



Adolescent Experiences in Chittagong and Sylhet Divisions: Baseline Report

Authors

Silvia Guglielmi, GAGE-ODI

Jennifer Seager, George Washington University

Maheen Sultan, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, Brac University

Farhana Alam, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, Brac University

Sarah Baird, George Washington University

Nicola Jones, GAGE-ODI

T.M Asaduzzaman, World Bank BRM

Deepika Ramachandran, World Bank

Shwetlana Sabarwal, World Bank

24th May 2021

Baseline Report on “Adolescent Experiences in Chittagong and Sylhet Divisions Bangladesh.

Authors: Silvia Guglielmi, Jennifer Seager, Maheen Sultan, Farhana Alam, Sarah Baird, Nicola Jones, T.M Asaduzzaman, Deepika Ramachandran and Shwetlana Sabarwal

The authors wish to thank the GAGE Bangladesh quantitative research team based at Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), and the GAGE Bangladesh qualitative research team based at the BRAC Institute for Governance and Development (BIGD) and the BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, especially Alvira Farheen Ria, Samira Ahmed Raha, Sajib Rana, Prantik Roy, Taslima Aktar, Saklain Al Mamun and Mehedi Hasan Anik. Thanks to Professor Sabina Faiz Rashid at Brac School for reviewing and providing oversight and feedback to the JPGSPH team, Gage project.

Outline of Presentation

1

- Overview: Adolescent Student Programme (ASP)

2

- Chittagong and Sylhet Baseline study: quantitative and qualitative samples

3

- Findings and key priorities: Education and Learning; Psychosocial Well-Being; and Economic Empowerment and Voice and Agency

A close-up photograph of two adolescent girls in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The girl on the left is looking slightly to the right with a neutral expression. The girl on the right is smiling broadly, looking towards the left. Both are wearing colorful, patterned clothing. The background is dark and out of focus.

Overview: Adolescent Student Programme (ASP)

Adolescent girl, Chittagong, Bangladesh © Nathalie Bertrams /GAGE 2019

Adolescent Student Program

Aims to alleviate constraints to continued education of adolescent girls and boys

- Grade 10 retention
- Re-enrollment post COVID-19
- Concerns exacerbated by COVID 19

Innovative evidence-based approaches to prevent dropout in improve re-enrollment

- Growth Mindset and Girl Rising programming aimed at shifting gender norms around education
 - Currently being implemented

Improving infrastructure, supportive teacher training, and community outreach

- 13.7 mil students receive sexual and reproductive health training, guidance and counselling,
- 3500 WASH block and drinking water facilities
- 4.8 mil girls to receive MHM grants
- 138,000 teachers trained

Collaboration between the Government of Bangladesh and World Bank and the GAGE Programme

Chittagong and Sylhet
COVID-19 study:
quantitative and qualitative
samples



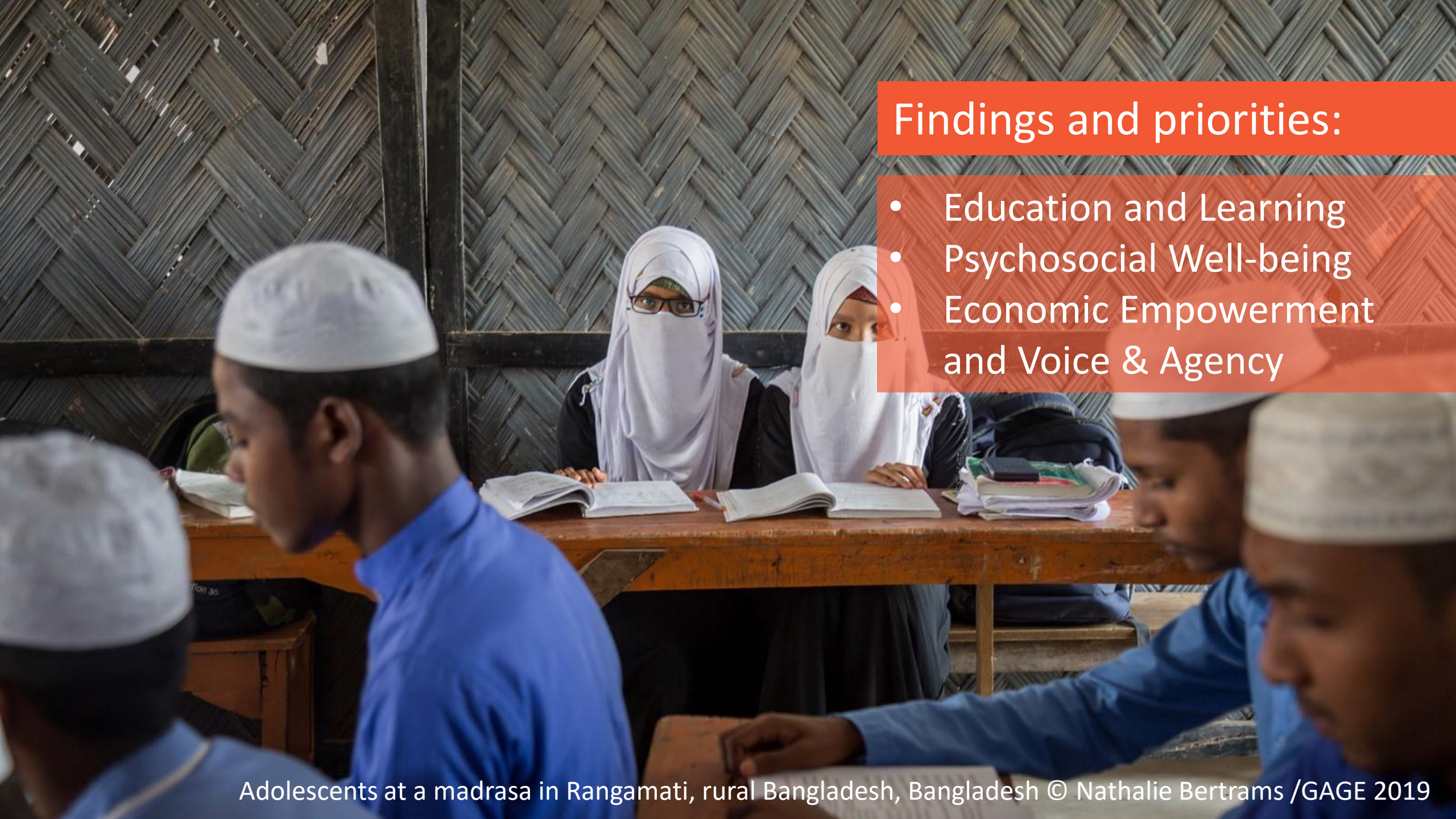
Chittagong and Sylhet Sample

- **2,220 in-school adolescents** attending grades 7 and 8 from Chittagong and Sylhet in Bangladesh
- **109 schools**, 31 Government and 78 MPO schools
- 12.8 years old on average, 54% female, 75% in Chittagong
- Surveys took place February and March 2020 through **face-to-face interviews**

Adolescent characteristics	Quantitative sample	Qualitative sample
Total working adolescents	108	4
Total adolescents with disabilities	25*	4
Total adolescents from female-headed households	207	6

Chittagong and Sylhet : qualitative sample

	Chittagong urban	Chittagong rural	Sylhet urban	Sylhet rural	TOTAL
Adolescent girls - grade 7	4 (4%)	7 (7%)	4 (4%)	5 (5%)	20 (20%)
Adolescent girls - grade 8	5 (5%)	6 (6%)	4 (4%)	5 (5%)	20 (20%)
Adolescent boys - grade 7	5 (5%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)	5 (5%)	18 (18%)
Adolescent boys - grade 8	5 (5%)	5 (5%)	3 (3%)	5 (5%)	18 (18%)
Mothers of adolescents	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	5 (5%)
Fathers of adolescents	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	6 (6%)
Teacher key informants	4 (4%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)	13 (13%)
TOTAL	25 (25%)	29 (29%)	20 (20%)	26 (26%)	100 (100%)



Findings and priorities:

- Education and Learning
- Psychosocial Well-being
- Economic Empowerment and Voice & Agency

Education and learning

Education is seen as a social good and has intrinsic value

- This has been internalised by adolescents, their parents and their communities

Aspirations

- **90% of adolescents aspire to at least some university education**, and 91% aspire to a professional career, such as a doctor, teacher, police officer, or engineer

Quantitative data reveals entrenched gender differences:

- While parents typically support both boys' and girls' educational trajectories, **adolescents believe that parents prioritise boys' education over that of girls.**
- Nearly a third (30%) of adolescents agree with the statement that ***'if a family can only afford to send one child to school, it should be the boy'***.
- Boys were more likely to agree with this statement than girls (38% versus 23%).

Well, everyone needs support to continue his or her studies. You see, my sons are going to school....However, I can't always provide them with everything they need. Yet, I try my best to support their studies (father of an adolescent boy from Sylhet urban)

Education and learning

- **Adolescents are aware and concerned about the quality of education** and whether the atmosphere in school is conducive to their studies.
- This is related to their concerns about their future.

'A good education is very much needed. Getting a job depends on that' (16-year-old boy, grade 8, Chittagong rural district).

- **Girls had negative experiences of menstrual hygiene management provision at school** – 46% of report attending schools with no facilities or resources to use while menstruating

I take everything that I will need to school. There's no arrangement for [menstrual management] in school, but I still go. In many schools there's pads... or places to keep [and] share [sanitary napkins in a private space]. There's nothing like that in our school.

- **Importance of social aspect of school life and extracurricular activities** for adolescents
- 90% of adolescents say they have at least one friend outside of their household that they trust

'Yes, I like going to school because I can have very much fun with my friends.'
(15-year-old girl in grade 8 from Chittagong urban)



Key priorities : Education and Learning

1

- Increasing the share of female teachers at the secondary level to improve adolescent outcomes

2

- Encouraging schools to use grants from MoE for Improving adolescent student outcomes and streamline the grant application process.

3

- Teacher training should increasingly incorporate adolescent-specific topics, such as the importance of non-violent discipline and pedagogy skills required for delivering adolescent-sensitive content.

4

- Prioritise improving menstrual hygiene management infrastructure at schools to support continued education for adolescent girls

Psychosocial Well-Being

- These are some of the things that make adolescent boys and girls feel good: **doing well in school and in exams, their parents' appreciation** of academic performance, **spending time with their friends, buying new clothes**, enjoying activities such as **listening to music or playing sports**.
- **Overall rates of depression appear to be low**, at 1.3% of adolescents classified as being moderately to severely depressed, **with some variation by gender** (1.9% girls vs 0.4% boys), demarcating additional levels of sadness and stress for girls.
- **Some of the reasons for feeling sad** include: being cut off from friends, and worries about poverty and the future of their education



'I feel sad because of my father's economic hardship, we can't eat properly. My father is very weak, he can't work properly. If he could work properly then he could fulfill all of our wishes.'
(A 13-year-old girl in grade 7 from Chittagong rural district)

Support Systems

Support from parents: Practical

- **98% of parents are reported to pay for books and uniforms for schooling**, as well as providing space and time for adolescents to study,
- **father plays the key role in ensuring monetary support** for children
- **Mothers provide practical support** during girls' menstruation

Support from parents: Emotional

- **94% of adolescents report talking to their mothers about religion**, 79% of adolescents speak to their fathers about religion
- **31.5% of adolescents talk to their mothers about harassment** at school, and 15% talk to fathers about harassment at school
- **24% of girls and 8% of boys talk to their mothers about romantic relationships**. and only 5% of girls and 3.5% of boys talk to their fathers about romantic relationships.
- **Qualitative data shows that adolescents share their good or bad news with their mother first.**

Support from teachers but lack of counseling services

'No counselling programmes here. We try to solve each problem with our caring.(...). We care for our students but have no counselling for them.' (teacher from Sylhet urban).

Key Priorities: Psychosocial Well-Being

1

- Encouraging further collaboration between MoE and MoH at the local level to address adolescent mental health. In order facilitate access to mental health support, greater interdepartmental vision and services are required

2

- Enhancing and scaling up awareness raising on adolescent psychosocial needs – at present, recognition of adolescents’ psychosocial health needs is extremely limited despite the GoB Adolescent Health Strategy putting this centre stage

3

- Support would include more outreach by providing information to parents, teachers and community leaders about adolescent mental health concerns, and enabling adolescents to access counselling services at school and in the community.

Economic Empowerment and Voice and Agency



5% reported being involved in paid work.

- Among working adolescents, the most common forms of labour were: **non-agricultural wage work (45%); farm work (21%); and other types of employment (19%).**

Gender differences in the involvement of adolescents in unpaid household work, with girls doing disproportionately more of such work

- **Girls spend 1 hour per day on average, compared to 40 minutes for boys**

'Girls will do household chores, they have been doing it since ancient times, and they will raise ducks and chickens in the house. On the other hand, boys will take care of domestic animals, help their father with his work. They [girls] are different because of the division of labour. I mean, what boys can do, girls can't and what girls can do, boys can't.'
(12-year-old boy in grade 7 from Sylhet rural district)

Most adolescents reported that they are able to make decisions about what they prefer doing

- **91% of adolescents report that they have a great deal of say in how much education to complete, with some gender differences**
- **90% report having at least a little say in how much time spent helping around the house, 48% a great deal of say**

'Boys can do whatever jobs they want, girls can't. If the girls study too much then... they say, "what can you do with that much study, you better get married".'

Economic Empowerment and Voice and Agency: Key priorities

1

- Improving financial literacy and access to banking services

2

- There is a pressing need for policy dialogue with mobile financial service providers and banking associations to allow less rigid criteria for opening student accounts, especially in rural areas.

3

- Providing 'home economics' classes in school so as to valorise unpaid household work

4

- A transformative approach to gender norms needs to be introduced for adolescents at school and family level.

5

- Building awareness through formal (e.g. policies and programmes) and informal channels (e.g. role models, the media, community-level dialogues) can help transform gender norms and reduce gender disparity

Contact Us

✉ Maheen Sultan, GAGE Bangladesh Research
Uptake and Impact Coordinator:
maheen.sultan@bracu.ac.bd

Brac JPGSPH Profesor Sabina Rashid
Project Lead Qualitative, GAGE Bangladesh
Research with BIGD

[Farhana Alam, Coordinator, GAGE Bangladesh](mailto:farhana.alam@bracu.ac.bd)
farhana.alam@bracu.ac.bd

🌐 www.gage.odi.org
www.bigd.bracu.ac.bd
www.bracjpgsph.org

🐦 @GAGE_programme
@BRACJPGSPH
@BIGD_BRACU

📘 GenderandAdolescence ■
BIGDBRACUniversity
BRACJPGSPH

About GAGE:

- Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year (2015-2024) mixed-methods longitudinal research programme focused on what works to support adolescent girls' and boys' capabilities in the second decade of life and beyond.

We are following the lives of 18,000 adolescents in six focal countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

