



Adolescents' experiences of COVID-19 in Chittagong and Sylhet:

Findings and policy implications

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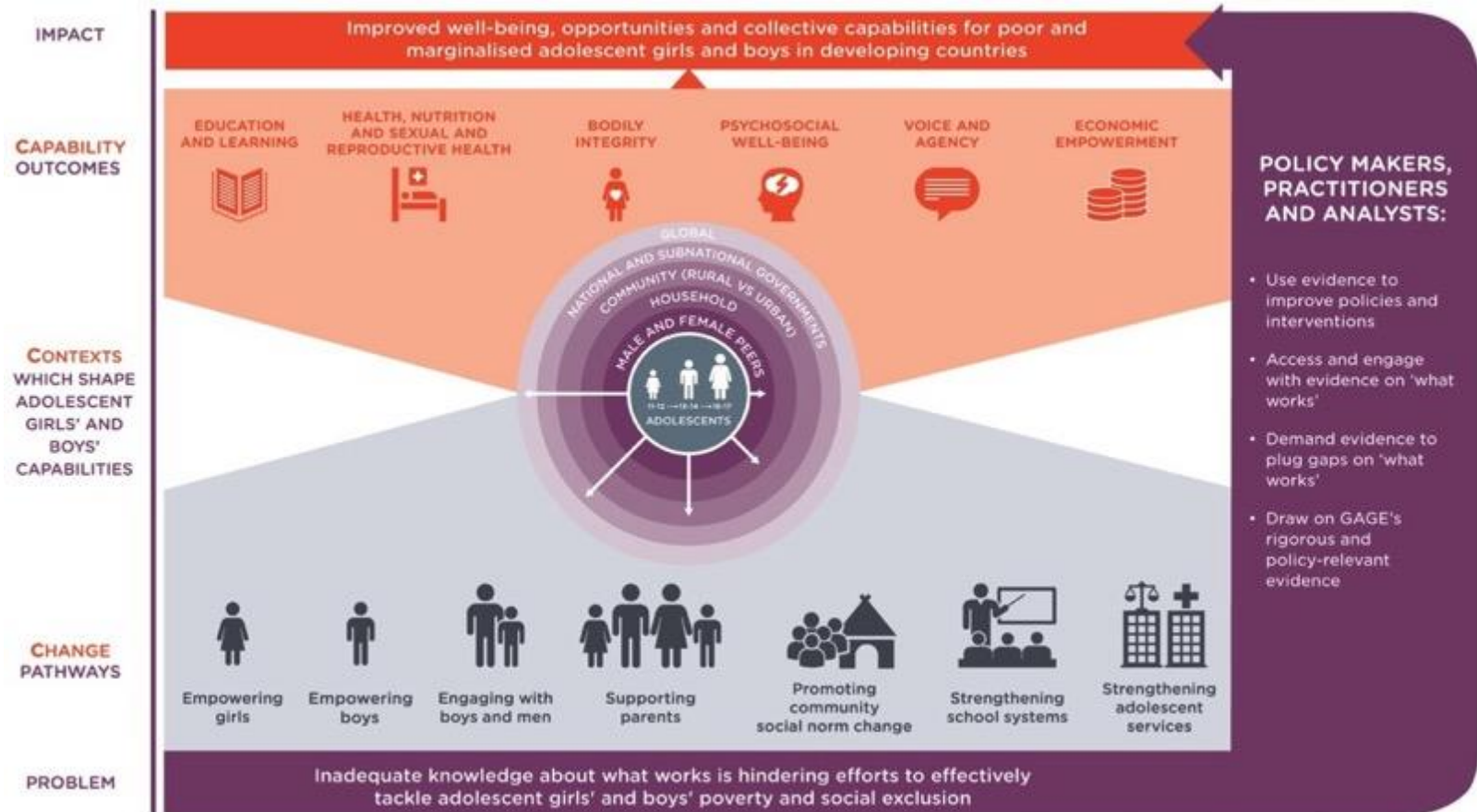
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Overview: GAGE Conceptual Framework and research during COVID-19



GAGE Conceptual Framework



GAGE research during COVID-19

GAZA

Virtual IDIs, FGDs, participatory photography and audiodiaries with 50 adolescents from urban and camp settings



ETHIOPIA

- Survey research with 2000 urban adolescents
- Virtual IDIs and participatory photography with 120 adolescents from urban, rural + pastoralist areas
- Virtual key informant interviews with service providers

LEBANON

- Virtual IDIs and FGDs with 50 adolescents from Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese communities
- Participatory photography
- Digital and audio diaries



JORDAN

- Survey research with 3500 adolescents in camps/ host communities
- Virtual IDIs, FGDs, photography and audiodiaries with 110 adolescents from refugee and host communities

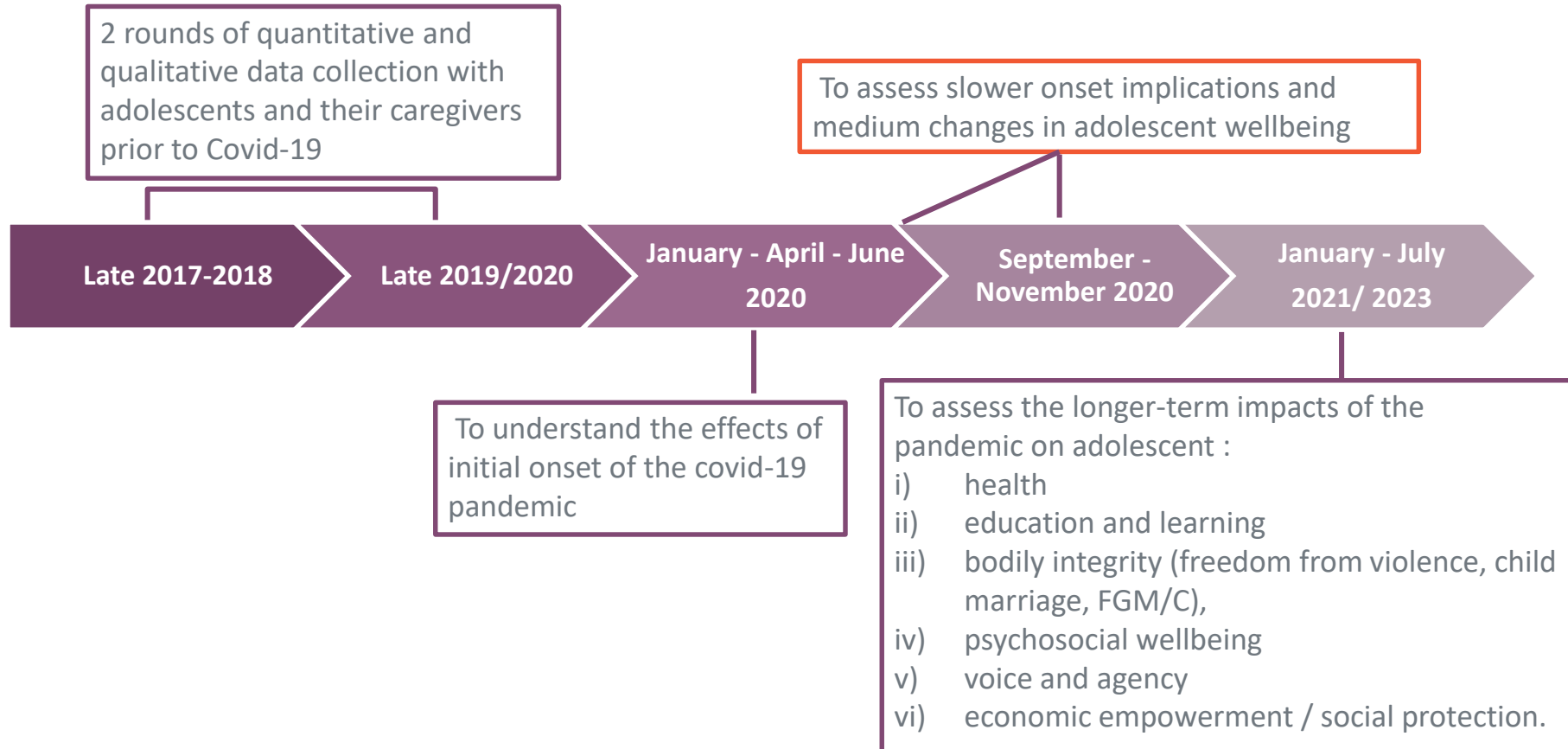
BANGLADESH


BANGLADESH

- Survey research (5000)
- Virtual IDIs with 30 adolescents in 3 low income settlements in Dhaka, with 30 Rohingya adolescent; and 39 school-going adolescents in Chittagong and Sylhet



GAGE research during COVID-19





Chittagong and Sylhet
COVID-19 study:
qualitative sample

Chittagong and Sylhet COVID-19 study: qualitative sample

	Chittagong	Sylhet	TOTAL
Adolescent girls - grade 7	6	4	10
Adolescent girls - grade 8	5	5	10
Adolescent boys - grade 7	5	4	9
Adolescent boys - grade 8	5	5	10
Female teacher key informants	3	1	4
Male teacher key informants	4	5	9
TOTAL	28	24	52

Total working adolescents	4
Total adolescents with disabilities	4
Total adolescents from female-headed households	6

A photograph of a classroom with several students in light blue uniforms sitting at wooden desks. They are looking towards the front of the room. The room has white walls and windows with metal grilles. An orange semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

Findings:

- Adolescents' COVID-19 knowledge
- Education and remote learning
- Incomes and livelihoods
- Nutrition, health and hygiene
- Psychosocial well-being and coping
- Voice and agency

Adolescents' COVID-19 knowledge and practices: generally good, but....



- Some **rural adolescents had little or no knowledge about the signs and symptoms of COVID-19** stating that they just did not know much about it, while others – both rural and urban adolescents – seemed to confuse it with other diseases:

- Adolescents in **urban areas** were found to have more precise knowledge on COVID-19 and **more access to various sources of information.**

'I learned it online and my mother is a teacher..and we discuss it in our home. Then I can learn many things from the government website.'

(11-year-old girl, grade 7, Sylhet urban area)

- To protect themselves, most adolescents mentioned **wearing a mask, washing their hands, and social distancing.**
- Most adolescents suggested various **home remedies** to cure and recover from covid-19, such as drinking hot water, taking painkillers, and having citrus fruits (lemons or oranges), tulsi (holy basil), cumin, cloves, etc.

'You will get coronavirus if you stay among trash and dirt.' (13-year-old girl, grade 7, Chittagong urban area)

Education and remote learning



- Although mentioning that it was a fair response to the pandemic, adolescents feel damaged by the ongoing school closures, leading to **reduced study hours and a loss of interest**.
- **Phone and internet connectivity, limited access to personal devices and expensive credit all pose key barriers to continuity of learning** – for rural adolescents primarily, and teachers in rural schools.

'I have stopped studying. How much can one study all by herself? We don't have a TV in our home. It is possible to watch YouTube [educational] videos on my father's phone but he doesn't stay at home all the time. So, the mobile phone is not available either.'
(13-year-old girl, grade 8, Sylhet rural area)

- While **we report few gender differences, location matters**. Adolescents in urban and more affluent areas are more likely to have private tuition; steady access to devices to follow online classes, and benefit from various learning platforms.

Incomes and livelihoods

- Regardless of gender or location, most adolescents (31 out of 39) reported that **their families faced economic hardship during lockdown due to loss of income, loss of jobs or the closure of shops** for the sale of their products.
- Families dependent on income sources from **agriculture, transportation, garment work, fishing, and immigrant workers** faced **most of the economic burden** during lockdown.
- While most reported that family members were **returning to work** at the time of data collection (July-August 2020), others had lost their jobs and struggling to cope, with loans and credit mounting.



'We had to borrow a lot of money. The situation hasn't changed much for us. We will need a long time to pay back the money we borrowed. It might take us two or three months to fully repay the loans.' (13-year-old girl, grade 8, Sylhet rural area)

Incomes and livelihoods – cont.

- Most teachers acknowledged that the pandemic had gravely impacted the whole community – with **the poorest being worst affected** – and thus most at risk of catching and spreading the virus.

'[The poor people] don't have anything. When you don't have anything, you do not have the luxury to choose between whether to die of hunger or to die of coronavirus. When there is no food in the house, you can't sit still at home being afraid of coronavirus. It does not happen like that. In order to maintain a normal life, to arrange food and clothing for the family, they go out for work, ignoring coronavirus, rendering the lockdown ineffective.' (53-year-old male Madrasa teacher from Chittagong rural area)

- **Family economic hardship was found to directly impact adolescents' lives:** most reporting contributing to increased household work, with **boys taking care of livestock and cutting wood and girls more involved in household chores** such as cooking and cleaning.
- Some reported learning **new skills** such as sewing and running a grocery shop as schools remain closed and they attempt to support their families.

Nutrition, health and hygiene

- Economic fallout has resulted in a **reduction of daily food consumption** for many households, **compromising adolescents' nutritional intake**.
- As the adolescents in our sample are from different socioeconomic backgrounds, **not all reported the need for receiving government aid** – in the form of in-kind and cash assistance – though there was broad consensus that this was available for the most needy.
- However, a few adolescents from relatively low-income households **did not get any support from the government or the community**, although they would have benefited from this assistance.
- Some mentioned **the shame of receiving aid**.



'My father pulls a van. He has a business. Had we asked for that support, wouldn't people have gossiped about it [and said] "He laid his hands on the food meant for the poor!" That would have been embarrassing, so we didn't ask for anything. We managed on our own no matter how difficult it was.' (13-year-old girl, grade 8, Sylhet rural area)

Psychosocial well-being and coping



'[If schools remain closed and] the government announces that everyone will be promoted to the next class then it won't help to grow our knowledge.' (15-year-old boy, grade 8, Chittagong urban area)

- The findings indicate that **many adolescents have faced social isolation, boredom and exhaustion** – they miss their friends, going to school and normality.

'Now it has become intolerable. I have gotten extremely exhausted staying at home for so long. Actually, I miss school. Also, the kind of fun we could have at school, we can't have it at home, like meeting my friends' (13-year-old girl, grade 8, Sylhet rural area)

- Watching TV and using mobile phones (urban boys primarily) were **common coping strategies** to deal with boredom. Some adolescents, both male and female, also mentioned activities such as drawing, reading story books, and playing with siblings
- **'Education-related uncertainty'** was reported as the most common source of their anxiety, with family financial struggles also mentioned frequently.

Voice and agency

- Findings reveal **stark gender differences** in voice and agency. Due to cultural traditions, adolescent girls have limited mobility compared to boys and while some reported new restrictions imposed by their parents because of the pandemic, others highlighted the pre-existing one precluding their mobility.

'Boys go out, they always go out, even after the [imposed] lockdown they went out sometimes. But girls don't go out much.' (14-year-old girl, grade 8, Sylhet urban area)

- While adolescents relied on phones to contact friends, **girls' limited access to personal devices** often severed their communication beyond the confines of their homes.
- Adolescent **boys were found to have more flexibility and agency regarding their mobility** – going out for a walk down the street or meeting their peers whenever they got bored of staying at home.





Conclusions and policy implications

Policy implications

1

- The MoE and private organisations working in the education sector should **identify and address educational gaps** created by COVID-19, exacerbated by poverty, geographical location and gender

2

- Limit existing class and gender divides during school closures, by **reducing mobile data costs and piloting low/no tech distance learning** options

3

- Improve **awareness of adolescent psychosocial needs**, and provide opportunities for adolescents to volunteer in their communities and access recreational facilities.

4

- The government, NGOs and other stakeholders should act swiftly to **mitigate the immediate potential nutritional risks** faced by adolescents.

THANK YOU



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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.

