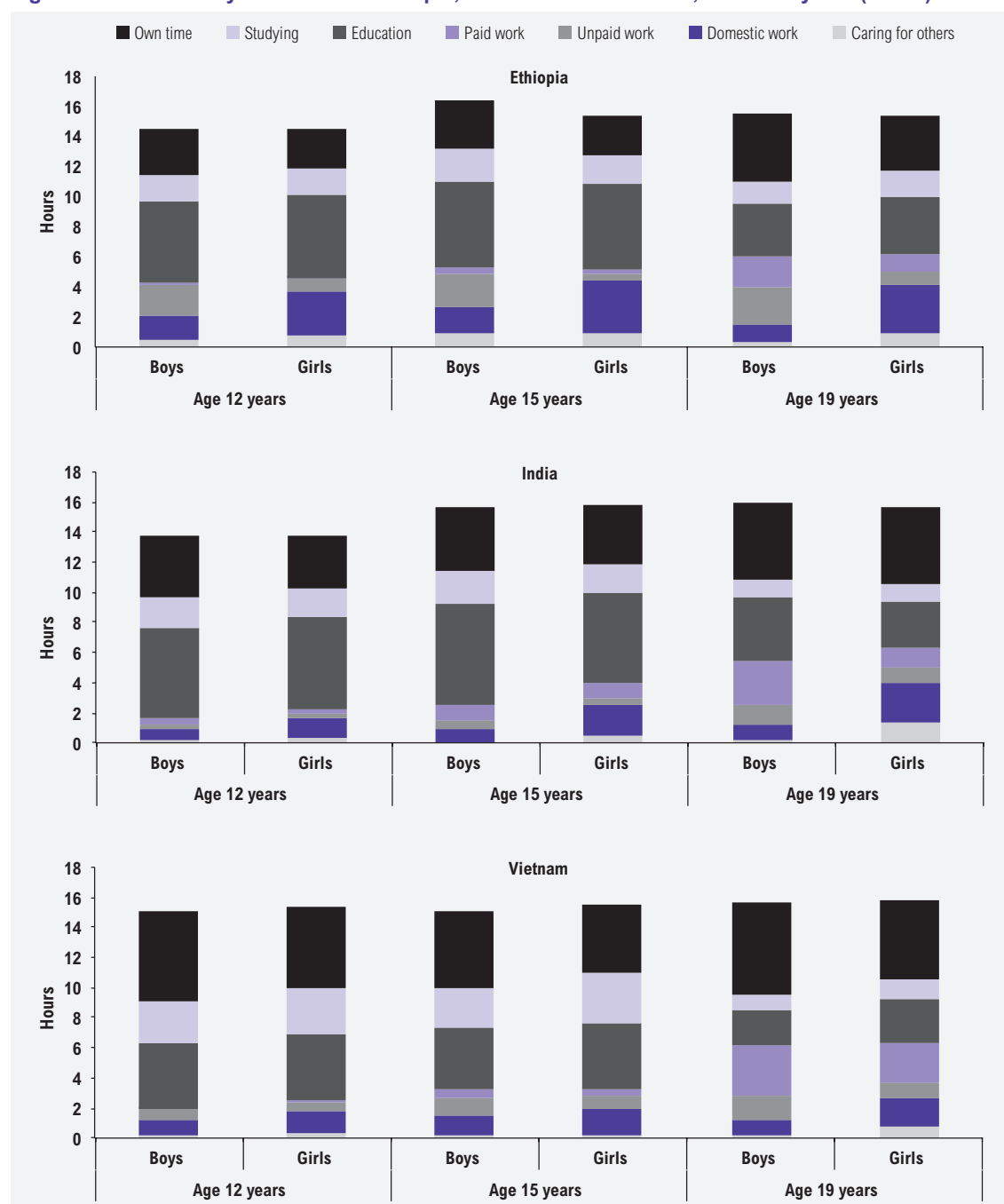
- Children's work in low-income countries – its benefits, hazards and relationship to schooling – has long been a subject of debate (Bourdillon et al. 2010).
- Adolescent girls' domestic and care work burdens have received attention as part of wider concerns about gender inequalities in the care economy (Chopra and Sweetman 2014). This is linked to a focus on women's and girls' economic empowerment (UN Women 2015; UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment 2016).
- Youth employment is a major area of policy concern. Around a third of young people are not in employment, education or training. Young women face particular barriers to finding employment or secure livelihoods. A billion young people will enter the job market over the next decade, the vast majority in developing and emerging economies, and fragile states. There is considerable policy interest in finding ways to support full and productive employment and decent work for young women and men (S4YE 2015).

From the start, Young Lives has collected information about girls' and boys' time use and about the benefits, risks and consequences of children's paid and unpaid work. Many girls and boys were doing unpaid work by the age of 8, and some were undertaking paid work. By the age of 19, a minority of young people had left education and were working 'full time'. From 2017, Young Lives will be in a position to provide a more complete picture of young women and men's work and employment activities.

What Young Lives has found

There were gender differences in children's paid and unpaid work at the ages of 8 and these become more marked from the age of 12 onwards

As Figure 3 shows, there were gender differences in children's paid and unpaid work at the age of 8, and these become more marked from the age of 12. There are signs that children's work is changing, but in complex ways. In many contexts where families faced economic hardship, the whole family were expected to contribute their labour. Far from starting work after the completion of their education, many children began paid and unpaid work before the age of 10. On average, girls and boys carried out different tasks and spent different amounts of time on common tasks. Gender roles in childhood were relatively flexible, but gender-based differences were generally more marked from early adolescence onwards.

Figure 3. Girls' and boys' time use in Ethiopia, India and Vietnam at 12, 15 and 19 years (hours)

Note: Data from Peru are not included here as there is some double-counting at age 15.

Source: Young Lives data from Rounds 2, 3 and 4.

Whether girls and boys did the same amount of work in total varied from country to country. In Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam for example, the total amount of paid and unpaid work undertaken by girls and boys was broadly similar, whereas in India girls did more work overall than boys (Pells 2011a).

In Ethiopia (Boyden et al. 2016), comparison of the two Young Lives cohorts (born in 1994/5 and 2000/1) shows that – at the age of 12 years – the younger group were doing fewer chores and caring work than the older group, with a slight narrowing of the gap between girls and boys. While the amount of paid work undertaken by urban children and girls had declined, the younger rural boys were still spending the same number of hours on paid activities as the older boys had been seven or eight years previously.

Gender divisions of labour are not absolute, but do become more fixed as time goes on

Girls and boys across all the study countries undertook a mix of household chores and caring work, paid and unpaid work, and schooling and studying. However, girls were directed towards household and caring roles, while boys concentrated more on paid work, farming (for example herding) and other enterprises. For example, Young Lives data from Ethiopia showed that at the age of 12 in 2006 on average across the 20 sites, Older Cohort girls were twice as long as boys on domestic and caring work per day (1.8 hours for boys compared to 3.6 for girls). By the time they were 19 in 2013 the boys were spending fewer hours on domestic and caring work (1.5 hours), whereas the girls were working in the house for more than four hours per day (4.1 hours) (Pankhurst et al. 2016a).

Boys saw household work as something for girls. The mother of 12-year old Dibaba, in Ethiopia, reported that her son had said, “Why is it only me who should care for the baby? Do you think that I am a girl? You should recognise I am a boy. Let the girls carry the children.”

Family structure and birth order as well as gender made a difference to adolescents’ work and to how girls and boys were affected by economic changes

In Ethiopia, Young Lives has found that older sisters work almost an hour a day more than their younger sisters, but older brothers do not work longer than younger ones. Oldest girls also work longer hours than boys, including oldest boys. In households where no men or boys were present, girls sometimes took on boys’ tasks, such as herding. Younger boys without sisters, or whose sisters had married or moved away, were expected to take on ‘female tasks’ (Heissler and Porter 2013).

Social protection schemes in Ethiopia and India – although important for reducing economic poverty and vulnerability – were shown to have increased adolescent girls’ workloads and significantly reduced their time for study and leisure (Camfield 2014). There were a number of examples from Young Lives qualitative data of girls’ increased unpaid work freeing up mothers to do more paid work outside the home. However, when mothers worked outside the home girls sometimes left school to look after siblings.

Analysis of Young Lives data from India shows that loss of crops through pests, fire, or theft or natural disasters resulted, on average, in a three-hour increase in the amount of work girls living in rural households did per week, with only a very small and statistically insignificant effect on boys’ work (Krutikova 2009).

The severe drought in Andhra Pradesh in 2002/3 had complex effects on the workloads of 11–12 year olds. With less farm work to do, eldest sons in irrigation-farming households reduced the number of hours they worked and spent more time in school. All other children in the households were more likely to leave school, and girls increased their workloads (Galab and Outes-Leon 2011).

The impact of older girls’ and boys’ work on schooling was complex and context-specific

Young people’s work sometimes facilitated their schooling by enabling them to meet the costs of uniforms, equipment and transport. However, some kinds of work were harder than others to combine with schooling, and there are a number of examples in the Young Lives study of girls and boys who left school (temporarily or permanently) as a result of the need to undertake paid or seasonal agricultural work.

Adolescent girls' household responsibilities did not diminish when they went to school or took on paid work (Pankhurst et al. 2016a). Household chores and activities were generally easier to combine with schooling than paid jobs because they tended to be more flexible. However, Young Lives research with younger children found that some chores that were generally done by girls – such as cooking – could not be easily stopped and started, and girls reported that it was difficult to study at home because they could be called on to do chores at any time (Orkin 2011). On average, girls in the four countries spent less time on home study than boys.

Adolescent girls' and boys' work was valued

Adolescents described the social benefits of their work, the benefits for their family members, and the material benefits. They appreciated the praise that they gained from working well and were proud to contribute to their households (Pankhurst et al. 2016a)

Caregivers also described learning domestic skills as being important for girls because it helped to ensure a successful marriage. This was often regarded by families in contexts of poverty and economic vulnerability as an important strategy for protecting their daughters.

At 19, a significant minority of young people were 'only working' or 'working full time'

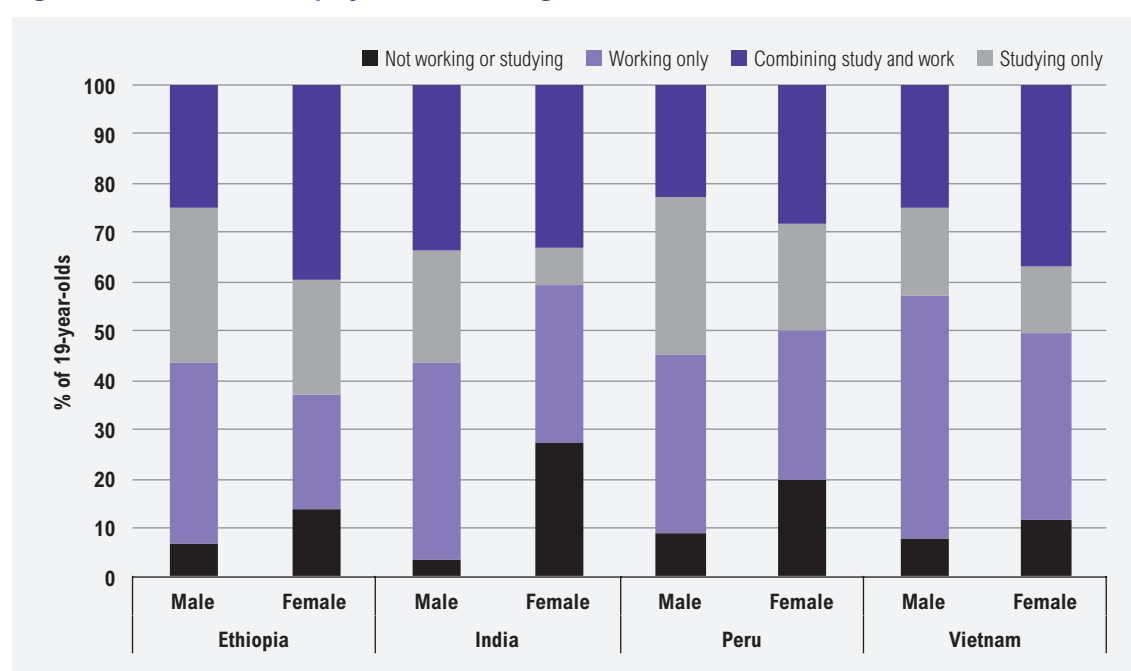
Young Lives collected data on whether 19-year-olds were in education, working, married, some combination of the three, or none.

A minority of young people reported that they were 'only working' or 'working full time' as well as 'married and working' – ranging from 30 per cent in Ethiopia (where many young people were still at school) to 36 per cent in India, 39 per cent in Peru, and 43 per cent in Vietnam. In all countries, these were more likely to be male, from a rural area, and from a poorer household.

Because of the high percentage of young women married by 19, young women were more likely to be either married and working, or married and not working.

Many young people were engaged in insecure and marginal work

Figure 4. Education and employment status at age 19



Source: Young Lives data, Round 4.

As Figure 4 shows, the types of work the young people did at the age of 19 varied across the four study countries, with many young people working in agriculture in India and Ethiopia and many reporting they were engaged in insecure or marginal work. In Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam, a higher proportion of the young men in work were working in agriculture at 19 years old than the young women. In India, a higher proportion of the young women in work were working in agriculture than the young men.

In Peru, among the 19-year-olds who had had a job in the previous 12 months, most were involved in non-agricultural activities (74 per cent) and 21 per cent worked in a family business. Only 14 per cent reported having a written contract with their employer, and very few received formal labour benefits such as health insurance or access to social security.

Many young people relied on connections to find a job

In rural Peru, Manuel had help from his girlfriend's family to get a job as a construction supervisor, enabling him to leave behind poorly paid and insecure agricultural work. In Vietnam, young people talked about the need to use family and informal connections to find a job. Quang's aunt helped him get an interview for his first job, with a Japanese company specialising in producing fishing rods. "Without the connections, then they may take in the applications and just leave them there, they would keep us waiting for a long time."

The patterns of local economic development had a direct impact on opportunities for young people

Young men in Ethiopia described their frustration at the lack of opportunities available to them, even in some urban areas with apparently rapid rates of development. Young men in an urban district of Addis Ababa where rapid development had not been accompanied by economic opportunities reported a real sense of hopelessness, whereas young men from rural areas where agricultural development and irrigation were taking place were more positive (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016).

Gender norms shaped why young people worked and the work they did

Young men talked about how their obligations to their families led to them leaving school and taking on paid work.

- In India, young men worked to earn money to pay debts incurred through ill health in the family or dowry, or to support the family after the death of a breadwinner. Although girls and young women in India did leave school for work, this was largely in the form of unpaid domestic or agricultural work. Young women's work in the home is generally undervalued, and they themselves did not see it as working in a formal sense (Vennam et al. 2016).
- In Peru, young men from rural areas who had begun agricultural work at the age of 7 or 8, described how by the age of 15 their skills and physical strength meant that they could make a contribution to the household economy (Rojas et al. 2016).

The type of work that young people did was also gendered – occasionally by direct exclusion (young men in Vietnam not in tertiary education are subject to compulsory military service) but often by norms and advice from adults about suitable roles for young women. In Vietnam, both genders were involved in manufacturing and agriculture, but young men also worked in construction or driving, or served in the army or in the communal militia, while girls were involved in sewing, caring or administrative roles.

The next survey round (Round 5) will provide a comprehensive picture of young people's transitions to the labour market, showing whether they have been able to find work, how they balance paid and unpaid work and other responsibilities, and what difference education, skills and aspirations make to finding and keeping different kinds of employment.

Policy implications

1. Children and young people's contributions to the household are shaped by gender, age and household composition. Norms relating to girls' contribution to unpaid domestic and care work become more fixed from early adolescence. To address this, policy and programmes should
 - *recognise* adolescents' unpaid care and domestic work and consider how this is gendered (for example, by monitoring whether social protection or employment programmes shift responsibility for the care of children onto older girls or boys);
 - *reduce* these burdens (for example, through investment in water, sanitation and hygiene); and
 - *redistribute* divisions of labour around care to support adolescent girls, for example through better provision of pre-school childcare, or through interventions aimed at altering social norms (Elson 2010; Esquivel 2013).
2. Many adolescents do paid work out of necessity. If they are to continue their learning, they will need more flexible schools which offer shift systems (in many cases these already exist), or allow them to reintegrate after time away. Social protection and health insurance schemes can reduce the impact of shocks and poverty on adolescents, enabling them to remain in school.
3. Our qualitative research confirms that young people who entered the labour market early tended to be in insecure, low-paid and arduous jobs by the age of 19, particularly if they had left school early. While many children aspired to work in the formal/public sector, young people had often adjusted their expectations by the age of 19. Some young men working in rural areas where there had been investment in infrastructure saw a positive future for themselves.

8. Child marriage and adolescent child-bearing

Background

Eliminating harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and FGM, is among the targets of Global Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Child marriage – a marriage where one or both parties are under 18 years – overwhelmingly affects girls and has received considerable attention: including through the Girl Summit, held in 2014, and the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage sponsored by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF. Child marriage is against international (although not always national) law, and together with adolescent pregnancy is a risk factor for maternal morbidity and mortality, HIV, intimate partner violence, restricted female autonomy, and early school exit. On current trends, the total number of women married in childhood will remain roughly constant at over 700 million, as reductions in child marriage rates will be largely offset by population growth (UNICEF 2014).

The challenge is to develop evidence-based strategies to address what is a complex issue: a recent evidence review concludes that ‘a set of strategies focusing on girls’ empowerment, community mobilization, enhanced schooling, economic incentives and policy changes have improved knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour related to child marriage prevention’ (ICRW 2013).

While Young Lives research does not provide a comprehensive picture of child and adolescent pregnancy, it does allow exploration of the links between children’s early circumstances and early marriage, and the identification of factors which place girls at greater or lesser risk of child marriage (Roest 2016). Two of the study countries – India⁸ and Ethiopia – are among the ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage worldwide. Young Lives has collected information about child-bearing, but little about access to and use of sexual and reproductive health services.

Future Young Lives data should tell us more about whether or not there is a downward trend in the prevalence of early marriage and child-bearing, the difference that the age of marriage makes to young people’s choices and outcomes, and whether early marriage has an impact on the next generation of babies and children.

What Young Lives has found

Girls made up the overwhelming majority of children married before the age of 18

Despite big differences between countries, girls made up the overwhelming majority of children married before they reached 18. The number of girls marrying under the age of 15 in the Young Lives study was small in all four countries. There were large differences between the four study countries in the number of children who reported having married before 18 years.

8 In this section, we refer to united Andhra Pradesh, since differences in the prevalence and practices associated with child marriage are so great across different Indian states.

- In India, 28 per cent of girls (136 out of 487) married before they were 18. Five boys married before that age.
- In Vietnam, 13 per cent of girls (59 out of 465) married before they were 18. Five boys married before that age.
- In Ethiopia, 10 per cent of girls (41 out of 420) married before they were 18. Two boys married before that age.
- In Peru, no boys and just two girls were married before they were 18. In Peru, early cohabitation is more common than formal child marriage. It is not possible to collect data on cohabitation in the same way as for child marriage, but by the age of 19, 22 per cent (73 out of 221) of young women and 6 per cent (22 out of 262) of young men had married or cohabited at some point.

Fewer girls married before their 15th birthday: 30 girls in India, four girls in Vietnam, seven girls in Ethiopia had married before their 15th birthday. No girls were married before they were 15 in Peru, and no boys were married before the age of 15 in any country.

Child marriage rates were significantly higher in rural areas

In all countries, rural girls were more likely to get married under 18 than urban girls. In united Andhra Pradesh, 32 per cent of girls from rural areas were married under 18 years compared to only 14 per cent of girls from urban areas. In Ethiopia, 12 per cent of rural girls were married as children, compared to 4 per cent of urban girls. There were also differences across sites in Ethiopia: all four girls who were married at the age of 13 were from regions where very early marriage is known to be common (Amhara and Tigray).

The predictors of child and early marriage varied from place to place, but poverty and staying in education appeared to be influential

Additional analysis using data from marriages up to and including 19 years (that is, *early marriage*) allows us to understand the factors which are linked to early marriage.⁹

- In Vietnam, not being enrolled in school at the age of 15, being from an ethnic minority background and having a mother with little say in household decisions were the three main characteristics associated with higher rates of early marriage (Nguyen 2016).
- In united Andhra Pradesh, the factors linked with early marriage were not being enrolled in school at the age of 15, lower parental and child aspirations for education at the ages of 12 and 15 (respectively); parents' expectation that their daughter would marry before she was 19; lower wealth and caregiver education; earlier age at puberty onset; and having an older brother (Singh and Espinoza 2016).
- In Ethiopia, early marriage is associated with lower levels of caregiver education and lower household wealth (Pankhurst et al. 2016b).

Decisions about girls' marriages must weigh up a variety of factors

Qualitative research underlines the complexity of decision-making about marriage. Families take into account social norms and social risk, economic insecurity and girls' future prospects. Young Lives confirms that – at least for India and Ethiopia – marriage was seen by many

⁹ Using the larger number of young women married by age 19 allows a more robust analysis than using figures for child marriage.

families as a way to secure their daughters' future in contexts of economic insecurity. The death or absence of parents – particularly fathers – emerged as an important factor in the accounts of adolescent girls who had gone on to marry in Ethiopia. In united Andhra Pradesh, parents who were poor, or who had health problems described early marriage as a way of ensuring their daughter would be cared for.

“We never thought of marrying her so soon. I have [high blood] sugar and blood pressure problems and I suffer with kidney problems also. If I die, who will take care of the girl? People are always ready to slander a girl if she is alone.”

Mother of Ameena, Hyderabad, India, who was married at 16 after failing a paper in her Grade 10 exams

“I asked [my mother] to delay the marriage as I was too young. But she worried that she was getting very sick and she wanted to see my marriage before something bad happened. Then, I said OK.”

Haymanot, from Tigray, Ethiopia, who married at 16

The association between staying at school and marrying later was clear, but causation was not. Young Lives evidence does not provide a definitive answer as to whether girls left school and then decided to marry, or left school in order to marry. In Ethiopia, almost all the married girls in the qualitative sub-sample reported leaving school as a result of poverty, shocks and economic problems, and in order to work to support their families, and then subsequently getting married (Pankhurst et al. 2016b). In India, interviews with married girls tended to suggest that decisions about girls' education and marriage were made jointly, and girls often left school and married at the point where they had to travel further afield to school, or pay for attendance.

Girls' education and wider social changes opened up new opportunities but evidence from India and Ethiopia very clearly shows how these opportunities also gave rise to concerns about girls' safety and reputations. In India, girls who reached puberty early were more likely to be married early, and many girls and their parents reported pressure on girls to marry and restrictions on their mobility from puberty onwards. Avoiding sex outside marriage through early marriage was mentioned frequently in Ethiopia.

Caregivers in Oromia saw child marriage as a means of preventing promiscuity and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. They also emphasised how girls who have sex outside marriage may be abandoned by their partners, thus rendering them unmarriageable, and how girls who become pregnant before marriage risk being ostracised from the family and clan, together with their babies.

(ibid.)

Local traditions have a bearing on marriage practices and early marriage. In united Andhra Pradesh, girls with older brothers tended to marry earlier than girls without older brothers, probably since brothers were able to contribute to dowry or wedding costs. In some parts of Ethiopia, there is a tradition of marriage in the early teenage years, which is reflected in Young Lives findings.

Some girls with a heavy workload at home in Andhra Pradesh and Ethiopia felt that marriage provided a possible escape from heavy work burdens, although in reality this was not always the case.

Beletech's aunt did not want her to marry and wanted her to continue with schooling. However, she was not interested in school, was not doing well in class, had a lot of domestic work at home and was involved in paid work. The prospect of a husband with a town house who would look after her no doubt was an attractive alternative that incited her to elope.

(ibid.)

There was very considerable variation in girls' involvement in decisions about marriage

In united Andhra Pradesh, around 47 per cent of girls who married before they were 18 only met their spouse on their wedding day. Forty-five per cent said they had no say in choosing their spouse, 45 per cent made the decision together with their parents or other relatives, and 10 per cent made the decision themselves. Young women who remained unmarried at 19 years tended to do so with the support of their parents (Roest 2016).

Although based on small numbers, data from Ethiopia point to a link between age and agency. Of 11 children married when they were between 13 and 15 years, nine had no involvement in choosing their partner. Out of those who married over 15 years, half chose their partner themselves. Evidence from the Young Lives qualitative sample suggests that girls often had more say than is assumed.

Fatuma [from Addis Ababa in Ethiopia] met her husband, a petty trader selling fruit and vegetables, and was in a relationship with him for some time before her mother knew and he proposed. Fatuma had a higher work load while living at home with her mother, whereas after her marriage she only had routine household chores. Her mother said she got married "to escape poverty and family problems".

(Pankhurst et al. 2016b)

In Vietnam, norms around marriage were rather different: young people and most parents were against early marriage for girls as well as boys. They believed that getting a good education and achieving financial security was a priority, and that marriages without a stable economic foundation would be prone to conflict and breakdown.

"I think she should study right away. First of all, men are different, once a woman has a family, it becomes difficult, she will be bound by so many things. Once you get married, you must have children, and it leads to so many things. So I think those older than her are right, she should spend a certain time in her life to complete all her studies, in a systematic manner"

Mother of My, Vietnam

In Ethiopia, strong norms may result in interventions having unintended consequences

Child marriage and FGM are linked practices that are prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and common traditions in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, there is evidence of significant decreases in these practices. However in some areas there is some resistance to abandoning them when and where people are not convinced of their harm or fear consequences. Young Lives findings highlight the continuing importance of reputation for girls and young women in contexts of poverty and insecurity. Community members talked about the risk that FGM would be carried out when a girl was too young, or organised at night, in remote areas, or done by girls themselves if bans were imposed without community support (Pankhurst 2014; Boyden 2012).

Life after marriage was very different for many girls and young women

In India, married girls were overwhelmingly out of education. In Ethiopia, out of 55 young women who had married by the age of 19 years, only four were still in education. Of those no longer in education, just over half said it was because they were married. Although married girls were optimistic about returning to school in the future, qualitative research suggests that they were embarrassed about the prospect of learning alongside younger children, especially if they had not reached the higher grades.

Young Lives findings from united Andhra Pradesh show that married 19-year-old women had less favourable responses to psychosocial questions than their unmarried peers (Singh and Espinoza 2016). In Ethiopia, young women described the impact of marriage on their life, with a change of home, new community roles, reduced contact with old unmarried friends, and often the birth of a child leading to a very different life (Chuta forthcoming).

Significant numbers of young women had had a child by the age of 19: 9 per cent in Ethiopia, 16 per cent in Vietnam; 21 per cent in united Andhra Pradesh; and 24 per cent in Peru.

Quantitative analysis from Peru shows that becoming a parent by the age of 19 was linked to lower socio-economic status (particularly for girls), earlier first sexual relations, less knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, lower early aspirations, having a large number of siblings or an older brother, experiencing family breakdown, leaving school and/or exhibiting poor school performance. Adolescents who had experienced an increase in self-efficacy between the ages of 12 and 15 were less likely to have had a child by age 19 (Favara et al. forthcoming).

Young mothers in India spoke about the pressure they had felt to have children soon after marriage, and reported that they had known little about contraceptives (Vennam et al. 2016). However, in Ethiopia, young mothers from two sites reported joint decision-making with their husbands over pregnancy, though young mothers in another area felt unable to delay pregnancy (Chuta forthcoming). Ayu, from Ethiopia, said, “It is good to marry early and have a child early. It is better to marry early than become *haaftu* [left unmarried]. It is not good to give birth at a late age.”

A fuller picture of the consequences of marriage and parenthood for girls’ and young women’s trajectories will emerge with the findings from Round 5.

Very few boys in the Young Lives sample married as children.

Qualitative research with young men in Ethiopia highlights the pressures that young men faced to achieve some level of financial security before marrying. Boys felt they needed to have an established income and a house in order to marry and felt hopeless about the prospect of ever being able to get either. A number of young men who had left school had “girlfriends”, although their relationships were secret from their families, and described the companionship, support and well-being they derived through these relationships (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016).

Policy implications

Strategies to address child marriage need to be based on a firm understanding of the cultural logic underpinning the practice in contexts of poverty and insecurity, and be rooted in a broader agenda of empowering and valuing girls – married and unmarried. Caregivers, men, brothers and husbands need to be involved in debates about this.

1. Young Lives does not provide evidence on the effectiveness of particular interventions to address child marriage. However, our research highlights the complex economic and social drivers of child marriage, which interventions need to address. The factors described below are particularly important.
 - The role of fathers and brothers in decision-making about marriage in India and Ethiopia underscores the importance of engaging men and boys in changing norms relating to marriage,
 - There are strong links between enrolment in school at the age of 15 and delayed marriage. While causation is not clear, safe, high-quality secondary schooling for girls has value in its own right as well as a possible protective role. If secondary schooling is easily accessible, girls may also have a greater say over whether they stay in school compared to whether they get married.
 - Considerable local variations in child marriage and the importance of local practices mean that tailored local interventions are needed.
 - The relatively small numbers of girls married at a very young age in many contexts, and regional variations in Ethiopia can be cautiously interpreted as supporting findings elsewhere that there is an uneven process of social change underway.
2. Marriage, and then parenthood, are typically decisive moments, which signal a move to an unfamiliar household, a loss of decision-making power and an end to education. Much better support is needed for married and cohabiting girls and young women, including programmes that allow married girls and young women to continue in education, and support with childcare.

9. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted what Young Lives has learned about the role of gender across several interrelated areas of adolescents' lives in four countries. We set out to look at three questions:

- What difference does gender make to adolescents' aspirations and outcomes?
- How and when do gender inequalities emerge and in what areas of adolescents' lives?
- Are there windows of opportunity or particular kinds of investment that are likely to support girls and boys to reach their full potential?

Below, we summarise the answers to these questions, according to Young Lives evidence.

What difference does gender make to adolescents' aspirations and outcomes?

Young Lives has found that gender differences and inequalities in aspirations and learning outcomes became increasingly evident from early adolescence. The size of gender disparities varied from country to country. Gender inequalities did not always favour boys, and the impact of gender has to be understood in conjunction with the effects of poverty and other forms of socio-economic inequality, which influenced children's growth and learning from their earliest days.

Adolescents experienced violence and bullying in several different environments, with girls and boys experiencing very different patterns of violence.

Girls made up the overwhelming majority of those married as children and becoming parents by the age of 19, and marriage and parenthood had a large effect on their educational opportunities, caring responsibilities and mobility.

Starting from the age of 8, girls and boys spent their time differently, with boys increasingly undertaking paid work and girls assuming more domestic and caring roles. At the age of 19, the evidence suggests that there were significant differences in young women and men's labour force participation and in the work they did, but the picture was not complete, as many young people were still in education.

How and when do gender inequalities emerge and in which areas of adolescents' lives?

Although gender is part of children's experience right from the start of their lives, Young Lives has found that gender inequalities in parental aspirations for children's education were first evident when children were 8. These disparities were reflected in girls' and boys' aspirations for themselves at the age of 12 and in learning outcomes by the age of 15.

Parents and young people's accounts draw attention to puberty as a key moment in many adolescents' lives. After puberty, social norms – expected behaviours – played a greater role: for example, girls in some locations found their mobility restricted, and boys were able to earn higher incomes through paid work and were sometimes expected to contribute significantly to family income.

Are there windows of opportunity or particular kinds of investment that are likely to support girls and boys to reach their full potential?

Young Lives findings indicate two points during adolescence, when gender norms become particularly salient:

- the period from middle childhood to early adolescence – coinciding with the onset of puberty, and generally with the transition from primary to secondary school
- the period when girls come under pressure to marry.

Clearly, supportive interventions with girls and boys themselves, families and the wider community are particularly important during these periods. However, our findings suggest the notion of ‘windows of opportunity’ should be treated with some caution for three reasons. Firstly, the impact of poverty and other forms of disadvantage on children’s life chances is evident from birth. Secondly, adolescents’ transitions are far from uniform: any attempt to pin interventions to a narrow age band is likely to miss a large number of young people who might otherwise stand to benefit. Thirdly, our qualitative work shows how caregivers and young people become increasingly realistic about their futures as they near adulthood. They weigh up current and future opportunities and risks when making choices about education, work and marriage. Tackling wider gender- and wealth-based inequalities in job and leadership opportunities would send an important signal to adolescents and their caregivers that staying at school, studying hard, and delaying marriage and parenthood are worthwhile investments. The message for policymakers is clear: that the underlying drivers of change for disadvantaged adolescents are effective education, job and economic opportunities to look forward to, robust social protection arrangements which improve the chances of their hopes being realised, and protection from violence. Girls and boys also need information, guidance, and advice, together with further opportunities if things do not work out as they had hoped.

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Shaping Aspirations and Outcomes: Gender and Adolescence in Young Lives

Frances Winter

This report explores how children's lives change during adolescence – the period between 10 and 19 years of age – and the difference that gender inequalities and gender norms make to their pathways.

It asks three questions:

- What difference does gender make to adolescents' aspirations and outcomes?
- How and when do gender inequalities emerge and in which areas of adolescents' lives?
- Are there windows of opportunity or particular kinds of investment that are likely to support girls and boys to reach their full potential?

Our findings include:

- Gender differences and inequalities in aspirations and learning outcomes become increasingly evident from early adolescence. However, gender inequalities do not always favour boys, and the impact of gender has to be understood in conjunction with the effects of poverty and other forms of socio-economic inequality.
- Adolescents experience violence and bullying in several different environments, with girls and boys experiencing very different patterns of violence.
- Girls are much more likely than boys to marry and have children before the age of 19, and marriage and parenthood has a large effect on their educational opportunities, caring responsibilities and mobility.

- Gender inequalities in parents' aspirations for their children's education were first evident when children were as young as age 8. These disparities were reflected in girls' and boys' aspirations for themselves at the age of 12 and in their learning outcomes and achievement by the age of 15.
- After puberty, social norms and expected behaviours play a greater role in young people's lives: for example, girls' movement may be restricted, or boys are expected to contribute significantly to family income.

Young Lives findings indicate two windows of opportunity for policy intervention: middle childhood to early adolescence (which often coincides with puberty and the transition from primary to secondary school) and the period when girls come under pressure to marry. However, these 'windows' should be treated with caution. The underlying drivers of change for disadvantaged adolescents are effective education, job and economic opportunities to look forward to, robust social protection arrangements which improve the chances of their hopes being realised, and protection from violence. Girls and boys also need information, guidance, and advice, together with further opportunities if things do not work out as they had hoped.

Funded by

