Drivers of Violence Against Adolescents in Myanmar

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The Drivers of Violence Against Adolescents in Myanmar: Consultations to Inform Adolescent Programming Report is part of the **Understanding Violence Against Adolescents in Myanmar Series** which aims to contribute to this growing body of evidence to understand better why violence against children is happening and what is driving it. The Series draws data from both nationally representative data as is presented in this report and from the UNICEF-supported interventions where diverse information is being collected as part of programme monitoring. The Series attempts to give it a closer look at the data and information at hand and dig deeper the issue of violence against children in Myanmar. We hope to generate evidence, create deeper understanding of the issue and stimulate discussions – all to better inform programming to address violence against children in Myanmar.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consultations with 207 young people ages 18 to 22 years old (95 males, 112 females) using a range of participatory activities were held in Central Rakhine, Northern Rakhine and Kachin Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps and host communities (defined as non-IDP communities in Northern Rakhine with both Muslim and Rakhine participants), to explore social norms and drivers of violence against children with the specific goal of (re)designing prevention interventions.

Complimentary quantitative polls were also conducted using U-Report. U-Report is an innovation based, user-centred social monitoring tool based on simple Short Message Service (SMS) messages (poll questions, results, and sharing of useful information). It is designed to strengthen community-led development. In total, U-Reporters provided responses to several polls in the consultation phase (9,827 polls were filled out by females, 6,809 by males and 356 by those who identified in non-gender binary terms as 'other').

Key areas of exploration for both the qualitative consultation and the U-Report polls were identified through an initial secondary analysis of national surveys such as the Global School Based Health Survey (GSHS), the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) and the Myanmar Census as being key issues for young people in order to improve programming:

- school violence and bullying,
- migration,
- substance abuse,
- adolescent intimate partner violence and help-seeking behaviours.

The consultations also highlighted the dynamics of growing up in Myanmar and different adolescent profiles in these areas.

Key Findings

School Violence and Bullying

Perhaps what is most alarming is that out of 96 countries that use the GSHS measure, Myanmar is the only country globally where self-reported school violence and bullying has an increasing trend for both boys and girls. To understand what is causing this school violence and bullying, the consultation process asked young people about their perceptions of the causes of bullying in school.

Young people thought the main causes of bullying related to lack of empathy and intolerance of difference. Most of the main causes young people ranked as the top causes of bullying pointed to a lack of empathy that pupils have towards others who are different (whether different ethnicity, appearance, gender, socio-economic status, etc). This is one of the coherent overarching themes coming out of the school violence and bullying data from the qualitative focus groups. As one group from Northern Rakhine mentioned, one of their top reasons for what causes bullying is that "there is no sympathy in humanity…hatred is always given precedence."

Young people highlighted the link between how teachers treat students and how students treat each other. When young people talked about bullying in the listing and ranking activity, they often talked about the preferential treatment from teachers (either for good or in terms of corporal punishment) and the links with bullying between pupils. The example given by participants in Central Rakhine was around teachers favouring rich students by giving them hints for exams and also that those students who cannot make donations for seasonal occasions (such as Kathein ceremony offerings to monks) are badly treated by teachers and then, in turn, are also badly treated by pupils. In this way, teachers' treatment of pupils sets the example for how pupils also treat each other.

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) was commonly mentioned by both boys and girls. Strikingly, in both the Muslim girls' and boys' groups, one main reason for bullying was *because of being a girl* or gender inequality. This also came up in girls' IDP camps as a main reason, but specifically teasing and bullying behaviours related to girls' body parts especially during puberty (e.g. growing buttocks and breasts). Whereas, SRGBV also happened to boys in IDP camps as a way to put boys in their place and make fun of them through sexual harassment. Examples given include getting their trousers and *longyis* pulled off and their butts being fingered from behind *almost always by other boys.*

Norms differ among boys and girls about what they should do if they witness school violence or bullying. When asked how they thought their friends *would expect them to react if they witnessed bullying,* 70% of females compared to only 42% of males said their friends would expect them to report it to another adult—the most common expectation for both genders. Whereas, boys also had expectations from friends in 1 in 5 instances to join in on the bullying or in nearly 1 in 4 instances to intervene. This suggests that the norms are much stronger for girls and in one direction (to report)—whereas there are conflicting norms from friends for boys on whether to report, to try and stop the bullying and/or to join in on the bullying. Likewise, young people experienced conflicting normative messages from parents and teachers about what they are expected to do if they witness bullying. This data suggests that a school-based intervention that focuses on bystander roles could be successful in shifting norms since there is not one single strong norm influencing behaviour.

Intimate Partner Violence

Existing nationally representative data from the Demographic Health Survey (2015/16) highlight that *intimate partner violence is frequent in adolescent relationships* in Myanmar with 15% of 15- to 19-year-old girls who are in relationships having experienced physical violence by their partner since age 15. Of these, 10% have experienced it often or sometime in the past 12 months. *Adolescents who are married as children also experience the highest levels of controlling behaviours from their spouses and partners.* Most marital control behaviours are more common in the youngest age group: 10% of women age 15-19 report that their husbands demonstrate three or more marital control behaviours, as compared with 6% of women age 40-49.

Adolescents also hold more negative gender norm beliefs around intimate partner violence than adults with 64% of all adolescents agreeing with at least one statement condoning the use of intimate partner violence compared to 52% of adults. *Common across all the activities in the focus groups, equating love with violence was a central theme particularly for young people from host communities in Kachin and Central Rakhine.* For Northern Rakhine in both Rakhine and Muslim community sites we see stressors, such as lack of employment opportunities, as being one of the top reasons for violence within relationships (mentioned more frequently by boys) alongside gender inequality (mentioned by girls).

A total of 5,174 participants ages 18 to 24 years old filled out the U-report questions on gender norms (3,140 girls and 1,976 boys, and 58 participants with non-binary gender from 15 regions in the country) and the *findings show that perceptions of the acceptance of controlling behaviours came up frequently among young people*, echoing the findings from the DHS data that adolescent girls experience a larger amount of controlling behaviours in their relationships. Monitoring of their partners was identified as socially acceptable behaviour to be done by boys and girls with monitoring movements by about 1 in 5 young people and monitoring social media by approximately 1 in 3 young people. Similar to monitoring physical movements, monitoring online movements and interactions was perceived to be acceptable behaviour regardless of whether it was done by teenage boy to his girlfriend/wife (where 30.4% of girls and 34.4% of boys agreed) or by a teenage girl to her boyfriend/husband (with 34.1% of girls and 30.8% of boys agreeing).

While controlling behaviours happen to both boys and girls in relationships, the gender norm is that girls cannot go against their partner's control without repercussions (disapproval from parents and even violence from partners, for example). For girls, more than half believe that parents and friends will disagree with them if they disobey their husband or boyfriend. This sanction or negative repercussion for not following the social norm (in this instance to obey your husband and boyfriend) only existed for girls. This social norm around who has control in the relationship over the other person's behaviour is important for understanding repercussions (such as violence) when a girl breaks this norm, with parents serving as the main reference network for how a young wife should behave in a marriage with her husband.

Feelings of jealousy, often described as "loving too much", underpin controlling behaviours among adolescents in intimate relationships. These controlling behaviours were linked to attention seeking among boys which also lead to restricted social networks and activities for their female partner. Among girls these feelings of jealousy also lead to the monitoring of their social media activity within the relationship as well as pushing expectations upon their male partner to demonstrate proof of their affection. When discussing how girls could respond to experiencing physical intimate partner violence, both boy and girl groups responded with suggestions that the girl could explain herself and reason with her partner. *Such responses underpin the typical expectation of girls, which is to play a communicative role in their relationship, family, and community. Apart from intimate partner violence, this gender role was a regular theme across many discussions including forced migration and child marriage.*

Adolescents do tell someone such as a family member about the violence they experience in their relationships but they are less likely to seek professional help than adults. DHS data highlighted that for those that had experienced violence, 50.2% of girls (1 in every 2 girls) aged 15-19 years told someone about the violence they experienced but also reported not seeking professional help (higher than all other age groups) for said violence. When explored in qualitative focus groups it was found that several factors inhibit help-seeking. Both boys and girls mentioned the shame and stigma of having experienced violence as a barrier to help-seeking alongside being fearful of the safety for a girl

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