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# CHILD PROTECTION & RESILIENCE

A PRUV research report

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# ACRONYMS

CBCPMs	Community-based child protection mechanisms
FGDs	Focus group discussions
GBV	Gender-based violence
KIIs	Key informant interviews
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
PRUV	Preparedness and Resilience to Address Urban Vulnerability
UCD	University College Dublin

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a rapidly urbanising world, the number of children living in informal settlements in urban areas is growing. The life that these children face can be characterised by chronic insecurity and precarious living conditions. But beyond the challenges are stories of adolescents' resilience, optimism and coping mechanisms. Qualitative research in two informal urban settlements in Nairobi, Kenya, explores how adolescents perceive the risks in their community and the kinds of coping strategies they mobilise in order to manage and mitigate adversity and insecurity.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Adolescent girls and boys live in fear

- Violence, and the fear of violence, is a marked feature of children's lives; they are exposed to violence at all times, day and night, as they move around their community.
- Findings from this research support existing evidence on the gendered nature of violence against adolescents: girls are disproportionately exposed to and fear sexual violence and harassment, whilst boys are disproportionately exposed to physical attacks and are vulnerable to pressure to recruitment into gangs.

*"I think with the high insecurity in our area we have to devise ways of coping with it by avoiding going out at night so as to minimise the risks that one might encounter such dangers. What I do is ensure that I finish everything during the day."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

### Harmful gender norms and stereotypes have negative consequences

- Girls reported deep-seated and persistent gender discrimination and strong expectations of their role in society. This impacts on their lives in terms of limiting their freedom of movement, their ability to choose how to spend their time or engage in hobbies. It also takes a huge toll on their psychosocial wellbeing.
- Boys also reported that they were discriminated against by the community and felt the consequences of stereotypes.

*"I want to be a lawyer so that I can help other girls, especially those who suffer, like those who are raped and have no one to defend them in court and the man goes away with it while the girl and her family suffer the consequences."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

### Adolescents have developed a range of coping mechanisms

- Social connections are key; many adolescents reported having someone to turn to for advice and support when they were going through difficult times. Peer connections were particularly valued.
- Adolescents develop uniquely personal strategies for coping with a challenging situation. However, violence and harmful gender norms can undermine adolescents' abilities to exercise these absorptive resilience capacities.
- Adolescents have agency and the ability develop resilient strategies to adapt to adversity in urban slums. They demonstrated the ability to positively shape the world around them and participate in decision-making.

*"Because the adolescent is in a stage where need we to listen to their opinions rather than being harsh and offer them with help."* Father, Kibera

### Adolescent boys are overlooked

- The research shows that a number of boys felt that they were not valued or loved by their families or communities, a result of stereotypes of adolescent boys as ‘trouble-makers’ or ‘criminals’.
- A number of respondents, both adolescents and adults, reported that NGOs or community-based organisations excluded helping boys who had experienced violence from their remit. Boys were often left with nowhere to turn to for critical support

*“One should be focused in life because you know what you want. You should also work hard in order to realise that dream come true. Despite the challenges that you go through and you should not listen to other people’s opinion.”*  
Adolescent boy, aged 15-19,  
Kibera

### Adolescents are resilient and care about their communities

- The responses that adolescents gave in this research were interwoven with a sense of collective responsibility for keeping each other safe. It becomes clear that adolescents want to help each other; they encourage each other and look out for each other.
- Adolescent participants expressed the desire to help the community in the future through their careers. Young people want to help others and are an important source of resilience for the community.

*“My dream is to become an engineer. I also want to establish an organization in my area to help the needy, campaign against drug abuse and build an orphanage for children without homes.”*  
Adolescent girl, aged 15-19,  
Kibera

### Education has protective potential

- Working hard in their studies was often reported as a coping strategy and a means to survive through difficult periods of time.
- Schools were frequently identified as a safe space and a protection mechanism by adolescent participants. Through meeting with their friends and developing peer connections through classes and after-school clubs and activities, schools also provide some psychosocial protection.
- Despite the odds, adolescents demonstrate that they are capable of maintaining their emotional wellbeing through self-belief, optimism and hope for the future. Education is a key source of hope for the future.

*“In school we have a teacher... for guiding and counselling. You can go to her and she would guide you on the things that you should do and she would teach you how can avoid finding yourself in that situation.”*  
Adolescent girl, aged 12-14,  
Kawangware

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



### CHALLENGE HARMFUL GENDER NORMS



### NURTURE RESILIENCE



### CREATE SAFER FUTURES

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Partners

The research presented in this report forms part of a wider research initiative conducted under the *Preparedness and Resilience to Address Urban Vulnerability* (PRUV) consortium. Funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, this consortium aims to develop evidence-based solutions that will inform preparedness and resilience interventions in order to make a lasting, sustainable contribution to addressing urban vulnerability.<sup>i</sup> The consortium has been exploring vulnerability, preparedness and resilience in urban informal settlements in three countries: Colombia, Indonesia and Kenya. Researchers from Plan International's Global Headquarters and Kenya Country Office have been supported by researchers from University College Dublin on this study.

### 1.1.1. Plan International

Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world.<sup>1</sup> The organisation is an independent development and humanitarian organisation working alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. Plan International drives change in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

Plan International has been working with communities and the government to raise awareness about the importance of children's rights in Kenya since 1982. Plan International Kenya applies a rights-based approach in working towards transformed institutions, laws and communities that respect the rights of children, especially girls in Kenya. Active in over 18 counties across the country, child protection and resilience-building through disaster risk management are two key areas of work for Plan International Kenya within its Country Strategic Plan.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1.2. Centre for Humanitarian Action, University College Dublin

The University College Dublin Centre for Humanitarian Action (UCD CHA) is an inter-disciplinary research and teaching platform focused on international humanitarian action: actions aimed at saving and preserving life, preventing and alleviating human suffering, and supporting life with dignity for those affected by emergencies.<sup>3</sup> The Centre's mission is to enhance the professional delivery of humanitarian action through the provision of inter-disciplinary and internationally recognised research in order to inform policy and practice.

## 1.2. Background

In a rapidly urbanising world, the number of children living in informal settlements in urban areas is growing. The life that children face in these urban informal settlements can be characterised by chronic insecurity and precarious living conditions. Children face protection risks on a daily basis: they are exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation as they develop through their adolescence, and lack adequate protection. In fact, urban slums in Kenya have been described as 'toxic environments' for children's protection and wellbeing, leaving some of the world's most at-risk groups without sufficient protection.<sup>4</sup>

With a long history of addressing the protection of vulnerable children across the globe, Plan International, one of the leading INGOs working to advance children's rights and equality for girls, was brought in as a partner to address one of the consortium's key objectives: to address the theoretical and practical gaps in the protection of crisis-affected communities and vulnerable groups in urban settings.<sup>5</sup> Harnessing our experience of working in urban settings in Kenya, we have focused our contribution to the PRUV project on

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<sup>i</sup> This EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme falls under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 691060. Preparedness and Resilience to Address Urban Vulnerability [website], <http://pruv.ucd.ie/about/project-aims-objectives/>, accessed 20 August 2019.

the protection of adolescents in urban informal settlements in Nairobi. We have drawn on our expertise in child and youth-focused research to amplify the voices, perspectives, and experiences of adolescents.

A rapid literature review conducted at the beginning of this project highlighted evidence gaps in the knowledge base on child protection in urban slum settings which this research subsequently sought to address. Namely, with the tendency in existing research on children and disasters to focus on child protection risks facing, or the vulnerabilities of children<sup>6</sup>, little is known about the unique coping strategies that girls and boys respectively employ to navigate high levels and fear of violence in these settings. Moreover, there is a gap in knowledge around how gender inequality and dynamics affect girls' and boys' capacities to cope with child protection risks amidst the insecurity in urban slums.

This report uses qualitative research methods to address the lack of research into the perceptions of adolescents living in urban slums in Nairobi. The findings of this study complement previous findings from quantitative research conducted with adults in Kibera and Kawangware in 2015 by Concern Worldwide – a partner on the PRUV consortium (see Annex 3).<sup>7</sup>

## 1.3. Setting the scene: child protection, resilience and urban slums

### 1.3.1. A brief definition of child protection

Despite the right of every child to live free from any form of violence, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDH) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (Article 19, amongst others), violence remains a harsh daily reality for a staggering number of children as they move between the places they live, learn, play and develop into adults.<sup>8</sup> The *Know Violence in Childhood* research report estimates that in 2015, at least three out of four children – an overwhelming 1.7 billion children – had experienced interpersonal violence in a previous year.<sup>9</sup> Violence has devastating consequences on children that are both immediate and lifelong and that can harm their wellbeing, health and whole quality of life.<sup>10</sup>

Child protection,<sup>ii</sup> as defined by Plan International and the wider humanitarian and development community, is the 'prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children'.<sup>11</sup> Historically, development and humanitarian actors have taken a 'top-down' approach to strengthening child protection systems; that is, they focus on ensuring that governments have laws, policies and capacities to protect vulnerable children.<sup>12</sup> Child protection practitioner Michael Wessells argues that this 'top-down' approach is insufficient because it overlooks the unique contribution of families and communities to child protection.<sup>13</sup> He further advocates for a comprehensive approach to child protection system strengthening which recognises and builds on the different layers of protection – including the existing strengths of individuals and community action.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.3.2. Gender and age dynamics behind violence against children

According to global co-chair of the Know Violence in Childhood initiative, Dr Shiva Kumar: "All children – girls and boys – will experience differently, different forms of violence at different stages of their lives."<sup>15</sup> Violence against children is rooted in power dynamics which, in part, stem from a child's age and dependency on adults. Children have less experience, knowledge, maturity and, in many cases, physical strength than adults which puts them at increased risk of being targeted by perpetrators.<sup>16</sup> But violence against children is also often rooted in gender dynamics which influence the way in which violence is perpetrated against, and experienced by, girls and boys.

Girls at all stages of their childhood are disproportionately affected by certain forms of violence as a result of unequal structures of power which discriminate against girls and women, and rigidly assigned gender norms which place them as inferior to men and boys.<sup>17</sup> Girls face differing forms of violence to boys: they are more

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<sup>ii</sup> It is important to note that child protection is not the protection of all children's rights, but rather the protection of a specific subset of children's rights (Article 19 of the UNCRC). In this way, child protection differs from the definition of the broader protection sector in humanitarian action. The PRUV project is made up of several different 'work packages'. This research falls under work package 2 which looks at humanitarian protection. However, this specific contribution is in line with sector-wide definitions of child protection and focuses therefore focuses on protection from violence.

likely to experience sexual violence, harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting and domestic violence.<sup>18</sup> Violence against women and girls is pervasive. The possibility and threat of violence informs girls' choices, constrains their potential, and intimidates them into conforming to the oppressive and patriarchal status quo. According to researcher Judith Bruce: "Violence conditions [girls] to avoid opportunity in order to manage risk. As girls internalize their responsibility for managing this risk, they begin to pre-censor their potential."<sup>19</sup> This consequence has been described as a form of gender-based violence in and of itself.<sup>20</sup>

Gender also affects the way in which boys experience violence. Evidence shows that boys are, generally, more vulnerable to physical violence.<sup>21</sup> They are more likely than girls to experience bullying and physical attacks in and around schools,<sup>22</sup> and they are more likely than girls to experience corporal punishment.<sup>23</sup> Often, the normalisation of the violence that boys experience renders invisible the threats they face.<sup>24</sup>

Age adds another layer of vulnerability. For all children, girls and boys, the violence that they experience worsens as they enter adolescence,<sup>25</sup> a life stage marked by significant changes in their cognitive, physical and emotional development.<sup>26</sup> A 'time of transition',<sup>27</sup> adolescence is a period of time when families and communities may expect children to take on increasingly adult responsibilities. As adolescents become more independent and begin interacting with peer groups and people outside their family environment, they become more susceptible to violence and physical attacks, including in and around schools.<sup>28</sup>

For boys, adolescence is a period where they are particularly vulnerable to peer group pressure to join gangs and engage in criminal activity and the risks posed to them of dying by homicide dramatically increases.<sup>29</sup> For girls, adolescence is a time when worlds start to shrink, when families and communities start to restrict their opportunities and when their vulnerabilities increase.<sup>30</sup> Evidence suggests that during the early years of adolescence, social norms start to become more rigidly enforced and more personally prominent.<sup>31</sup> A study by Girl Effect found that gender norms in adolescence reinforce 'notions of male strength, competence and control while concurrently reinforcing female frailty, vulnerability and need for protection'.<sup>32</sup> In a report that presents findings from their in-depth statistical analysis on violence against girls, UNICEF demonstrates that girls are at the highest risk of violence during adolescence.<sup>33</sup> As they grow up, adolescent girls are at heightened risk of sexual victimisation outside the home through increased exposure to both strangers and peers.<sup>34</sup>

Research on humanitarian crisis situations demonstrates that interventions do not always recognise the intersection of age and gender.<sup>iii</sup> Generally, broad brush-strokes in the definition of 'vulnerable groups' have grouped the needs of adolescent girls either with programmes targeting all 'children' or 'women'.<sup>35</sup> By failing to respond to their distinct age and gender needs, adolescent girls have been side-lined from life-saving interventions in humanitarian settings: the effect described as letting adolescent girls 'fall through the cracks'.<sup>36</sup>

### 1.3.3. Urban Growth and Humanitarian Crisis

The world is experiencing rapid urban growth: it is estimated that there are currently 4.2 billion urban dwellers across the globe.<sup>37</sup> This number is expected to grow to six billion by 2045, with most of this growth occurring in Asia and Africa.<sup>38</sup> Urban areas are increasingly the sites of humanitarian crises, such as political unrest, conflict, "natural" disasters and displacement.<sup>39</sup> Yet in the informal settlements of some cities - home to approximately 1 billion people around the world, or one in three urban inhabitants<sup>40</sup> - the situation has been, in some instances, called a humanitarian crisis in and of itself.<sup>41</sup> Life in some urban informal settlements (hereafter referred to as 'urban slums') has been described as 'life-threatening'.<sup>42</sup> Concern Worldwide, through their efforts to collect data to identify emergencies in urban settings, find that too often the levels of poverty, food insecurity and broader insecurity in urban slums can constitute a humanitarian emergency and that national and international humanitarian frameworks ought to more adequately reflect this.<sup>43</sup>

Humanitarian crises are widely recognised to intensify children's exposure to violence.<sup>44</sup> The relationship between humanitarian emergencies and violence against children is intersecting and contextual and can include: the breakdown of medical, legal and social services; the disruption to protective informal community structures and networks; increased stress amongst families as a result of financial pressures, displacement

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<sup>iii</sup> For example, the 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview report on South Sudan disaggregates data by sex throughout.

and overcrowded living conditions; exposure to violent events as a result of the emergency; and changing gender roles and norms.<sup>45</sup> Academic research and humanitarian practice show that gender and age differentiation are particularly acute in situations of crisis.<sup>46</sup> The gender and age dynamics that drive violence against adolescents are also exacerbated by humanitarian crises, leaving adolescents highly vulnerable and at significant risk of violence.<sup>47</sup>

#### 1.3.4. Urban Areas and Child Protection

Urban crises generate unique child protection risks. Urban slums have been described as ‘toxic environments’ for children’s protection and wellbeing, with experiences of and exposure to violence a daily part of children’s lives.<sup>48</sup> Plan International Australia’s child-centred urban resilience framework suggests that children who live in urban slums are some of the most ‘at-risk children’.<sup>49</sup>

Gender and age are recognised to play a significant role in children’s experience of risk in urban areas.<sup>50</sup> Evidence from Plan International Denmark’s learnings on urban programming supports the gendered nature of children’s experiences of violence; young women tend to experience higher rates of sexual and domestic violence, whereas boys and young men are more likely to be involved in physical assault and robbery, as perpetrators and victims, and are more commonly recruited into gangs.<sup>51</sup>

There is an environment of fear that pervades life in urban slums. In their recent research, Concern Worldwide concluded that only looking at:

*“Each event of violence’ leads to an incomplete understanding of the impact of violence on women and girls; even if they haven’t experienced an actual violent event, girls and women ‘face environment marked by enough insecurity that the sense of fear may have significant impacts.”<sup>52</sup>*

These impacts include restricting women and girls’ freedom of movement, the opportunity to meet and establish social networks and access essential services, and in doing so exposes them to heightened risks of violence within the home.<sup>53</sup> Judith Bruce’s argument is pertinent here: the fear of violence is a form of pervasive form of GBV.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the heightened levels of violence and fear, urban slums pose significant challenges for establishing and implementing effective protection systems and mechanisms. Informal settlements can be perceived as temporary, are marked by organic growth and are often ‘out of reach’ of formal services.<sup>55</sup> In some cases, these communities are considered illegal and are not formally recognised by the government. This means that, in some cases, the formal child protection services (the ‘top-down’, as described in section 1.3.1), will not reach the most marginalised and at-risk children and young people who live in slum communities. For example, Plan International’s research on adolescent girls’ views on safety in five cities highlights the lack of formal policing or security guards in slum communities.<sup>56</sup>

#### 1.3.5. The Situation in Kenya

Kenya is rapidly urbanising, with 50% of the population expected to live in urban centres by 2020.<sup>57</sup> More than half of Kenya’s urban residents live in poverty; they live in the peripheries of urban areas on meagre incomes and in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions. Nairobi alone is home to 45% of the country’s urban population, of which 60% live in slums on 4% of the city’s land.<sup>58</sup> In Kenya, urban slums have been frequently characterised by extreme levels of poverty and marginalisation, a lack of access to basic necessities, overcrowding and food insecurity.<sup>59</sup> And the millions who live in such areas are exposed to multiple, interacting protection risks such as sexual exploitation and abuse, HIV and AIDs, and violence.<sup>60</sup>

Findings from research study in two urban slums in Mombasa, Nairobi, show the harms that children are exposed to on a daily basis: being out of school, widespread sexual exploitation and abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and gang violence.<sup>61</sup> This research also noted that the lack of social cohesion as a result of intense competition for scarce resources associated with chronic poverty and insecurity in slum settings negatively impacted on community-based child protection.<sup>62</sup> Communities with lower social cohesion, often the poorest communities, have also been linked in a separate study to higher rates of violence in childhood.<sup>63</sup> The effect is cyclical, and low social cohesion causes higher rates of violence against childhood and poses challenges for community-mobilisation of child protection.

#### 1.3.6. The Concept of Resilience

Research on child protection often looks at the vulnerabilities of children and young people. And resilience is widely understood in relation to the concept of vulnerability.<sup>64</sup> But, approaches which focus on vulnerabilities

are problematic; it has been argued that when development and humanitarian actors focus on a person's vulnerability without recognising their capacities, they encourage the view of programme participations as 'defenceless victims in need of help'.<sup>65</sup> A resilience approach, however, is able to put primary emphasis on "what communities and individuals can do for themselves and how to strengthen their capacities, rather than concentrating on their vulnerability to disaster...or their needs in an emergency".<sup>66</sup> This resilience of individuals and systems in urban areas has gained increased emphasis over the past few years as a means to address urban vulnerability.<sup>67</sup>

There has been increased attention paid to resilience over the past few years as the term that bridges the gap between the humanitarian and development divide.<sup>68</sup> Whilst there are different interpretations of the term 'resilience', there are common elements across definitions.<sup>69</sup> This is captured by Sweetman and Smythe in their introduction to the *Gender and Development* journal edition on resilience:

*"At the heart of the concept of resilience is the idea of strength in the face of adversity. Resilience-based approaches in humanitarian and development work aim to support people not only to survive and recover from current crises, but to strengthen their defences in the face of future threats."*<sup>70</sup>

This research adopts the essence of this definition, particularly the concept of 'strength in the face of adversity'. With this interpretation in mind, the adversity facing adolescents in urban slums must in part be understood in relation to the violence and its drivers, and the resulting restricting environment of fear, that is pervasive in them.

Oxfam's conceptualisation of resilience is generally accepted across the sector.<sup>71</sup> Three overlapping capacities are identified:

**Absorptive**, which refers to the capacity to take 'intentional protective action to cope with known shocks and stresses';

**Adaptive**, which refers to the capacity to 'make intentional incremental adjustments in anticipation of or in response to change, in ways that create more flexibility in the future'; and

**Transformative**, which refers to the 'ability to make intentional change to stop or reduce the drivers of risk, vulnerability and inequality'.

A criticism of resilience approaches is the tendency to look at systems rather than people and, in doing so, overlooking the power relations that are at the root of much vulnerability.<sup>72</sup> Specifically, gendered power dynamics driven by social norms and gender inequality are critical to the understanding of vulnerability to shocks and stresses; according to Le Masson, Norton and Wilkinson's research for *Overseas Development Institute's* BRACED programme, the effectiveness of resilience interventions will depend on the extent to which they address these gender dynamics.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the resilience discourse has, until recently, been largely blind to these gendered power dynamics.

Oxfam believes that gender-based inequality is a significant barrier to achieving resilience for communities and societies.<sup>74</sup> This is supported by recent research conducted by ODI, which highlights that gender-based exclusion is a key factor that undermines people's and community's capacities to cope with and recover from disaster risks and climate events.<sup>75</sup> Socially constructed status, roles and norms are gendered and intersect with other social identities, such as age or ethnicity, to create unequal levels of marginalisation. This can prevent girls and women from accessing the same opportunities, assets, resources and services as men and boys, and from exercising the same decision-making powers on an equal footing.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, there is a growing evidence base that children can act as 'protagonists for action in reducing risk, and catalysts for behavioural change and collective action in communities', and their abilities and capacities should be further uncovered.<sup>77</sup> Research in Mombasa found that children living in the urban slums were far from being 'passive victims'. In fact, they actively engaged with their environments, sought to cope with multiple sources of adversity, and showed considerable resilience. They demonstrated the ability to cope and to navigate complex environments, and the research attributes this partly to preventive factors which reduced children's exposures to risks, namely school and religion.<sup>78</sup>

## 1.4. Focus of this research

This research sought to amplify the voices of adolescent girls and boys and focused on their perceptions and experiences in urban informal settlements. It focuses on these lesser-explored layers of child protection and seeks to uncover the unique contribution of children, families and communities to child protection in two urban informal settlements in Nairobi. It contributes to the growing body of literature that shows that gender and age dynamics underpin the resilient capacities that are mobilised by men and boys, women and girls. Taking this into consideration, the research takes the decision to focus on resilience at the individual level, rather than a systems-strengthening or broader urban resilience approach.

The research sought to answer four key research questions:

- What are the perceptions of protection risks in the community affecting adolescent girls and boys? Do adolescent girls and boys differently perceive these risks? If so, how?
- What coping strategies – including processes of support and resilience - do adolescents mobilise amidst adversity and insecurity in informal urban settlements? Does this differ between girls and boys? If so, how and why?
- What actions do families take to protect their children from risks relating to violence?
- What services, resources and mechanisms exist to prevent and respond to violence against adolescent girls and boys in informal urban settlements? Are they perceived to be effective?

In addressing these questions and topics, this research aimed to contribute to a strong child and youth voice to the PRUV consortium. It particularly explores how gender and age dynamics underpin perceptions and experiences of risk and resilience amidst high levels of insecurity.

# 2. METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative approach. The primary target of the research was adolescent girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 19 living in Kibera and Kawangware, the two areas studied. The research also included adults who were parents or guardians to an adolescent, and members of the community involved in child protection. Qualitative data was collected by Plan International in Nairobi in September 2018. This report draws on this data and includes the voices of 212 individuals, 134 of which are adolescent girls and boys.

## 2.1. Research approach

The qualitative research design was developed collaboratively by researchers at Plan International's Global Headquarters in the UK and Country Office in Kenya. The design was informed by five key considerations stemming from the research objectives and questions and the literature review:

**Rights-based approach:** Plan International believes that children's involvement in research is important. Not only does it hold significant potential for strengthening policies, programmes and services targeting children and their families, it signals respect for children's rights as enshrined in the UNCRC, particularly their right to participation and to have their voice heard in decisions that affect them (Article 12). We believe that it is not enough to only ask adults about children's lives: children experience the world differently and uniquely and must be consulted directly to provide a complete picture of protection issues.

**Adolescent-centred:** This research particularly focuses on adolescence, an age in a child's life that is marked by key transitions and dramatic physical, cognitive, and social changes that set the stage for lifelong capacities and aspirations.<sup>79</sup> The research therefore draws upon adolescents' voices. It seeks to amplify and validate the knowledge of adolescents, recognising that they are best positioned to express their needs, priorities, perceptions and experiences.

**Intersection of gender and age:** This research responds to the fact that girls and boys, women and men are exposed to and experience differently risks and vulnerabilities in situations of crises.<sup>80</sup> It also responds to the growing evidence base on the influence of gender and age dynamics on the resilience of individuals. The research adopts an intersectional approach with regards to gender and age, recognising the diversity of experiences in urban crises.

**No 'one-size-fits-all' for urban informal settlements:** In line with the belief of the wider PRUV consortium, this research recognises that too often challenges in one urban informal settlement are assumed the same for another; the challenges in urban informal settlements are unique and there cannot be a one-size-fits all lens.<sup>81</sup> As such, as much as possible this research seeks to identify where experiences are consistent across both Kibera and Kawangware, and where some experiences might vary.

**Focus on capacities and agency:** Research on child protection can too often focus on vulnerabilities and under-prioritise the agency and capacities of children for resilience. Similarly, resilience approaches tend to overlook community and individual level capacities, particularly in the case of children. Yet there is a growing evidence base that children can act as 'protagonists for action in reducing risk, and catalysts for behavioural change and collective action in communities'.<sup>82</sup> As such, this research seeks to primarily uncover the unique capacities, agency and coping strategies of girls and boys.

## 2.2. Data collection

An initial desk-based review of current literature on key concepts relevant to the PRUV project and areas of strategic interest to Plan International was carried out. This included exploring literature on gender, age and resilience; child protection in informal urban settlements; urban vulnerability and crises; and the overlaps between these. This desk-based review helped to define the focus of this project, inform the research approach and sharpen the research questions. The conceptual framework developed from the literature review, which helped define the focus of the research, can be found in Annex 2. Qualitative data collection was carried out in Nairobi in September 2018 using two methodologies: focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs).

### 2.2.1. Study areas

Research was carried out in two informal urban settlements, Kibera and Kawangware. The rationale for the selection of these sites were as follows:

- They met the PRUV projects' location selection criteria in terms of access, maturity and population size;
- Plan International has a presence in both urban slums and was able to facilitate participant mobilisation; and
- Concern Worldwide conducted the quantitative survey in 2015 in both locations, key findings relating to protection from which can be found in Annex 3 of this report.

**Kibera** is thought to be one of the largest informal settlement in Nairobi. Established in 1899, current population estimates for Kibera range from 150,000 to 300,000 residents, densely settled in 1.5 square miles, southwest of Nairobi. Seventy percent of the Kiberan population are children, and approximately fifty thousand of those children are orphans.

**Kawangware** is located about 15 km west of the centre of Nairobi. It is one of the fastest growing and poorest slums in the city, with a population of over 300,000, of which 65% are children and youth.<sup>83</sup>

### 2.2.2. Data collection tools

Multiple qualitative data collection tools were adopted to ensure that they were age-appropriate; allow for the data to be cross-referenced; and allow the research to take an inclusive approach by including a range of opinions and experiences from different segments of the population. Researchers from Plan International Global Headquarters and Kenya Country Office worked collaboratively to develop the tools. They were based around three main themes: gender and age dynamics; perceptions of harm and feelings of safety; and coping strategies and protection mechanisms. The tools were consulted on and contextualised during the training of research assistants in Kenya, drawing on their local knowledge and expertise. They were piloted and further refined ahead of data collection.

All qualitative tools were open-ended and allowed participants to explore and express their own realities. The questions remained general and focused on overarching risks in the community. Participants were not asked to share personal experiences of violence abuse or exploitation. Neither were pre-existing notions of violence were not imposed on them. Instead they were asked to identify the risks or 'harms' that they observe in their community, whatever they may be, and not restricted to set definitions.

FGDs were the primary tool used for this research. They were carried out with adolescent girls, adolescent boys, and parents or guardians of an adolescent. There were typically between eight to 10 participants in each FGD. The FGDs allowed the exchange of views, consensus-building around responses to certain issues or, alternatively, highlighted differences in views or experiences. Single-sex separate FGDs were carried out for male and female participants and targeted different age groups: aged 12-14, aged 15-19, and adults (parents or guardians to an adolescent child). The disaggregation allowed participants to speak more openly and confidently about their opinions, and researchers to further analyse the intersection of gender and age in the experiences of adolescents in urban slums.

For research with adolescents, participatory FGDs were conducted using two tools:

- ‘Body maps’, which allowed participants to draw and discuss a hypothetical adolescent of their age in their community, their role in the community, the key risks affecting them. Most importantly, they discussed what they do to respond to risks and who they turn to for support or guidance in times of need.
- Adolescent-friendly social cartography (described as community maps) in which adolescents were asked to map out and describe their community space as they see it, the safe and unsafe spaces, and the protection mechanisms that exist.

Participatory techniques were adopted in order to: help reduce potential power dynamics between different participants, including between participants and/or between researchers and participants; create a safe environment for children and young people to discuss protection risks; and create an enjoyable and meaningful experience for those adolescents giving their time to participate in the research. Adolescent participants were encouraged to speak freely and openly about their perceptions and feelings of risk and coping, and what changes they wanted to see in the future. If they preferred not to speak, they had the option of drawing a picture or writing their thoughts down. There was an emphasis on resilience, and participants were encouraged to describe their own strength, strategies for coping, and those who they turn to for support in times of need.

FGDs were also conducted with parents or guardians of an adolescent. These adults were asked to describe their knowledge of key risks affecting adolescents and what parents or families generally do to respond to these risks in their community. This data provided an important cultural context and helped to corroborate or challenge the views of adolescents.

Finally, KIIs were carried out with key stakeholders in child protection at the community level: teachers, CSOs; police officers; health services; community leaders; education officers; children’s officers; representatives from relevant government departments. The KIIs also provided an important point of comparison and allowed researchers to compare experiences and validate the findings from the FGDs.

### 2.2.3. Sample

A purposive sample was selected to represent a diverse group of adolescent girls and boys, parents or caregivers and key informants. This research engaged community mobilisers who were/had previously been involved with Plan International Kenya or local partners, who mobilised adolescent and adult participants through child or youth groups or schools, or communities known to Plan International. Some participants had engaged with Plan International programmes, and/or other NGO projects, previously and this was considered during analysis.

The total sample size for this research was 212. This comprised of 134 adolescent girls and boys (66 adolescent girls, 68 adolescent boys), 64 adults who were parents or guardians of an adolescent (32 mothers, 32 male), and 14 key informants (2 female, 12 male).

Table 1: Number of research activities by age category

Research activity	Aged 12-14 <sup>iv</sup>	Aged 15-19	Adults (age not collected)
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<sup>iv</sup> Community mobilisers were briefed and given instructions to mobilise respondents between the following age brackets. However, on data entry researchers noted that one child was nine years old, and five were 11 years old. However, given that this constitutes a small percentage of the adolescent sample, this report refers to adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19.

Participatory FGDs – adolescents			
<i>Female</i>	4	4	
<i>Male</i>	4	4	
FGDs - parents & guardians			
<i>Female</i>			4
<i>Male</i>			4
KIIs			
<i>Teachers</i>			5
<i>NGOs/CSOs</i>			5
<i>Police</i>			1
<i>Community leaders</i>			2
<i>Children's officer</i>			1

An equal number of single-sex FGDs were conducted in Kibera and Kawangware. This was also true of different age categories: there were 8 FGDs with adolescents aged 12-14, eight with adolescents aged 15-19, and 8 with parents/guardians (see Table 1). In terms of overall sample, 53% of participants were male, and 47% were female. For adolescents, the majority were mobilised through schools. However, seeking to reach some of the more marginalised and vulnerable young people in these settings, a small number of participants, 19, were out of school.

Fourteen KIIs were carried out at the community level with stakeholders in child protection, including five with teachers or headteachers, five with local NGO staff, two with police representatives, and two with community leaders (one from Kibera, one from Kawangware).

## 2.3. Ethics and safeguarding

Research ethics were core to this research initiative, recognising the sensitive nature of the topic of investigation and the involvement of children and young people. All research complied with Plan International's global policy on Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Policy and Standards and plan International global policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People.

Risks were carefully assessed during conceptualisation stage which mapped the key ethical or safeguarding concerns that could arise as a result of research on a sensitive topic and involving children and young people. In addition to consulting with technical specialists across Plan International, a number of critical documents were also consulted at this stage.<sup>84</sup> The risk assessment informed the ethics application to UCD (see section 2.3.1.) and shaped the research design, methodology and tools. A localised risk assessment was conducted by Plan International Kenya closer to data collection and shaped research planning and logistics.

### 2.3.1. Ethics approvals and permissions

All qualitative research obtained ethical approval from UCD's Human Research Ethics Committee in May 2018. Additionally, an application form was submitted to Kenyatta University's Ethics Committee and approved in July 2018 (Approval number: KU/ERC/APPROVAL/VOL.1(100)). Finally, authorisation to conduct this research was provided by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya in July 2018 (Reference number: NACOSTI/P/18/25199/22839).

### 2.3.2. Selection of research assistants and training

Local research assistants were hired to conduct data collection. The recruitment process was led by Plan International Kenya, and all research assistants had appropriate background checks. There was an emphasis on having an equal number of male and female research assistants. There was also a strong emphasis for research assistants to be young (preferably under the age of 30) to generate a sense of comfort and understanding for adolescent participants. As far as was possible, data collectors were the same sex as participants in FGDs to reduce gendered power dynamics. For all FGDs with adolescent girls and mothers, both the facilitator and note-taker were female.

Research assistants were also fluent in the local language which allowed for meaningful engagement with adolescents and the collection of detailed information. Research assistants received a three-day training delivered by Plan International staff prior to data collection starting, which covered research purpose, focus, tools, research (facilitation and note-taking) skills and ethics and safeguarding. This training was practical

and reflective. There was also a deep-dive into the tools themselves, appropriate phrasing to use to describe child protection risks (with 'harms' being selected), and the suitable translation to local languages.

### **2.3.3. Informed consent**

The informed consent process ensured that research participants were aware of all aspects of the research process and voluntarily provided their consent to take part.

Information sheets were developed detailing purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, what their participation will involve, and privacy and confidentiality. There were different versions of the information sheets which were age appropriate and specific to the research activity. They were handed out to participants several days before the data collection activity, giving participants time to consider whether or not they wished to take part. At the start of the FGDs, researchers read out a statement which reminded participants of the key points on the information sheet before they provided written consent. All key informants provided their consent after the interviewee read out a statement covering all points on the information sheet and before the interview and recording commenced.

For adolescents under the age of 18, the consent of the parents or guardians was first obtained, followed by children's assent. Drawing on the local knowledge of Plan International Kenya and the research assistants, the headteacher was deemed the appropriate guardian for FGDs that took place within school grounds and their consent was obtained in advance of the discussion. When the FGDs took place outside of school, the consent of a parent or guardian was obtained in advance.

### **2.3.4. Confidentiality and privacy**

During the training of data collectors, there was a focus on the need to strictly adhere to confidentiality and privacy. All discussions took place in a private, youth-friendly space where participants could not be overheard by outsiders or community members. All participants in FGDs were reminded of the importance of not sharing with others what was discussed during the discussion. No names were included on transcripts, and no names or identifiable information have been included in this report.

### **2.3.5. Handling and storage of data**

At the end of each day of data collection, audio-recordings on Plan International audio-recorders and handwritten notes from the FGDs and KIIs were moved to secure laptops held within Plan International's office in Nairobi. All notes and audio-recorders were transcribed, typed and stored using password-protected files and devices. Research assistants were instructed to delete any notes they had.

Transcripts were transferred to Plan International Global Headquarters through password-protected files. Soft copies of data are stored at Plan International for a period of five years, in line with our global policy on data storage. Hard copies are stored at Plan International Global Headquarters for a period of two years before being destroyed.

### **2.3.6. Safeguarding measures**

Plan International Kenya's Child Protection and Safeguarding Advisor was a core member of the research team and played a key role in ensuring that all tools and research processes adhered to Plan International's Global Policy on Child and Youth Safeguarding. There was a referral process to ensure that if any child protection concerns or disclosures arose, they were responded to in a sensitive, timely and appropriate manner.

During data collection training (see section 2.3.2), Plan International Kenya's Child Protection and Safeguarding Advisor delivered an in-depth training session on child and youth safeguarding which focused on the research assistants' obligations and codes of conduct. It covered the reporting protocol and referral process; what to do if there were disclosures or any safeguarding concerns; how to listen non-judgementally; and the importance of upholding privacy and confidentiality.

There was also a session on research ethics, covering informed consent and other key ethical considerations for this research. All research assistants knew to take a break in the interview activity if any participant showed any signs of unease, distress or trauma. As part of the informed consent process, respondents were informed that if they were uncomfortable answering any question, they did not need to respond and they could skip the question. They were also told that they could take a break from or ask to leave the FGD at any time without any negative repercussions.

Whilst tools were designed to limit the likelihood of discomfort and deliberately avoided asking personal questions, the research team anticipated that some participants might experience distress given the sensitive nature of the topic being discussed. Research assistants were attentive to the issues that might trigger distress. Additionally, professional psychosocial support was hired from a Plan International partner organisation: a counsellor was on site during data collection to provide immediate support if it was needed.

## 2.4. Analysis

After data collection and entry, transcripts were coded on the qualitative analysis software NVivo in order to identify emerging themes and patterns from the data. Thematic analysis was then carried out and the findings prepared for this report. Coding was complete used a grounded theory; codes were generated from the data and then refined until themes emerged.<sup>85</sup> There were no pre-defined codes prior to starting the analysis.

Themes were developed under four key areas:

- Gender and age dynamics;
  - Perceptions of protection risks;
  - Identification of protection mechanisms; and
  - Coping strategies and resilience.
- Case classifications were used for age range of the FGD, gender of participants, and location (Kibera or Kawangware). This made it possible to disaggregate and compare findings and perceptions according to these key characteristics.

## 2.5. Limitations

There are limitations to this research that stem from the modalities of the research, the complexity of the study areas and ethics. Firstly, it should be noted that this research draws primarily from qualitative research. Whilst findings from a quantitative survey provide context, this research is not mixed methods and the qualitative findings are not backed up by quantitative findings. As such, this research does not present definitive patterns which are quantitatively verifiable, nor does it assign concrete frequencies to the patterns identified. Instead, it suggests patterns of resilience that have emerged from the data and is explorative. Qualitative analysis is also subjective. It is also important to note that this research is not representative of the populations in Kibera and Kawangware. The data analysis did not focus on making comparisons between the two localities; the analysis which was conducted did not produce any significant variations and further analysis would need to be carried out to answer if the modes of resilience differed between the two areas.

Whilst efforts were made to access a cross-section of adolescents, it was difficult to reach some of the more marginalised and vulnerable adolescents. Adolescents were mainly mobilised through existing schools, but efforts were made to also reach some adolescents who were out of school through youth groups. However, the research findings are not representative of the most vulnerable adolescents, including those orphaned, living on the streets, or with disabilities. Moreover, due to ethical challenges, adolescent mothers or those who were pregnant were not targeted by this research.

It is important to note that this research project has not been designed to establish any prevalence with regards to child protection issues, or to provide an objective account of adolescents' experiences in urban slums. Consistent with the research purpose and methodology, the goal of data analysis was to draw out and amplify the voices of adolescents in the research findings. Consequently, the findings in this research are subjective. Moreover, they underscore the fact that adolescents are not a homogenous group and do not have a single view or set of experiences in insecure urban settings. However, the project does highlight areas of commonality and difference, which provides a rich understanding of the coping strategies that adolescent girls and boys adopt.

Data collection tools were designed in English and were not translated into Kiswahili or other local languages. Research assistants translated the tools into the appropriate local language whilst verbally conducting data collection. Whilst there was a discussion during training on key words and appropriate terms, it is possible that different terms were used across the FGDs and KIIs with different connotations. The data was also transcribed directly into English. This creates opportunities for both questions and responses to lose some nuance or meaning in the translation process.

Coding and analysis were carried out by one researcher. Whilst this researcher consulted with the wider research team at Plan International and University College Dublin, this may have had implications for the subjectivity of the codes applied.

The study acknowledges that there is considerable diversity in the way 'gender' is defined. In developing the methodology and approach, the team considered specifically incorporating individuals who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, intersex, queer and other such categorisations (LGBTIQ+). The decision was made that this was beyond the scope of the current study, and that there are significant ethical and safety issues associated with seeking out such respondents in the contexts of the field visits. Rather, a separate and more tailored study would be needed to address and minimise these risks.

## 3. DETAILED FINDINGS

### 3.1. Perceptions of protection risks in the community

*"At the heart of the concept of resilience is the idea of strength in the face of adversity."*  
Sweetman and Smythe 2015.

Before exploring the resilience set out in the term above, it is first important to set the scene in terms of the adversity that adolescents face in the two informal urban settlements of Nairobi: the perceived risks that they face, the environment that they navigate.

It is important to note that this section presents *perceived* risks in the community. Focusing on adolescents' perceptions of risk and highlighting their feelings of safety in their physical and social environment paints a picture of the situation in which adolescents are required to exercise their resilient capacities. It was beyond the scope of this study to research actual risks in these two informal settlements.<sup>v</sup> This study also did not ask about risks or violence in the home, as to explore this sufficiently and in an ethical way would require a tailored study.

#### 3.1.1. Unsafe spaces in the community

Adolescents were asked to draw a map of their community space in order to identify unsafe (and safe)<sup>vi</sup> spaces and describe characteristics of these spaces (see image 1). What emerged from this research activity was that adolescents perceived a vast expanse of their communities to be unsafe. Participants from Kibera and Kawangware identified unsafe spaces, including homes, schools, markets, churches, mosques, shops, public areas, construction sites. The frequency and variety of unsafe spaces, including the identification of spaces that one might assume should be safe (such as schools and homes), supports the perception of one key informant in Kawangware, who said that: *"I do not think there is anywhere safe."*

*"Everywhere in this community; in churches, schools. Kibera is not safe for adolescent girls and boys... There are no policies put in place to look after the children in this community."* Key Informant, Kibera

*"The youth are suffering. Now we are safe in here but when we get out there people feel insecure."* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kawangware

*"There is no security in this area. It is not safe."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

Adolescents particularly reported feeling unsafe in their communities at night, with the increased presence of gangs and criminals and the lack of adequate security such as street lighting. But many said they always felt unsafe, no matter the time of day. They also alluded to the volatile nature of insecurity, identifying specific time periods, namely holidays and weekends (which, when asked to provide more detail, adolescents

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<sup>v</sup> Actual risks can be researched through, for example, collecting crime statistics.

<sup>vi</sup> Safe spaces are presented later in the report under protection mechanisms and community resilience.

reported as being the periods when schools were shut) and election periods, when violence in the community peaked.

### **3.1.2. Risks pertaining to violence and abuse in the community are pervasive**

Findings from this research highlight the serious protection risks that adolescents face in both Kibera and Kawangware. When asked to identify the 'harms' or 'risks' in their community, adolescents who participated in this research frequently reported risks pertaining to violence, exploitation and abuse. It is important to note that adolescents were not explicitly asked about their experiences of violence but were forthright in their responses outlining violence as a key concern. Overall, adolescents described a broad spectrum of violence in their community which infiltrates and impacts significantly on their lives and wellbeing. One respondent (a father who participated in an FGD) in Kawangware stated that: *"They start living in an environment where they feel violence is part of their lives."* This is aligned to existing research that finds that 'crime and violence' are 'normal occurrences' for children and young people who live in Kibera.<sup>86</sup>

#### **3.1.2.1. Physical violence<sup>vii</sup>**

Overall, the harms reported most frequently by adolescents fell under the category of physical violence. This was particularly prominent amongst FGDs with adolescent boys – participants across all eight FGDs with adolescent boys in both Kibera and Kawangware described physical violence as a serious concern. This mostly referred to physical violence in the community and was closely tied to the activity of gangs and criminal groups (see section 5.1.2.1).

*"There is an area where you will be chased by a gang literally and once they get hold of you, they will beat you."* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kawangware

Adolescent boys also described that they were scared of being in the wrong place at the wrong time and getting caught in the crossfire of police activity. On several occasions, participants described how this physical violence could be fatal.

*"As boys when you come home late in the evening, you might end up landing in a group of wrong people who were being chased by the police. If they were firing out bullets, you might end up in that threatening situation."* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

Evidence from the FGDs with parents and KIs further emphasises the gendered nature of boys' and young men's exposure to physical violence and homicide.

*"The adolescent boys are mostly killed maybe innocently here in our community, so they live in fear as compared to the girls."* Father, Kibera

*"The risks involves all but boys are at more risk because if they meet with the police, they are arrested or killed and we are alert over this issue, we look out for the boys a lot."* Mother, Kawangware

One adolescent boy alludes to how threats and experiences of physical violence create an environment of fear that deters adolescent boys from reporting perpetrators of violence to authorities. In this way, physical violence seems to serve a specific purpose: to allow for violence to be perpetrated with impunity.

*"Here in Kibera, even if you see those people attacking someone you assume you haven't seen because if you report them they will come for you and your family members and beat you."* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

The concern expressed by adolescent boys over physical violence in their community aligns to research on boys' increased exposure to physical and lethal violence compared to girls and young women (as outlined in section 3). But it is important to note that it was not only an issue for adolescent boys. Physical violence in public spaces was still a significant concern for girls and was mentioned in six out of eight FGDs.

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<sup>vii</sup> See Annex 1, the glossary, for a definition of types of violence that fall under this section.

### 3.1.2.2. Sexual violence

Harms which fell under the category of sexual violence were also reported frequently by adolescents, and particularly by adolescent girls – a finding which supports existing evidence on sexual violence disproportionately affecting girls.<sup>87</sup> In fact, overall, adolescent girls mentioned sexual violence over five times more than adolescent boys. It was discussed in all eight FGDs as a risk or harm posed to them and other adolescent girls like them in their communities. Adolescent girls mostly referred to the risk of rape in their community which they described as pervasive and inescapable. They also described sexual harassment and abuse.

*“There are so many rape cases here in Kibera. Many girls are being raped.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

This risk of rape posed to adolescent girls was resoundingly supported by adolescent boys, parents and key informants. They recognised that it disproportionately affected girls and young women.

*“Here ... is very bad, that’s the area where they take Bhang, if you are a girl and you pass there, they’ll just rape you.”* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

One respondent alludes to the way in which girls’ physical development during adolescence, which intersects with gender norms around the increased importance of a girls’ sexuality during this period of their life, puts adolescent girls at heightened risk of being victimised by perpetrators of sexual violence.

*“When we get older we start developing for example breasts, we become taller. When we have those changes some men start admiring you. They are attracted to you and so they want to have sex with you.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

In one FGD in Kibera, adolescent girls described the risk of sexual exploitation through ‘transactional sex’. They described how girls would be forced to engage with transactional sex as a result of poverty and lack of access to necessities such as school equipment or sanitary products. Yet, a sense of normalcy of transaction sex emerges from this FGD; it is a means of getting money for basic necessities that is recommended by female peers. This form of sexual violence was confirmed as a risk to adolescent girls by adults (key informants and FGDs with parents).

*“Let me explain. For example, if my mother does not give me things like sanitary pads, money required at school, my friend would tell me, “there’s no need for your mother to give you those things. Come let me show you where I get them from. Come and let me show you a certain boy who’ll give you money”. And because I know I do not have that money, it forces me to go there.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“When asked where they get money, some friends say they have a boyfriend who gives them and you can get one if you want to be given money. But the boys cannot give you for free as you’ll have to pay them in with sex.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“Lack of basic needs makes them [adolescent girls] so vulnerable especially that the adolescent girl requires sanitary towels, so you find someone is willing to provide this things but in return they take advantage.”* Key Informant, Kawangware

The consequences of sexual violence described by adolescent girls supports existing evidence on the detrimental long-term consequences of violence. They described the sexual and reproductive health consequences, including exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and early and unwanted pregnancy. One father also described that some girls would be forced to have unsafe abortions with potentially serious risks to their health and with potentially fatal consequences.

Adolescent girls also observed that forced and unintended pregnancy could “crush all dreams” (as described by an adolescent girl aged 12-14 in Kibera) when girls drop out of school to have a child; often they are unable to return. They also described the stigma and shame that would accompany sexual violence which would sometimes result in isolation and ostracisation by families and peers.

*“In the community, it’s hard to convince girls who dropped out of school to come back to school because they think they’ve already ruined their lives and therefore there’s no need because if*

*they do, other girls at school will laugh at them. And if they say they want to go back, they fear that they will not be allowed.*” Adolescent girl, aged 15-17, Kibera

*“Her education life will be hindered with because there are some schools that won’t admit girls who have children; it is assumed that they can be of bad influence to these other children.”*  
Father, Kawangware

*“When a teenage girl gets pregnant she is judged harshly by the community while the boy goes free.”* Mother, Kawangware

This represents a ‘double threat’ for adolescent girls: those who are survivors of sexual violence frequently face stigma and shame, as well as experiencing emotional violence in the form of isolation or ostracization from their families and communities.<sup>88</sup> The impact of sexual violence could lead to serious and life-threatening mental health issues, and one participant identified suicide as a serious risk for girls who have been raped.

*“[You might feel...] Lonely in school since other pupils may be laughing at you... You may feel like committing suicide because of stigmatization from the people around you.”*<sup>viii</sup> Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kibera

Finally, a small number of adolescent boys and adults reported that sexual violence was also a risk to adolescent boys. However, it is known that sexual violence against boys remains severely shrouded in silence and stigma, is invisible and a taboo;<sup>89</sup> it is likely that the issue of sexual violence against boys is under-estimated and under-reported in this research.

### **3.1.2.3. Harassment: verbal abuse and physical intimidation**

Harassment from strangers on the streets, highly gendered and sexual in nature, was also a serious concern for adolescent girls. This harassment could be verbal, with men and boys shouting lewd and abusive comments, but it could also encompass physical intimidation, such as groups of men and boys lingering outside schools or following and chasing girls.

*“When I’m from school and tired, some youths...stop you on the way back home and start asking so many questions. When you try to avoid them, they shout, “Are you menstruating?” it pisses me off.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“For example, there is a place where they have to wait for a group of people to cross with them. If you happen to be alone, you will be harassed.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

Findings from this research highlight how this type of harassment can significantly impact on the emotional wellbeing of girls and young women. Adolescent girls suggested that boys and men verbally abused and harassed girls with the intent of embarrassing or shaming them (which is closely tied to emotional violence in section 3.1.2.4). It could be inferred from this that harassment is a means through which men assert the ‘social status quo’ in terms of belittling women and preserving their low status in society.

On several occasions, adolescent girls referred to the significant impact that this had on their self-esteem. As alluded to in the second quote below, sometimes this restricts girls’ and young women’s freedom of movement.

*“When you pass by the car wash area, the boys tend to insult and mock the girls as they pass by. Like they would say you are not beautiful which always has impact on self-esteem on the lady.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“Yes. That may discourage you from even getting out of the house because you are afraid that they are going to make you feel bad.”* Adolescent girl, 15-17, Kibera

Interestingly, harassment and verbal abuse was not often reported by parents or key informants as a harm to adolescents. This is supported by the relatively low percentage of household respondents identifying harassment occurring to them or household members in the quantitative survey detailed in Annex 3. It could

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<sup>viii</sup> Referring to a hypothetical situation, not the participants’ actual experience.

be inferred from this that this form of violence remains a lesser concern to parents who potentially overlook the serious consequences reported by some adolescent girls.

#### 3.1.2.4. Emotional abuse perpetrated by parents

Another theme that emerged from the data was emotional violence. Whilst we did not seek to explore the violence that existed within homes as part of this study, this is a theme that emerged nonetheless. This was particularly prominent for girls who described unsupportive environments within their homes in which girls were insulted, shamed and belittled (and was closely linked to harmful gender norms and attitudes described further in section 3.1.3.2). Adolescent girls described the adverse impact that this kind of violence could have on their mental health and self-esteem.

*“For instance, in our case, we normally go home from school at 7.00 PM. When you get home, you guardian...says, “where is this prostitute coming from? She is pretending that she is from school yet she is from seeing men”. That hurts a lot.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-17, Kibera

One respondent also described how this emotional violence within the home could lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

*“The strict parents always see that their children are always up to something bad and so this lowers the self-esteem of the child and she ends up feeling lonely most of the time.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-17, Kibera

#### 3.1.2.5. Recruitment of adolescent boys into criminal groups and gangs

The risk of gangs and gang violence emerged strongly from the FGDs and closely linked to the physical violence (described in section 3.1.2.1). A few adolescent boys described the risk of recruitment into gangs; they could be recruited by gang members in the community as they travelled to school, for example, or as a result of peer pressure from their peers.

*“Joining bad company...you may be taking a walk and you meet guys who tell you to join them.”* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

Recruitment of adolescent boys into criminal groups was of concern to adults who participated in this research; they expressed concern that this could be fatal.

*“This company that boys keep you at times find that they are thieves and once he is recruited into this, he risks losing his life when a time comes when the police are after the group. He might be shot in the process.”* Father, Kibera

*“The risks that are there to boys they are much more than girls because now you can find they are most of them are lured by other people of their age sets that they can even involve themselves in the habit of being thieves, robbers and most of them they now end up being killed by the mob.”* Key Informant, Kawangware

### Key findings: perceptions of risks pertaining to violence

Violence, and the fear of violence, is a marked feature of children's lives as they grow up in Kibera and Kawangware: **they are exposed to violence at all times, day and night**, as they move around their community, whether going to school, to the shops, collecting water, or meeting friends.

Findings from this research support existing evidence on the gendered nature of violence against adolescents: boys are reported to be more vulnerable to physical violence, whilst girls are reported to be more vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment.

**Physical violence**, and the threat of physical violence, is a serious concern for boys. They described how simply being in the 'wrong place and the wrong time' could result in them being physically assaulted, attacked or even killed.

Physical violence linked closely to **the presence and activity of gangs and the activity of police**. Adolescent boys are also vulnerable to being recruited into gangs and criminal groups.

The fear of experiencing **sexual violence**, including rape, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation is often reported by girls. Their responses provide a glimpse into the severity of the consequences of experiencing such violence which, in addition to early and unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), included detrimental impacts on mental health.

**Verbal harassment** was a risk reported by adolescent girls; gendered and sexual in nature, it made girls fear for their safety and restricted their freedom of movement, and it had serious consequences on lowering the self-esteem and emotional wellbeing of adolescent girls.

Adolescents believed that the violence they are exposed to could have **severe consequences**: experiencing violence could be fatal, have life-changing consequences, and have devastating impacts of mental health which could result in adolescents taking their own lives.

### 3.1.3. Drivers of violence at the community and societal level

It is widely recognised that violence prevention and response must not only focus on individual characteristics of individuals and perpetrators, but instead look more broadly at the social, economic and normative environments in which children and adolescents live.<sup>90</sup> UNICEF's Theory of Change recognises two high-level, cross-cutting drivers of violence across the ecological model:

- Situations of fragility and conflict at the community and society level; and
- Social norms about gender inequality and the acceptability of violence and discrimination.

Evidence which fits under each of these drivers emerged clearly from the FGDs and are described in the sections below. Many of the issues described below as drivers of violence were initially identified by adolescents as harms in their community. In particular, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and idleness, and criminality.

#### 3.1.3.1. Fragility in the community

Participants in this research described their community space to be insecure and fragile. They described a number of intersecting factors which contributed to their feelings of insecurity: the presence of gangs, weapons, and criminal activity; drugs and alcohol abuse; extreme poverty and inequality; adverse conditions within the community; unemployment and youth idleness; corruption; and ethnic tensions and violence.

##### 3.1.3.1.1. Gangs, criminality and the presence of weapons

Research participants, adolescents and adults alike, were seriously concerned about the presence of gangs in their community. Both adolescent boys and girls reflected on how the fear of these gangs negatively impacted on their lives and affected their ability to undertake simple, everyday activities such as going for a walk to the shops. Gangs were reported to mostly comprise of young men and adolescent boys who carried out criminal activities, namely mugging and theft.

*"Here [referring to a point on the map] is where the gang meets...if you pass there carrying money anyhow, they'll attack you and go with what you have."* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

*"Going for a walk is proving to be difficult because there are some crime prone areas due to the existence of gang members who would rob you."* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kawangware

The existence of and easy access to weapons emerged from FGDs; it was reported to be a significant risk to personal safety and security.

*"[When asked to identify a risk in the community] Growing [up] in areas where everyone has gun with them."* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kawangware

*"There is a place... where these groups are always armed with guns and they kill people. They also smoke bhang around that place."* Fathers, Kibera

##### 3.1.3.1.2. Drug and alcohol abuse

The activities of gangs of men and boys, criminal activities and violence were closely linked to drug (namely cannabis or 'bhang') and alcohol abuse. Drug and alcohol abuse were reported frequently across FGDs with both girls and boys.

*“There is a group who smoke bang in those areas and once you approach there, they harass you.” Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kawangware*

*“...At car wash area, there are a large number of school drop outs who waste their time drinking alcohol and using bhang. These groups are a threat in that area.” Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera*

Adolescents, both girls and boys, alluded to peer pressure in their communities to start using drugs and alcohol, which could impede their future ambitions and goals. As mentioned in the final quote below, adolescent boys could be influenced by the behaviour of their fathers.

*“You find that as young boys, you can bow to peer pressure and get involved in drug abuse. This will finally stop you from pursuing what you want like playing football.” Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera*

*“For example when growing up, you see your father smoke or in the slums you are told that that is the survival tactic here.” Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kawangware*

#### 3.1.3.1.3. Poverty and inequality

At the root of the violence and insecurity that participants perceived in their community was poverty. Threading through participants' responses in FGDs were descriptions of extreme poverty which prevented the basic needs of vulnerable populations from being met. In some cases, young people would be forced to resort to stealing in order to survive which, in turn, would put them at risk of police encounters and/or arrest, sometimes with lethal consequences.

*“High poverty level leads to increased crime rates and insecurity.” Adolescent boys, aged 12-14, Kawangware*

*“Lack of money among the youths and resolve to steal to make a living.” Adolescent boys, aged 12-14, Kawangware*

And, as discussed in section 3.1.2.2., poverty could also force girls and young women to resort to transactional sex in order to buy essential sanitary products, or simply to acquire money for other basic needs. Concerningly, one key informant alludes to how men take advantage of gendered power imbalances, which intersects with poverty, to sexually exploit girls and young women.

*“Poverty makes them vulnerable and this comes with a lot of things. You probably need sanitary towels, you have to have sex in order to obtain them and this man will take advantage of the situation. The way boys are brought up is that when you have sex with many girls, you are powerful.” Key Informant, Kibera*

Poverty was linked to adolescents being out of school. As alluded to by the respondent below, when parents or families do not have enough money to pay for schooling or school equipment, the onus is placed on children to find the money to pay for their own education, putting them at risk of child labour and exploitation.

*“Moderator: Okay, we have discussed what you would like to be in the future. Now, what are some of the challenges that you face that hinder you from achieving this?”*

*Respondent: Lack of money. You are supposed to make money that will pay for your education because parents cannot afford it, or the money that they end up making you find it is used to pay for house rent or it is spent on buying food.”*

Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

It was not just extreme poverty that emerged from participants responses, but the levels of inequality that existed within Kibera and Kawangware. According to one adolescent girl, being unable to afford the same items, such as phones, as their peers could lead to feelings of exclusion and isolation from peers.

*“When you go outdoors, your friends will make you feel insignificant by comparing what they have and what you do not have; for instance, they will talk about phones and at that time you do not even own a personal line.” Adolescent girls, aged 15-19, Kawangware*

#### 3.1.3.1.4. Poor conditions within the community

The community infrastructure and physical layout also contributed to feelings of insecurity. In particular, participants described how the poor lighting, lack of CCTV or general security mechanisms caused them to feel unsafe, particularly at night. Streets were often reported to be dirty, filled with garbage and highly unsanitary. Parents and key informants also described how cramped conditions and single room houses exposed adolescents to risks of violence within the home.

*“Like in the slums, you find that a family stays in single room and the girl is at a risk of being sexually harassed by the father unlike in the rich families where they have separated rooms.”*  
Father, Kawangware

Many adolescents described physical difficulties in navigating their communities; busy roads with cars and ‘bodabodas’, stray dogs, excessive amounts of garbage, overcrowded areas and poor drainage all generated feelings of insecurity.

*“I would wish the government makes good roads so as to reduce road accidents involving cars and motorbikes that often hit children.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kibera

#### 3.1.3.1.5. Unemployment and ‘youth idleness’

The high levels of unemployment amongst young inhabitants of Kibera and Kawangware seemed to significantly contribute to a sense of insecurity. Participants frequently reported ‘idle and unemployed young people’ who would resort to negative coping strategies, such as engaging in drug and alcohol abuse. It was the unemployed or idle youths who were often reported to be vulnerable to recruitment into gangs.

*“They don’t have jobs so from the scrap metals they sell, they’ll get money to go buy drugs.”*  
Adolescent boys, aged 12-14, Kibera

*“The youths who are not employed have resolved to attacking members of the community and steal their belongings.”* Adolescent boys, aged 12-14, Kawangware

One key informant from Kibera was critical of the government in failing to provide adequate job opportunities for young people once they had left school, which forced them to head in the “wrong directions”.

#### 3.1.3.1.6. Corruption

Many participants in both Kibera and Kawangware were quick to call out corruption in their community, specifically corruption that existed within the police services. A perceived culture of bribery seemed to erode the trust that adolescents had in their security and protection services, contributing to feelings of insecurity. This was mostly reported by adolescent boys.

*“The policemen have failed to do their work. The gang members are always freed by the policemen after the gang members bribe their way.”* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kawangware

Adolescent boys also felt that they were at risk of being falsely accused of criminal activity by the police. This appears to link closely with the harmful stereotype that all adolescent boys and young men are ‘criminals’ or ‘gang members’ (described in section 3.1.3.2.2.); by virtue of being an adolescent boy, you risk being falsely accused of a crime.

*“You will find there is a group that was involved in a crime then when the police are after them, then they find you in the course of patrol around you will suffer for the crime you did not commit.”*  
Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

#### 3.1.3.1.7. Ethnic tensions

Finally, ethnic tensions were also mentioned across FGDs. It was reported that these could flare up and result in violence during the election period. However, this was not as commonly discussed across FGDs compared to other perceived risks of violence.

*“During the electioneering period, if you are a landlord, people can demolish your house due to tribalism, because I am a Kikuyu.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

*“During elections I would say that there is tribalism, if we get to hear even on the radios that so and so have said this and he comes some a certain tribe, we group together and fight against the other tribes.”* Mother, Kibera

### 3.1.3.2. Social norms, stereotypes and expectations (gender and age)

In the body map activity during FGDs, adolescent girls and boys were asked to describe the role of an adolescent like them in their community. The overall picture presented is perhaps unsurprising: girls and boys grow up in environments which rigidly define their roles and place in society. There was discrimination reported both against adolescent girls and boys, but it affected them in different ways.

#### 3.1.3.2.1. The environment for girls

Overall, Kibera and Kawangware were perceived as restrictive environments for girls. As contended by one key informant, Kenyan society is patriarchal and tends to under-value the unique capacities and aspirations of girls.

*“Moderator: What would you say are the risks of harm and safety issues to girls in the community?”*

*Respondent: I would say the patriarchal society. It has been a big harm and risks towards women development. As I said, you are not allowed certain things because you are a girl. When you are aggressive, people question you a lot. You are not allowed to get into politics because it is meant for women who are prostitutes. When you get into politics, they judge you.”*

Key Informant, Kibera

Girls were expected to ascribe to traditional roles for women. In particular, they were expected to undertake chores within their homes and to look after siblings and their families. Adolescent girls described how the expectation on girls to help their mothers with chores meant that they are deprived of spare time to engaged with hobbies or leisure activities.

*“They say that women cannot compete with men. That the role of women is to wash dishes, cooking but they shouldn’t do men’s jobs.... Women are discriminated against.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“Yes. Girls stay indoors as the boys go out and play. We do not get a lot of play time.”* 12-14, Kibera

According to adolescent girls, they are also expected to get married and have children, at the expense of pursuing an education or career.

*“Girls are not considered when selecting those going to play. They are told that sports are not for the ladies. They should go and get married.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

*“A lot is expected from the boys; for instance, they are expected to study and maybe go to the University. Unlike the girls who are expected to get married after completing their form four.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

One key informant linked the value of girls as wives, or as an ‘item to be exchanged’ or a source of income, to driving violence and trafficking.

*“Within the social norms, there are higher expectations. Some see them [adolescent girls] as wives. They will go get married and exchanged. This leads to child marriages, trafficking of these girls and violence towards these girls since they have not been put into consideration as their male counterparts...So basically, girls are looked at differently as the weaker sex, nothing is really expected of them apart from getting married.”* Key Informant, Kibera

Cultural norms meant that girls were expected to be respectful, subservient and obedient to their families, elders and husbands. They were also expected to have high moral values, and to look and dress modestly and appropriately. The issue of wearing modest clothing, including dresses or skirts which did not reveal their knees emerged through one of the FGDs in Kawangware, as below.

*“Some adults say that this generation [of adolescent girls] that is coming ... We have bad morals and bad behaviours. The way we dress, the way we address the big people... They say that before we were here they had good morals. For example, when you greet an elder person you*

*kneel down. You just do things with respect. They would wear long clothes and not short the way we do right now.*” Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

Adolescent girls in Kawangware perceived negative consequences should they digress from these expectations around appropriate dress or behaviour. One participant describes how the shame and fear of what people say about her affects her life.

*“What the community people say makes us feel ashamed of what we are wearing or what we are doing. So we are sometimes scared of the people in the outside world.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

They also perceived negative consequences if they interacted with boys, something which appears to be deemed inappropriate by older generations. Yet, it is noteworthy that the blame is assigned to the girl for interacting with a boy; this did not emerge through FGDs with boys. This hints at intergenerational tensions between adolescents girls and adults.

*“For example, when an old person tells you that you should not talk to a boy and you know that this generation that is here we are allowed to talk to boys and even engage with boys. In class sometimes we sit with boys in the same desk. When an old person discourages you and now we are used to talking to the boys. It is like you feel like you are discriminated [against] from the outside world.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

One participant alluded to the intersection of gender and age in driving negative opinions of adolescent girls by adults in their community.

*“We seem insignificant. And they judge us harshly according to our age. Anyway, the words do not stick, we are used to them.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

#### 3.1.3.2.2. The environment for adolescent boys

Adolescent boys also reported feeling the effect of rigid and restrictive gender norms and discrimination. Boys were also expected to carry out chores and contribute to household tasks, but they tended to be different to the chores expected of girls. For example, boys are expected to travel long distances to collect water or buy food from the shops.

*“Sometimes we are sent to buy things that are purchased far away.”* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

*“Girls wash and cook while we fetch water.”* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

*“The roles of boys and girls are differentiated because of their differences in body formation. For example, the boy is masculine enough to handle tough duties like lifting heavy loads, carry Jerri cans to fetch water. One the other hand, the girl will be given lighter duties like sweeping the house.”* Fathers, Kibera

A few adolescent boys believed that they were given riskier tasks than girls and were mistreated and overworked. As described by the respondent below, they felt that they were more likely than girls to be punished if they failed to complete these tasks. Many adolescent boys described how they strongly felt that there was a favouritism towards girls within families: several stated that they did not feel valued or loved.

*“Nowadays most mothers favour girls to boys.... We are given hard tasks, when the girls fail to complete their tasks, mother does not punish them but when we fail to fetch water we are punished.”* Adolescent boys, aged 12-14, Kibera

*“Secondly, in this place they have really favoured girls more than us boys.... Nowadays they concentrate on girls and provide them with pads and pay school fees for them. As boys we are not valued.”* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kawangware

*“If you want to be loved like the girls, you can do the work that you are assigned to by your parents well so that the parents can also love you and in the process, we become equal to the girls.”* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

*"The girl is seen to be more delicate than the boy and the concentration they give to girls is higher than that of boys, increasing the vulnerability of the boy because the boy is suffering in silence."* Key Informant, Kawangware

One key informant suggested that gender norms which characterise men and boys as being strong can lead to fewer protection measures available, or perceived to be available, for boys within the family and community.

*Moderator: "What do they [adolescents] do to cope with these risks?"*

*Respondent: "Sometimes they report to us in school then we try to follow up and see what to do, mostly that is the mechanism they use. At home some of them talk to their parents... I think the parents respond the same way but have also noticed that there is much concern for girls. Just for the reason have said...girls are looked at to be weak and vulnerable while boys are seen to be strong."*

Key Informant, Kibera

This neglect was perceived by one key informant in Kibera as driving boys to engage in risky behaviour which would expose them to harm, as well as driving GBV against adolescent girls as a result of resentment.

*"They feel neglected because mostly we have concentrated on girl child and they end up doing bad things like joining gangs using drugs and they also participate in abusing the girls."* Key Informant, Kibera

Adolescent boys frequently mentioned that they were expected to be well-behaved and role models in their communities: they were viewed as 'future leaders'. Yet, to contrast, adolescent boys reflected on how the community villainised adolescent boys as 'troublemakers'; they described how they were treated with suspicion as they entered adolescence, and how there was a stereotype that adolescent boys were involved with drug and alcohol abuse, criminality and gangs.

*"The community always has a way in which they view us in a negative way because they perceive that all boys are troublemakers."* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

*"Since most of the youths engage in drug abuse and some steal in the community, it has led to the generalisation that every other boy is a bad one. Even at times you find someone say "This child he is a bad boy." This is not good at all."* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

*"They see us as suspects...they lack trust in us."* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kawangware

This was mentioned mostly by older adolescents, between the age of 15-19, but confirmed by other research participants. In some cases, the perception of adolescent boys as criminals could put them at risk of being arrested for crimes they did not commit.

*"Adolescent boys are at a risk of when working at night the police can arrest them; they think they are thieves, so they are not free."* Fathers, Kibera

*"Boys of our ages are viewed as thieves and are presumed to be using drugs (bhang)."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

### 3.1.3.2.3. Perceptions of adolescence

It is also important to consider adolescence and how it is viewed by those who participated in the research, giving an insight into the social norms environment during adolescence. The data from this research on this topic is limited, but the available data suggests that children between the age of 10 and 19 (adolescents) are believed to be going through a transitional, pivotal stage of their lives, one which exposes them to new vulnerabilities to violence (including through peer pressure to be sexually active, to take drugs and consume alcohol, or to engage in crime).

*"I can say the adolescent stage is where one explores and it can also end up being explosive."* Father, Kawangware

On the one hand, they were expected to act as the 'leaders of tomorrow' and to behave responsibly as 'become adults', and on the other they were perceived to still be immature and irresponsible. This dichotomy of expectations could present challenges to adolescents as they navigate this difficult period of their lives: they are neither viewed as adults, nor children. One key informant linked this perceived vulnerability at adolescence to drive abuse and exploitation of children.

### Key findings: perceptions of drivers of violence

**Fragility and insecurity in the community** drives an environment which allows violence in the community to occur. Of particular concern was the presence of criminal groups and gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, and extreme poverty and inequality. Cramped, busy and unsanitary conditions in the community also contribute to insecurity, as does corruption, high unemployment rates and ethnic tensions.

Girls reported **deep-seated and persistent gender discrimination, and strong expectations of their role in society**. They were disproportionately expected to undertake household chores and support their mothers, which impacted on their lives in terms of limiting their freedom of movement, their ability to choose how to spend their time or engage in hobbies. It also would affect their future: they are expected to get married and have children over pursuing higher education.

Girls described the huge emotional toll of such gendered expectations of appropriate behaviour and modest dress; it could have consequences on their mental health and restrict their ability to move freely and safely in their community.

**Boys also felt that they were discriminated against by the community**; as a result of increased focus on girls, they reported feeling unloved and under-valued. In some cases, this could drive resentment and violence against girls. It could also drive boys to engage in criminal activities or to join gangs.

**Boys felt the consequences of stereotypes**: they report being treated with suspicion as community members assume all adolescent boys are engaged in criminal and gang activity. In some cases, this could expose them to violence if they were arrested for crimes they did not commit.

## 3.2. Protection mechanisms

During FGDs, adolescents were asked to draw a map of their community and identify services that existed for their protection. Through separate FGDs, parents were also asked what protection mechanisms existed within their community. This section presents an overview of those mechanisms. It is important to note that this is not meant to be a comprehensive nor objective analysis of the protection mechanisms that exist across Kibera and Kawangware. It is, however, an attempt to better understand the availability of protection mechanisms from the viewpoint of adolescents and their families.

Across Kibera and Kawangware, respondents identified a variety of mechanisms that they thought played a role in preventing and responding to violence. The most commonly reported protection mechanisms were NGOs and other charitable organisations in their community. For example, adolescent girls and boys in Kibera named organisations that could respond if a girl or woman is raped, such as SHOFKO (Shining Hope for Communities) and Binti Pamoja. Other organisations identified as protection mechanisms included YMCA, Plan International, and CREAM (Centre for Rights Education and Awareness).

*"Binti Pamoja [name of organization]. It helps girls who have been raped by taking them to the hospital and after recovery, they take them so that they can be safe."* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kibera

This was closely followed by community leaders and chiefs, who had a significant perceived role to play in protecting young people from violence. Interestingly, adolescent boys mentioned that they would report violence issues to chiefs much more frequently than girls. A KII with an area chief in Kibera further highlights their perceived role as a key 'child protector' in their community.

*"As a chief, I'm the official child protector in the area, so there have been many complications, including counselling and reconciling families, including counselling the school children, including*

*counselling the errand members of young people, the children... generally, child protection is one of the core functions of our duties.”* Key Informant, Kibera

Police and security services were next most commonly reported protection mechanism and again, were significantly more frequently identified by adolescent boys than adolescent girls. This suggests a degree of inaccessibility to girls. The presence of police or security services was viewed by many respondents as a deterrent to violence or criminal activity in certain areas.

Other mechanisms identified included national children’s helplines and ‘children’s officers’, which were reported mostly by adults. Children’s Officers operate within the Department of Children Services (DCS) and are responsible for taking care of the wellbeing of children, ensuring child rights are adhered to and that children are protected from abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation. They also ensure there is an effective and functioning child protection system and conducive environment for the children to thrive.

### **3.2.1. Perceived effectiveness**

In some FGDs, participants were asked whether the protection mechanisms or services they identified were effective. Whilst a number of respondents did perceive these services to be effective, weaknesses were often identified. The overarching themes are discussed below.

Firstly, a number of participants alluded to service providers or police officers demonstrating discriminatory and belittling attitudes towards those reporting concerns or abuses. This fear of being ridiculed, not taken seriously, or even blamed could act as a deterrent to reporting violence.

*“Because if it’s going to the police they know which police they will be dealing with. Police usually bring in jokes where things are serious. When they start asking someone how the knife got into their body or the rapist got in them, how he tore their clothes does not add up to anything.”* Fathers, Kawangware

*“I go to the police station and at times the police officers say that maybe you are the only person who is causing trouble.”* Adolescent boy, Kibera

A number of adolescent boys reported that there were few protection mechanisms available to help them. They believed that most protection services or mechanisms in their community focused solely on girls and excluded boys from their remit. This meant that if boys had any protection concerns they would have to turn to police or the chief (which is in line with police and chiefs being identified as a key protection mechanism mostly by boys in section 3.2). This opinion was supported by FGDs with parents/guardians and key informants.

*“As boys we don’t have such organisations. Mostly they are for the girls. The boys are left to deal with the police and the chief.”* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kawangware

*“We lack many boy child organisations to run. So I go to the police station.”* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

Other respondents noted that not all areas of Kibera were reached by protection mechanisms, as highlighted by a key informant in Kibera: *“For us, I can say that we are accessible but not for the whole Kibera, that is the sad truth.”* Some respondents suggested that protection services (whether organisations, police, offices or chiefs), were poorly or under-resourced, impacting on their ability to respond to concerns or protect those in need. In particular, participants reported long processing times and an inability to immediately respond to an incident of violence. Even the helplines were identified as “shattered” and “poor”, and unable to respond immediately to the concern or threat to someone’s safety being reported.

*“People have lost trust in them [protection services] because of the long procedures taken.”* Fathers, Kibera

*“Most of this organizations are there but I can say they are just air.”* Father, Kawangware

Corruption was another theme that emerged in the findings, with suggestions that some reporting mechanisms were suspected of being either involved in bribery or colluded with gangs or criminal groups.

Finally, even though some respondents could identify laws and policies at the national level that are established with the purpose of protecting children, many stated that they were not implemented in Kibera or Kawangware. Many recognised that members of the community had poor knowledge of these laws and policies and that, in reality, they did not serve their purpose of protecting children from abuse.

*“Kibera is not safe for adolescent girls and boys.... There are no policies put in place to look after the children in this community.”* Key Informant, Kibera

With sometimes ineffective formal police services and weak laws and policies to protect adolescents from violence, many adolescents felt they had nowhere to turn to. They, and their families, were left to develop their own coping strategies, which are discussed in detail in the proceeding section. One key informant also highlighted the long-term risks associated with the lack of formal support for victims of violence.

*“Here, things are tough. [There are] none (referring to protection mechanisms or safe spaces) at the moment. Everyone handles their own situation and life goes on.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

*“The services are limited with very few respondents/actors to respond to the high cases of violence reported. These are traumatic experiences and the hope is that the child would have some kind of psychological support, which is not there. These children will grow up with this unresolved issues and in turn become perpetrators of the same. This will lead to a vicious cycle of violence.”* Key Informant, Kawangware

### Key findings: protection mechanisms and their effectiveness

A number of **protection mechanisms** which existed to prevent and/or respond to violence and abuse against adolescents. NGOs and other charitable organisations were often identified, followed by chiefs and community leaders. Police services and national helplines for children were also mentioned.

Whilst it is encouraging that a number of participants stated that the mechanisms they identified were effective, many responses highlight that they are perceived to be **futile, under-resourced or corrupt**. This perceived ineffectiveness acts as a deterrent for adolescent girls and boys and their families accessing these mechanisms to report protection concerns.

Some individuals working for protection mechanisms **express discriminatory or belittling attitudes** to those reporting a concern and, as described by one respondent, could blame the victim for the violence they experienced.

A number of respondents, both adolescents and adults, reported that NGOs or community-based organisations **excluded helping boys** who had experienced violence from their remit. Boys were often left with nowhere to turn to for critical support, leaving them with few options other than keeping silent, reporting to the police, or reporting to chiefs or community leaders.

## 3.3. Processes of coping and resilience

So far, the research findings highlight that adolescents face substantial and multiple forms of risks in their communities. They are surrounded by adversity in their physical environment, and they are affected by gender norms and discrimination. They are exposed to intersecting forms of violence as they go about their daily lives. Yet, they identified a lack of effective and accessible protection mechanisms in their community, adding weight to research concluding that urban slums are ‘toxic environments’ for children’s wellbeing and protection.<sup>91</sup>

However, the research findings presented below suggest that adolescents have significant capacity for resilience and have developed a range of resilient coping strategies to keep them, and those around them, safe. Their families and communities, too, appear to have established processes of coping and support to help adolescents and protect them from multiple forms of protection risks. This section presents the patterns that emerged from the data. In doing so, it offers a glimpse into some of the coping strategies that might be employed by adolescents in response to the adversity that surrounds them.

### 3.3.1. Negative coping strategies

Before discussing the processes of resilience and positive coping strategies, it should be noted that not all the coping mechanisms adopted were positive. In fact, a number of respondents described negative processes of coping that were adopted by adolescents, families and communities. For adolescents, this included turning to drug and alcohol abuse, engaging in transactional sex, joining criminal groups or gangs. For parents/guardians, this included restricting the movements of their children (especially girls), harsh (and violent) parenting, and treating their children (especially boys) with suspicion.

*“Us girls we are not allowed to go out and walk. But boys are allowed.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

This restricting freedom of movement is a particularly concerning trend when taken with existing evidence on undermining girls’ ability to mobilise support networks and access essential services, and also exposing them to heightened risks of violence within the home.<sup>92</sup>

One adolescent girl also reported that, driven by poverty and norms around a child’s obedience towards their parents, parents and families could put their child at increased risk by forcing them to engage in theft.

*“Yes. They say as long as you live under their roof, you have to follow their rules. As long as they still provide for you, you have to do as asked; even stealing if possible.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

A number of respondents, both adolescents and parents, expressed attitudes which assigned blame to victims of violence, rather than recognising and responding to the root causes and drivers of violence. These attitudes placed the responsibility of exposure to violence squarely on the shoulders of adolescent girls, mostly as a result of wearing ‘immodest’ clothes or by developing relationships with boys and men.

*“Some girls walk in small clothes. When they are walking they are showing some of their body parts. So, people might start abusing you and telling you that you have bad behaviours, you are going to affect the small girls.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kibera

*“We get to dress code, we tell our girls if you dress this way because we were told ‘my dress, my choice’ if you dress the way you have dressed, don’t pass in some areas.”* Mothers, Kawangware

Some parents and guardians who participated in this research also identified how adolescents were responsible for identifying risky spaces and avoiding them, putting the onus on girls and boys to protect themselves from harm and potentially contributing to a victim-blaming culture, whereby adolescents are blamed if they experience violence in a place that they should have avoided.

*“The child also has the responsibility to make sure that she or he is safe, to watch where they walk, if it’s a girl there are those hotspots of rape cases and make sure that she avoids those places.”* Mother, Kibera

### 3.3.2. Adolescents’ coping strategies and resilience

Despite some negative coping, adolescents who participated in this research demonstrated a variety of positive coping strategies amidst the adversity they face in Kawangware and Kibera. Coping strategies emerged both in response to the risks that they perceived, as well as a means of encouragement to themselves and those around them during difficult times. The themes that emerged from this research were: adapting and adjusting behaviour; exercising agency and influence; mobilising support networks; expressing the desire to help others and the community; maintaining self-belief, optimism and hope for the future; and personal techniques adopted to cope with difficult times. Each are discussed below.

#### 3.3.2.1. Adapting and adjusting behaviour

Adolescents often reported adjusting their behaviour or plans in response to harmful environments in order to mitigate threats in their community from affecting them, aligning to the ‘adaptive capacities’ described under Oxfam’s resilience framework (outlined in section 1.3.6.). Adolescents reported how they would avoid being out and about in their communities at certain times of the day or week or would avoid specific dangerous places by taking alternative routes that they know to be safe.

*"I think with the high insecurity in our area we have to devise ways of coping with it by avoiding going out at night so as to minimise the risks that one might encounter such dangers. What I do is ensure that I finish everything during the day."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*"We know areas that are not bad and areas that are bad, so by 8pm I'm always in the house and I can't leave till the next day."* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

*"There are many routes that I can use while going back home from school. If I see them [gangs] in one route, I will change the route."* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kibera

It should be noted, however, that for some adolescents, avoidance of the community meant staying in-doors. This could be interpreted as a negative coping strategy, particularly for adolescent girls in line with existing evidence on restricting girls' mobility and increased violence within this home.<sup>93</sup>

*"As adolescents, we should learn to keep ourselves busy in order to avoid getting into trouble, especially in this community, we should just stay indoors."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

Adolescents also suggested that they would avoid the company of certain friends in order to stay out of danger and avoid threats. This links closely with the peer pressure identified by adolescents in section 3.1.3.1, which increased their exposure to drugs and alcohol abuse and risky behaviour.

*"By choosing your friends wisely. For example, the bad friends you should not walk with them. You should not follow their bad ways. For example, some take drugs and drop out of school. You should not follow them. You should be what you want to be in future. So, you should not follow their bad ways."* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

Adolescents also discussed how they would mobilise collective resilience and work together to mitigate risks in their community. Participants frequently reported making a conscious decision to walk in groups.

*"By walking together in a group in dangerous places can scare away attackers because one would see that there are many witnesses."* Adolescent boys, aged 12-14, Kawangware

*"When I am going home, I do not go alone. I go with my friends as a group."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

One adolescent girl described how she would identify a boy to walk with her past certain risky areas. This alludes to the highly gendered nature of risk: simply having a boy with her made the adolescent girl feel safe.

*"I ensure that there is a boy from school to pass with him around the car wash area."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

### **3.3.2.2. Social connections and support networks for times of need**

Analysis of adolescents' responses also highlight another aspect to coping: the importance of social connections and relationships. These relationships would both help them to cope with hardship and build their resilience to threats.

*"By forming a group that will be always be of help to you when faced with problems."* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kawangware

Across all age groups and both locations, adolescent girls and boys highlighted the importance of having someone to turn to for advice and support in times of need and for encouragement. And existing evidence demonstrates the importance of building supportive relationships to building adolescent girls' resilience.<sup>94</sup>

*"I would encourage myself and my friends too should be able to encourage me. Like tell me to shun from the abuse of drugs among others."* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

For some adolescents, this meant turning to someone older than them for advice, information and support. And, according to Le Masson et al, accessing and exchanging information is an important process which facilitates resilience.<sup>95</sup> Most often, this was family and many adolescent participants stated that they would

turn to their parents when things got difficult. But they would also turn to their extended family – their grandparents, aunts and siblings.

*“I sit down with my mother and she tells me things and what to do.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“When a child has a problem, he identifies the person who listens to him. That is why we say that parents, especially mothers are supposed to blend with the child so that the child can open up.”* Mothers, Kibera

One adolescent girl (aged 12-14) hinted that they would be ‘embarrassed’ to tell someone outside of their family if they had experienced sexual violence. However, several adolescents expressed the view that their parents were discouraging and unsupportive and were unable to help them address the challenges they were facing. As such, they would turn to others outside of their family for support.

*“At times the parents are not supportive enough this leads to one being discouraged which becomes a hindering factor.”* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“Sometimes parents can make you lose hope. You can at one-point talk to your mother about what you want to be in future, the response you will get will be so discouraging.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

Whilst we do not have the data to delve with certainty into whether adolescents do turn to those outside of their family in instances of violent experiences (as we did not ask about personal experiences of violence), the available data does suggest that adolescents have critical support networks outside of their family who they can turn to for support and guidance, particularly at school.

*“If you trust your parent you can tell her and ask her for guidance. If you don’t feel comfortable with your parent you can go to a teacher you trust.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

*“In school we have a teacher... for guiding and counselling. You can go to her and she would guide you on the things that you should do and she would teach you how can avoid finding yourself in that situation.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

Some adolescents drew support from community members. Of prominence in the data were religious leaders, ‘mentors’ and counsellors, all of whom could provide critical psychosocial and emotional support to adolescent in difficult times, particularly where that support is lacking from family members.

*“Whenever I have a problem, I go to my pastor. My pastor is like my dad, because I don’t stay with my father. He steps in my father’s shoes, tells me how the world is, how to face challenges, because everyone has different challenges. Whenever he talks to me you feel okay.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“There are times when you going to the chief or police won’t help... You find that one has gone to those places and he has not found any help because one is filled with the thoughts of being suicidal. So what you do is go to a pastor or a mentor and share with them because they are the only remaining solution, you can get words of wisdom from them.”* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

Peers also had a significant role to play in providing emotional support and guidance. A number of responses alluded to parents’ and other adults’ inability to fully relate to the unique challenges and hardships that adolescents faced. Having friends, then, who could better understand their viewpoints and who may have experienced similar challenges in the past, was important to them. Many adolescents reported having good friends who they could turn to for advice.

*“For instance, I have friends, when they are going the wrong, I talk to them and they will do the same. We basically have each other’s back.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

*“Most of us have that best friend whom we can always talk to. It is difficult for our parents to understand us since things keep changing every day, but my friend will because she might be going through the same situation or might have gone through the same thing. In the event that*

*they do not understand, [they] will offer words of encouragement.*” Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

One adolescent girl (aged 12-14, Kibera) described how sharing her story with friends would help her to ‘forget the past’. Additionally, peers were important in sharing knowledge and information with each other about risks in the community, including routes to avoid, to help keep each other safe.

*“You should go there with company. You look for a friend who knows the area well and all the shortcuts.”* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kawangware

Schools were important spaces as they allowed adolescents to interact with their friends and foster such encouragement and peer support. Clubs also provided opportunities for such social interactions, including youth clubs, sports clubs, girls’ or boys’ clubs.

One adolescent demonstrated the importance of confiding in their support networks, who would know what to do as a next step if they had experienced violence or felt unsafe.

*“[Responding to a question asking them what they would do if they experienced a harm] Being courageous. You can tell your parents. If they fail to act you can tell the teacher or a person you live with and they would know what to do.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

### **3.3.2.3. The desire to help others and develop their community**

A sense of community also emerged as important to adolescents. A number of adolescents were already involved in helping those around them through youth or community groups – which included groups which cleaned the environment around them or raised awareness on the availability of protection services. For example, one mother mentioned how they had obtained knowledge of protection services through awareness raising campaigns of youth groups.

*“There are youths who go round with loudspeakers announcing about youth meetings that would teach certain things. If you are interested you can attend.”* Mother, Kibera

A significant number of young people expressed the desire to give back to their societies in the future. When talking about future goals and career aspirations, many responses included a *helping* element: adolescents said they wanted to help the poor or disadvantaged around them, including orphans, victims of violence, women and girls exposed to sexual violence, young people engaged in criminal activities, the sick or the elderly. Adolescents evidently care about their communities despite the risks and adversity posed to them; they wanted to give back to their community in the future. Such determination should be fostered as an important source of resilience for communities.

*“My dream is to become an engineer. I also want to establish an organization in my area to help the needy, campaign against drug abuse and build an orphanage for children without homes.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“I want to be a lawyer so that I can help other girls, especially those who suffer, like those who are raped and have no one to defend them in court and the man goes away with it while the girl and her family suffer the consequences.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

### **3.3.2.4. Maintaining self-belief, optimism and hope for the future**

Adolescents demonstrated remarkable optimism in the face of adversity. Many responses indicate that adolescents recognised the importance of believing in themselves and being confident in their abilities to make a difference in their lives, and the lives of those around them. Many were able to envisage futures for themselves where they were successful doctors, lawyers, teachers, pilots; this could be interpreted as a source of strength in and of itself.

*“Being optimistic, even if you pass through so many hardships. You just have to have a little hope in you that can change everything.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

*“My friends who have just they have failed in achieving their dreams can still develop skills and interest in some other things and achieve their goal in the long run. One has to be persistent, do not give up. You do not know what the future holds.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

For many respondents, their optimism was rooted in working hard in their studies and attending school. As alluded to in the quote below, education and schooling acts as a source of hope for uncertain futures, in line with existing evidence on the important role of education during times of crisis.<sup>96</sup>

*“By having hopes and just knowing that even when they talk bad about you that you follow your heart and focus on your studies and just know that you will pass.”* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

This optimism was, however, sometimes difficult. A number of adolescent girls expressed frustration and despair at how easily people in the community could criticise them and undermine them. However, adolescents demonstrated that they were resilient and were able to overcome criticisms or hurtful opinions.

*“One should be focused in life because you know what you want. You should also work hard in order to realise that dream come true. Despite the challenges that you go through and you should not listen to other people’s opinion.”* Adolescent boy, aged 15-19, Kibera

### **3.3.2.5. Individual processes and personal techniques adopted to cope with difficult times**

Adolescents also demonstrated the ability to develop personal techniques and ongoing processes that helped them through difficult times. This alludes to a deeply personal and unique form of resilience, sometimes developed in the face of limited support networks. Adolescent girls discussed a range of techniques, including: taking time to themselves to cry; going out for a walk; writing in a diary; and reading motivational books. Such techniques resemble psychosocial support and emotional wellbeing techniques.

*“I cannot tell anyone what I am going through. I would rather write it down in my diary, cry then tear away the pieces of paper.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

*“I just cry and all will be well.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

*“Whenever things are tough, I just take a walk.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

A number of participants emphasised the importance of keeping busy and engaging in recreational activities, which would help them potentially provide a sense of normalcy and provide relief from daily stresses or past experiences.

*“We play all the games that we can. You can see that we are still young and full of energy. We ride bicycles...It helps us to forget what we might be going through and also relieve the boredom.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

However, it is important to note that, as described in section 3.1.3.2.1., due to gender roles and expectations, adolescent girls felt unable to spend as much time engaging in recreational activities as boys; instead of leisure time, adolescent girls were disproportionately expected to do household chores. In this way, gender roles and discrimination could undermine an important coping mechanism, cause stress and anxiety and reduce adolescent girls’ resilient capacities during difficult times.

Moreover, engaging with sports as a recreational activity appears to be gendered, with more boys reporting engaging with sports than girls. Some adolescent boys were cognizant that engaging with sports could help them to avoid getting involved with drug and alcohol abuse and criminal activities.

*“They [boys] engage in sports to release stress, like if you are stressed up at home, you go to play football so as to forget what happened at home.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

Finally, with a number of respondents stating how they would pray or go to church during times of crisis, turning to religion was a way in which adolescents were able to cope with difficult situations, or make sense of the adversity they were facing. This is in line with recent Plan International research on adolescent girls in crisis.<sup>97</sup>

*“Yes, I do [cry]. And I feel lighter afterwards. I cry and ask God to help me go through whatever situation am going through.”* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kawangware

### **3.3.2.6. Influence and participation in decision-making**

Part of this research explored adolescents’ ability to participate in decisions that affect them. Some adolescents demonstrated the ability to positively shape the world around them and engage in decisions.

This ranged from small everyday decisions at home and at school, through to bigger decisions such as their education, choice of career, or if and who to marry.

However, overall, participants reported that adolescents were excluded from decision-making processes as a result of their age, gender, socio-economic background. Some adults simply ignored adolescents' views, and this represents a key barrier to adolescents mobilising their resilient capacities.

*"When there are serious decisions they think we are not mature enough so that you can make your own decision. They think you are somehow irresponsible that you may rush in decision-making."* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

On several occasions, adolescents demonstrated the ability to influence and shape their parent's decisions when it came to small decisions that might compromise their safety, such as going to the shops in the evening. This suggests that adolescents are, to some degree, able to participate in their own protection on a day to day basis.

*"I would tell my mother not to send me to the shop at 10PM at night."* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kibera

*"If my parents want to send me, I tell them to send me early or to send me to another shop so that I cannot get them there."* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kibera

However, according to one adolescent girl, they faced resistance if they attempted to exercise this decision-making in their own safety.

*"Our parents do not understand the situation because when you are sent and fail to go to the shop at night, the mother will say that one feels that she is all grown."* Adolescent girl, aged 15-19, Kibera

#### Key findings: Individual coping mechanisms (adolescents)

Adolescents girls and boys reported **adjusting their behaviour or adapting their plans** in order to mitigate risks of violence. This included taking alternative routes to avoid certain risky spaces in their community or avoiding the company of certain individuals who engaged in risky behaviour.

Many adolescents reported **mobilising collective resilience** to mitigate threats. Finding safety in numbers, adolescents would walk to and from school in groups.

Adolescents have **support networks**, and they were able to draw on these networks for emotional support in times of need. **Parents and family** were most often reported but if they were unsupportive or unable to relate, adolescents turned to others, including siblings, friends and teachers.

Adolescents **share information, knowledge and advice** on risks and self-protection strategies with their support networks.

Several adolescent participants **expressed the desire to help the community** in the future through their careers, even if their community posed significant risks to them. Young people want to help others and are an important source of resilience for the community.

Despite the odds, adolescents demonstrate that they are capable of maintaining their emotional wellbeing through **self-belief, optimism and hope for the future**. A key source of hope for the future was education.

Many adolescent girls reported adopting **therapeutic techniques** to foster psychosocial wellbeing when things got particularly difficult, including writing in diaries, reading motivational books, taking a walk, or engaging in recreational activities.

Adolescent boys turn to **sports or other leisure activities** to provide daily relief from stress or anxiety.

Although limited, some adolescents demonstrated the ability to **positively shape the world around them** and participate in decision-making. In a few instances, adolescents demonstrated the ability to positively

influence their caregivers into prioritising their safety and wellbeing. However, there were some barriers to this, and adolescents often reported restrictive environments in which they could express their views, and have their voices heard.

### 3.3.3. Parents' coping mechanisms and resilience

This research, recognising that the responsibility for protection should not fall only on adolescents' shoulders, sought to explore the resilience demonstrated by adolescents' families and communities. Exploring parents' coping strategies is pertinent because, as identified in the previous section, parents and family were often reported as sources of support for adolescents when they felt at risk or have experienced violence.

When asked how families protect children from violence, the responses fell under three main areas: adopting parenting strategies that were perceived to be positive; keeping their children busy and engaged; and taking the responsibility to report to available and trusted authorities where needed.

#### 3.3.3.1. Parenting

Although some of the parenting practices reported by respondents are interpreted as negative (for example, restricting movements of adolescent girls, strict parenting, violent discipline, seeking to arrange a marriage for their daughters), many responses showed how parents have adopted processes to support their children as they move through adolescence and navigate risks.

Mirroring the pattern of adolescents seeking advice from their parents and families, parents/guardians (both mothers and fathers) reported that they attempted to earn trust in their relationships with their children. They saw the importance of building genuine relationships and taking the time to understand what is going on in the lives of their children – their concerns, their fears, the risks they perceive. They mentioned that this would help children feel safe and able to share their problems with them.

*"I try to be a friend to him/her so that when they are in trouble, they can easily share their views."*  
Father, Kawangware

*"Because the adolescent is in a stage where need we to listen to their opinions rather than being harsh and offer them with help."* Father, Kibera

*"We should be a friend to our children and not be too harsh on them. If you are free with your children, then they would open up and ask you stuff. They would know the good and the bad."*  
Mother, Kibera

Interesting dynamics between mothers and daughters emerged from the data. Some mothers stated the importance of being open and honest with their daughters and educating them about the gendered risks that they might face, including sexual violence. One mother spoke about how she shared her past experiences and advised her daughter on strategies for keeping safe (such as walking in groups).

*"I have children and I tell my daughter everything so that she can try and be safe. I advise her to walk in groups so that when people try to grab her, she can shout and the rest can help her."*  
Key Informant

Parents discussed a range of tactics for keeping their children safe, including setting curfews for their children in order to limit their movements at night, teaching children how to recognise and avoid unsafe areas in the community, and, when appropriate, accompanying children on certain routes.

It is important to note, however, that on occasion adults espoused belittling and demeaning views of their children and their capacities, adopting an overly protectionist stance. Whilst it is promising that many adults recognised their responsibility for keeping the children and young people of their community safe, this could undermine adolescents' remarkable capacities for resilience which has been highlighted by evidence from this research.

*"Children cannot do anything. It is on us elderly people who has a duty to protect these children. It is our duty to educate them."* Key informant, Kibera

And, often, belittling views expressed were gendered, with girls being viewed by adults as needing 'extra care', or that they were 'weak' and in need of additional protection; this is in line with existing evidence on adolescence promoting girls' 'frailty, vulnerability and need for protection'.<sup>98</sup>

### 3.3.3.2. Parents challenging gender norms and inequality

Although limited, there is some encouraging evidence that some parents who participated in this research sought to challenge existing gender norms in order to ensure equal treatment of their daughters and sons. For example, one father in Kawangware described how in his household there was a 'chores roster', ensuring that girls and boys carried out an equal share of household chores, rather than leaving it all to the girls. He states that: *"So in Nairobi, that's what happens, there are no roles specific to gender."*

Several mothers also expressed that they treated their daughters and sons equally in terms of participation in decision-making, contributing to household tasks and taking care of the family. They also described how important it was for girls to realise that getting married and dropping out of school wasn't the only option for them in life: they wanted their daughters to go to school, to not get married early, and to get a job. This is encouraging in a society that was described as patriarchal.

*"If they are educated they become mentors for others and we as a community, we will be proud of our education girls. For instance, if one becomes a member of the parliament, we would be proud to associate them that they have come from [name of location]. She will represent the whole community."* Mother, Kawangware

*"We also encourage them as they go to school, they work hard so that they don't see that they are girls and at the end they have to get married. They should have a good foundation in education and get the best out of their education."* Mother, Kibera

### 3.3.3.3. Encouraging their children to keep busy

Many parents discussed the importance of keeping their children busy and engaged in order to mitigate and cope with risks. For many, keeping busy was a strategy for avoiding 'idleness', which was commonly perceived as a risk factor for being drawn into gangs or criminal activities, particularly for boys.

*"When he comes from school [during school holidays], as a parent I organise how he will rest for like 3 to 4 days and then I organise for him to go for some tuition to avoid idleness."* Mother, Kibera

*"I would like that during the holidays we have educative programs for the teenagers and help them even to make choices of their subjects that they learn in school so that they don't stay idle."* Mother, Kibera

This included encouraging their children to take up hobbies at school or through youth clubs, such as sports. Parents also seemed to believe that education had protective potential, and many reported that they encourage their children to work hard in their studies, engage in afterschool or school holiday study clubs (which mirrors school holidays as perceived periods of heightened insecurity).

Both of the above strategies for keeping children safe (establishing trust and becoming a confidant for children and encouraging their children to keep busy) mirror the strategies reported by adolescents. This could suggest that parents are responding to children's views, needs and wishes in order to support them in keeping safe in their community.

### 3.3.3.4. Reporting and accessing protection services

However, one protection strategy described by parents, which was less frequently described by adolescents in this research, was taking action and reporting concerns of child protection abuses to authorities or appropriate protection services. Overall, parents and adults seemed to be more confident in their ability to report and felt able to take forward any concerns they or their children had. Parents also reported knowledge of, and an ability to report to, a range of services in the community that they would access if their child had experienced a harm. This included hospitals and medical centres, police and authorities, counselling and psychosocial support mechanisms, to NGOs or other local organisations.

Some parents also reported not only having the responsibility to report any abuses that their children suffered, but also to report any suspicions of harm or knowledge of harm to other children in the community. This alludes to a collective sense of protection and responsibility as adults to keep children in their community safe.

*“As a parent or any other person you can [report to services]... It is not a must that it has to be your child. You can go to the groups you have and report that there is a child who is affected in this way.” Mothers, Kibera*

In many ways this is encouraging: it suggests that positive steps can be taken by parents to access protection mechanisms (see section 3.2. for more information on the protection mechanisms identified in this research). However, the fact that the evidence suggests that parents feel more confident in accessing these services than children underscores that these mechanisms may not be child- or youth-friendly, and possibly out of reach of children themselves.

#### **Key findings: Coping (parents and families)**

Encouragingly, parents reported coping strategies **mostly mirrored those of adolescents**. They prioritised **open and supportive relationships** with their children in which they could share information, knowledge and advice on strategies for keeping safe.

An interesting dynamic emerged between **mothers and daughters**: one mother reported sharing previous experiences of GBV with her daughter, with the intention of being open and honest about the hostility in the community and risks of violence, and in order to advise on self-protection strategies.

A range of **parenting practices** developed in response to insecurity were reported, including setting curfews, educating children on unsafe spaces, and sometimes accompanying their children on certain routes.

Some parents, particularly mothers, sought to **challenge gender norms** and treat their daughters and sons equally.

They also found it important that their children were **kept busy and engaged** in order to prevent them from engaging in risky behaviour.

Evidence suggests that parents were **more confident in accessing protection services** than adolescents; this is encouraging as children were most likely to tell their parents if something happened to them. However, it does underscore the fact that protection mechanisms and reporting routes may not be child- or youth-friendly or accessible.

However, there were some **negative coping mechanisms** that parents adopted. This included expressing belittling and shaming attitudes towards their children, restricting their freedom of movement (especially girls), engaging in violent parenting, or exploiting their children by pushing them to steal.

#### **3.3.4. Safe spaces and resilience at the community level**

Whilst the community mapping exercise with adolescents highlighted the prevalence of unsafe spaces in the community, adolescents did identify a number of spaces in which they felt safe. As put by one key informant in Kibera, safe spaces *‘have these children at heart’*; this implies that safe spaces prioritise the best interests of children.

Respondents identified safe spaces, most commonly schools, churches or mosques, and homes. It is interesting to note, however, that all of these most commonly reported safe spaces were also identified as unsafe spaces in section 3.1.1. These contradictions emphasise the volatility and unpredictability of risks: a space deemed safe for one adolescent could easily be unsafe for another.

Although less frequently, chiefs’ camps were also mentioned, as well as youth centres and NGOs or charitable organisations. When asked to describe how these spaces made them feel safe, adolescents mostly referred to the security in place to protect certain areas, including CCTV, streetlights (after dark), guards or police. They also alluded to how they felt safe when they were with adults or people they knew or trusted, for example, teachers or friends.

*“I feel safe at home because my friends are there and my parents.” Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kibera*

With regards to resilience – the community adapting in the face of adversity to protect children – some

themes did emerge linked to the safe spaces identified by respondents, particularly schools and spaces where NGOs or other charitable organisations or groups undertake activities.

#### 3.3.4.1. Schools

Schools were frequently identified as a safe space within the community in both Kibera and Kawangware (contrasting to the quantitative data from 2015 in Kibera). School buildings were sometimes reported to provide physical protection for adolescents, with many respondents highlighting that schools were located in secure compounds or areas, sometimes with guards. And, as previously discussed, engaging with studies was seen by many respondents as an important coping strategy, one which could prevent adolescents from engaging in harmful activities in their community.

This also related to the specific protection responsibility held by schools. Teachers were responsible for referring any cases of child abuse or violence against children. But their role extended beyond this, with teachers also providing psychosocial protection for adolescents: they were reported to play the role of 'counsellors' to children, providing them with emotional support and guidance, and also educating them on strategies for avoiding threats and self-protection (mirroring the importance of teachers as a support network for children in section 3.3.2.2). Some schools were reported to have counselling offices in order to provide specialist psychosocial support to students.

*"The teacher will be able to understand the child more than anybody else. A teacher will be able to detect a problem in a child while the parents may not have detected. And a teacher can do referrals."* Key Informant, Kibera

*"I think the teachers also play the role of counsellors and parents."* Fathers, Kibera

The evidence from this research suggests that schools also adapt to the external environment in order to keep their students safe. For example, adolescents reported that they were released early from school in order to avoid dark and ensure their safety on their journeys home from school.

*"These days even the teachers have known so they release the children from school early enough."* Adolescent boy, aged 12-14, Kibera

And, during school hours, some evidence suggests that schools seek to establish appropriate and accessible mechanisms for children to report any concerns or abuses in confidential manner, recognising that many children feel unable to tell teachers in person. For example, as shown below, one school in Kawangware had established a 'speak out' box.

*"If you don't have enough courage to report to someone, in this school we have a speak out box. You can write it down and put it inside there. The teachers will come and look at it and they will find a way to help you."* Adolescent girl, aged 12-14, Kawangware

The research indicates that adolescents view schools as trying to involve adolescents in decision-making. This provides spaces to be included in decision-making processes, even when they are not given the same opportunities in the home.

*"Schools try and involve them in decision-making even when parents don't appreciate."* Key Informant, Kibera

It is important to note, however, that there were limits to the school's protective capacity; one key informant from Kibera noted that sometimes teachers overlook signs of child abuse in their students.

*"In school if a child portrays certain behaviours that are influenced by what the child is going through at home, the teacher may not understand. Sometimes the child comes to school looking untidy and the teacher just reprimands the child without finding out the root of the problem."* Key Informant, Kibera

Moreover, mirroring concerns from the quantitative data in Kawangware (in Annex 3), one key informant highlights that going to school can, in some cases, put children at risk of violence.

*"Mostly the perpetrators of violence focus on the times that the children are going to and from school."* Key Informant, Kawangware

### 3.3.4.2. NGOs or other community-based organisations in the community

The activity of NGOs, or other organisations, in the community also appeared to be a source of resilience. A number of participants spoke about how youth groups or other groups supported by NGOs share important information and knowledge and educate vulnerable children and adolescents about risks and self-protection strategies. For example, some adolescent boys noted that they learnt about self-defence and self-protection strategies through engaging with Scouts.

Responding to the extreme inequality in Kibera and Kawangware, some NGOs or organisations were reported to target specific groups of vulnerable and marginalised children, and particularly girls. SHOFCO, for example, was reported to look for areas around schools during school time to reach out-of-school children.

Moreover, NGOs or organisations also said that they recognised the importance of children's participation in decision-making and gave a platform to for children to share their views and opinions on issues of concern to them. It is interesting that the SASA! model was mentioned by a couple of respondents. One key informant worked for an NGO in Kibera that implemented the SASA! model<sup>ix</sup>, with an aim of allowing young people to raise their voices about issues of concern in their community. According to the key informant, this would *“create cohesiveness in the community and reduces the possibility of occurrence of violence in the community”*. This type of resilience implies the third of Oxfam's resilient capacities – transformative resilience – as it seeks to mobilise the community in order to challenge and transform the underlying structures that drive risks. This strategy adopted by NGOs is promising, as evidence from evaluations of the SASA! model in Uganda shows that it was linked to reducing the level of physical partner violence against women.<sup>99</sup>

However, there was some data that contradicted this finding, so it should be taken with due caution. One key informant was particularly critical of NGOs and civil society organisations on the account of never consulting the community about their needs, let alone children, about activities that they undertake.

#### Key findings: Resilience at community level

Despite being able to identify many unsafe spaces, adolescents could encouragingly also identify safe spaces which prioritised their safety and wellbeing.

**Schools** are an important source of resilience and support for adolescents. They have protective potential and have adapted to the fragile context of urban slums.

Examples of **schools demonstrating resilience** include releasing children from school early in order to ensure they are home at a safe hour and including a 'reporting box' where adolescents can discreetly disclose a concern without having to verbalise the issue to a teacher (which could be frightening and challenging), and without drawing attention to the disclosure (which could result in stigma).

Schools are **entry points for psychosocial support services**, including counselling. Teachers have a role to play in providing counselling and emotional support to children, and to responding to and reporting any signs of child abuse.

The activity of **NGOs or other community-based organisations** also highlights resilience at the community level: they would educate children about risks and self-protection, seek out particularly vulnerable or marginalised groups in the community. Some NGOs are reported to provide a platform for adolescents to raise their voices on issues that affect them, but not all.

## 4. DISCUSSION

This research sought to shine a light on the views and experience of adolescent girls and boys in Kibera and Kawangware. In doing so, a number of key overarching findings have emerged.

<sup>ix</sup> The SASA! Approach is a community approach developed by the organisation Raising Voices Uganda widely recognised as an effective and transformative method for reducing violence against women and children. See: <http://raisingvoices.org/sasa/>

## 4.1. Volatility, insecurity and environments of fear

In many ways, the findings from this research are unsurprising. They confirm existing theories about the urban slums often being 'toxic environments' for children's wellbeing and protection. Adolescent boys and girls are exposed to serious and persistent child protection risks, including physical, sexual and emotional violence. And these risks of violence are gendered, again aligning to existing evidence: girls are disproportionately exposed to and fear sexual violence and harassment, whilst boys are disproportionately exposed to physical attacks and are vulnerable to pressure to join or recruitment into gangs. Yet despite the prevalence of child protection issues, the two urban slums appear to be out of reach of effective formal protection services and are not reached by laws or policies at the national level aimed to protect children from violence.

Insecurity pervades so many aspects of adolescents' lives and encroaches on the spaces that they spend their time as they grow up in these two urban slums. This research did not ask adolescents about individual experiences of violence. Yet, an environment of fear clearly emerges from the data: adolescents were all too aware of the harms they might meet when undertaking day to day activities as simple as walking to school, meeting their friends or going to the shops. This fear curtails adolescents' freedom of movement and restricts their opportunities to grow and develop to their fullest potential. They are forced to spend time and energy on managing risk. Aligned to Judith Bruce's argument, this fear, and its ability to control and restrict adolescents, could in and of itself be interpreted as violence.

Evidence from this research highlights the volatility and unpredictability of urban slums, making the work of effective child protection services particularly challenging. Many of the spaces described as safe by some adolescents were described as particularly unsafe by others, including spaces that should provide a nurturing and protective environment such as homes, schools, churches or mosques. Staff working for the services established to protect adolescents are sometimes perceived to perpetrate violence against them. This erodes trust that adolescents have in the ability of formal services to protect them and, as alluded to by several research participants, generates a feeling that 'no place is safe'.

## 4.2. Negative impacts on psychosocial wellbeing

Threaded through adolescents' responses were examples of poor psychosocial wellbeing resulting from violence and the fear of violence during adolescence in urban slums. With prevailing harmful gender norms, expectations and stereotypes, adolescent girls and boys felt isolated, discriminated against by the outside world, judged and shamed. In some cases, they described crippling self-esteem, low confidence and depressive outlooks on life.

During adolescence, it is well-established that children undergo a series of social, cognitive, emotional and developmental transitions. In the words of one research participant, adolescence is an 'explosive stage' of children's lives.<sup>100</sup> Adolescents are known to be particularly vulnerable to mental health problems as a result of these changes; yet, the urban slum contexts in which adolescents live – the exposure to multiple forms of risk and the pervasiveness of insecurity and its consequences on their daily lives – seemed to contribute to and exacerbate these vulnerabilities. In many cases, adolescents described having no one to turn to who could meet their specific psychosocial wellbeing needs.

For adolescent girls, psychosocial illbeing seemed to be linked to GBV. For example, the sexual violence that adolescent girls are exposed to on a daily basis – lewd comments and verbal abuse from men and boys in the streets – seemed to be perpetrated with the intention of controlling women and girl's low status in society by embarrassing them and making them feel ashamed of their bodies which are developing in adolescence. This type of sexual violence has a negative effect on girls' psychosocial wellbeing: it lowers their self-esteem, makes them fearful of leaving their homes, and can lead to severe mental health issues. It also reinforced harmful gender norms in an ongoing cycle. At some stage, systemic changes to gender discrimination, both direct and indirect, must be effected in order to shift societal perspectives on the status of women and girls.

## 4.3. Coping strategies to maintain psychosocial wellbeing

The findings shine light on some encouraging stories of strategies for maintaining positive psychosocial wellbeing amidst adversity in urban slums. Social connections appeared to be key and many adolescents encouragingly reported having someone to turn to for advice and support when they were going through particularly difficult times. Families were important, particularly parents and siblings. But peer connections -

friends who could relate to the specific challenges that adolescents were going through and provide appropriate advice – were particularly valued by research participants. Adolescents also developed uniquely personal strategies for immediately coping with a challenging situation. Girls described how they might write in their diaries, read motivational books, take a walk or engage with a hobby. Boys often described how they would engage in sports in order to relieve stress or anxiety. The capacities demonstrated here align to Oxfam’s resilience framework under absorptive resilient capacities: taking intentional (in this case, psychosocial) protective action to cope.

However, in terms of both social connections and self-help techniques, violence could undermine adolescents’ ability to exercise these absorptive resilient capacities. As shown by this research, violence and the fear of violence can restrict adolescent girls’ movements and their ability to meet with peers. Moreover, gender norms and expectations could undermine girls’ coping strategies for positive psychosocial wellbeing: expected to spend their spare time contributing to household chores, adolescent girls are prevented from engaging with a hobby, or fostering social connections with their peer networks – both important reported sources of resilience for girls. These findings align to Le Masson’s research which finds that gender-based violence undermines women’s capacities to exercise resilience on an equal footing to men in crisis settings.<sup>101</sup>

Whilst adolescents discussed that they would turn to their informal support networks for help when they needed it, few mentioned accessing any specialist psychosocial support tailored for adolescents in Kibera or Kawangware. On the rare occasions that it was mentioned, counselling came from schools, either from teachers or from professional psychosocial services using schools as an entry point. Whilst adolescents may have developed strategies for dealing with the issues they face on their own, it is critical that this is met and supported with tailored psychosocial support.

#### **4.4. Adolescent boys are overlooked**

Existing research on adolescent girls in humanitarian crises shows that they are ‘falling through the cracks’.<sup>102</sup> Whilst we do not have the data from this research to say whether there were services tailored specifically for the unique challenges facing adolescent girls in Kibera and Kawangware, it is encouraging that from the perspective of many research participants, there were a number of organisations that would provide specialist support for female victims of sexual violence. Many said that they knew of NGOs or organisations to turn to if an adolescent girl had been victimised.

The research shows that a number of boys felt that they were not valued or loved by their families or communities, a result of stereotypes of adolescent boys as ‘trouble-makers’ or ‘criminals’. The data suggests that these feelings could drive adolescent boys into engaging in risky behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse, or relenting to pressure to join gangs, which puts them at significantly increased risk of violence. It could also potentially drive adolescent boys into perpetrating GBV, as suggested by one research participant.

It was also frequently expressed by research participants that boys had nowhere to turn to and that there were no services or organisations that would respond to them if they had been victimised, despite the overwhelming threats of gang and physical violence and, although less prevalent in the data, threats of sexual violence. Unable to turn to NGOs or other community-based services, boys and their families are often left with no option but to turn first to the police. However, this is sometimes concerning: perceived to be highly corrupt, to express belittling or blaming attitudes, or even to collude with gangs, turning to the police could expose boys to further risks of violence or ostracisation. As noted by one research participant, adolescent boys suffer in silence.

In this way, violence and harmful gender norms can lead to negative coping mechanisms for boys. And, potentially, gender norms that see men and boys as strong, brave and not in need of any protection mean that the services tailored to adolescent boys are not as frequent as those for adolescent girls.

#### **4.5. Strategies to mitigate risks of violence**

The adolescents who participated in this study demonstrated detailed knowledge and awareness of the risks of violence that affect them. They could identify, often with consensus in the FGDs, spaces which were risky and should be avoided. They could name the times of day, month or year where certain places are out of bounds to them. They seemed to have access to up-to-date information, and a reported source of this

information was their peer networks: their parents, their teachers, their friends. This provides another angle to the importance of social connections.

What is clear from this research is that adolescents do have agency and the ability develop resilient strategies to adapt to adversity in urban slums. They change their routes, walk in groups, avoid situations where they are exposed to peer pressure, and avoid certain times of the day. These strategies closely align to adaptive resilient capacities under Oxfam's framework. Sometimes this was challenging, and environments which hold children back from partaking in decision-making meant that parents would expect them to undertake risky tasks, such as going to the shops at night. However, they demonstrated that, in the right supportive environments, they can harness their knowledge of risks to influence their parents to prioritise their safety in everyday life.

These individual-level adaptive capacities intersect and complement those at family and community level. This research shows that parents adopt a range of parenting practices in order to prevent their children from experiencing violence: setting curfews; accompanying children on certain routes; educating children on risks and self-protection strategies; being supportive of their futures and aspirations; keeping their children busy and engaged to prevent them from engaging in risky behaviour. One means of keeping children busy was encouraging them to participate in youth groups or clubs; and these clubs could foster resilient capacities through teaching adolescent self-defence tactics and self-protection strategies. Another means of keeping children busy was making sure they attended school. Schools, too, adopted specific strategies for mitigating risks such as releasing students early, or establishing a 'speak out' box for adolescents to report concerns or issues, so that they could be reported.

#### **4.6. Collective resilience and the desire to help others**

The responses that adolescents gave in this research were interwoven with a sense of collective responsibility for keeping each other safe. It becomes clear that adolescents want to help each other; they encourage each other and look out for each other. They accompany each other to and from school or on risky routes, they invite their friends over to their homes if home life gets challenging. Peer networks, in this respect are critical. In the words of one adolescent girl, there is a sense that adolescents 'have each other's back'.

And beyond immediately helping their peer networks through difficult times, there was a spirit of wanting to contribute to and give back to society. It is easy to focus on the risks that the community poses to adolescents; despite this, adolescent participants expressed kindness and the desire to help the community, and particularly help vulnerable populations, including street children, drug addicts, orphans, or victims of violence. When describing their aspirations for the future, they described how they wanted to be doctors, lawyers, social workers *in order to help those less fortunate than them* in Kibera and Kawangware. This collective spirit should be harnessed and built upon; adolescents have the desire to improve their communities in the future.

#### **4.7. The protective potential of education**

The findings suggest that education has an important role to play, aligning to research and theories on the role of schools as safe spaces in humanitarian crises.<sup>103</sup> Schools were frequently identified as a safe space and a protection mechanism by adolescent participants. They could provide physical protection, particularly if they were situated in a secure compound with security and CCTV. Yet through meeting with their friends and developing peer connections through classes and after-school clubs and activities, schools also provide some psychosocial protection. This is critical for adolescents' ability to mobilise the important processes of peer support highlighted by this research: sharing information, seeking advice and giving guidance amongst a peer network.

Teachers were reported by adolescents to be a key source of support. Therefore, being in school provides the opportunity for children to engage with and build supportive relationships with their teachers as well as the opportunity to confidentially share their worries with their teachers. Teachers also had an important role to play in child protection by responding to and reporting signs of child abuse. In some cases, they also acted as counsellors and could provide specialist psychosocial support. In this way, accessing the right to education could act as a gateway to rights to protection from violence in urban slums.<sup>104</sup>

Education was also markedly viewed by adolescents as a source of hope for their futures. Adolescents saw their education as the pathway to a more optimistic future for themselves. And working hard in their studies

was often reported as a coping strategy and a means to survive through difficult periods of time. However, evidence from this research shows that there are gendered barriers to education which could undermine adolescents' ability to access this source of resilience: girls do not progress as far through their education because society expects them to leave work and marry. Many adolescent girls disheartened by these imposed limits to their educational attainment, although there was some evidence to suggest that parents were prioritising their girls' education. Moreover, extreme poverty results in large numbers of young people being out of school in Kibera and Kawangware, undermining their chance to access this source of resilience.

Conversely, however, nearly three quarters of respondents in the 2015 Concern Worldwide survey (see Annex 3) said that they were anxious about leaving their children at school in Kawangware (74%). Qualitative descriptions of the risks facing adolescents on their journeys to or from school could shed some light on potential reasons for this anxiety. There may be other causes for concern about school's protective potential. For example, a couple of adolescent girls suggested that adolescent girls were vulnerable to sexual exploitation and, when parents are poor and unable to afford education or the required educational materials, the desire to attend school can result in girls being sexually exploited.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The tendency in both child protection and resilience research to overlook the individual strategies and capacities of adolescent girls and boys render invisible the remarkable resilience that they demonstrate in the face of adversity. Growing up in hostile urban slum contexts, adolescents show resilience against the odds. Beyond the challenges in urban slums, which dominate the focus of research, are stories of adolescents' resilience, optimism and coping mechanisms.

The adolescents in this study reported facing challenges and stresses in their everyday lives. Boys and girls are exposed to serious and persistent child protection risks, including physical, sexual and emotional violence. They feel unsafe in locations throughout their environment - in public spaces, community settings, and in the home – and the fear of violence permeates their lives. This fear curtails adolescents' freedom of movement and restricts their opportunities to grow and develop to their fullest potential. Despite the number of child protection issues, the two urban slums appear to be out of reach of many child protection services. The scale and pervasiveness of violence and the deleterious consequences the fear of violence has on adolescents suggests a situation that should be viewed as a crisis.

Girls described deep-seated and persistent gender discrimination, and strong expectations of their role in society. Boys felt they were discriminated against by the community and felt impacted by the consequences of stereotypes. Age also played a factor in the challenges faced by adolescent girls and boys in the two communities studied. They are often tasked with more adult responsibilities and peer groups are able to exert greater influence. Age and gender-based expectations also have consequences for the types of coping strategies available to adolescents; for example, girls may have less freedom to take part in activities outside of the home whereas boys perceive a lack of support services available to them.

### 5.1.1. Absorptive Strategies

On a day-to-day basis girls and boys adopt absorptive coping strategies to help them deal with difficult situations. Participating in recreational activities provides distraction and can help them to avoid unsafe situations. Parents also agree that it is important for their children to be kept busy and engaged. However, absorptive strategies differed between girls and boys. Many adolescent girls reported adopting therapeutic techniques when things got particularly difficult, including writing in diaries, reading motivational books, or taking a walk. Adolescent boys tended to turn to sports or other leisure activities to provide distraction and relief from daily stresses.

### 5.1.2. Adaptive Strategies

Adolescents and parents reported adjusting and adapting their behaviours in attempts to mitigate perceived protection risks. Adolescent girls and boys avoid being out and about in their communities at certain times or take alternative routes to avoid places known to be dangerous. Parents encourage similar behaviours, including setting curfews and sometimes accompanying their children on certain routes. Parents also adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as restricting their children's freedom of movement, especially for girls. They can also encourage their children to take part in criminal activity, such as stealing, to mitigate the effects of poverty.

### 5.1.3. Transformative Strategies

Individuals reported making changes in their lives to mitigate threats, changes which involved mobilising collective resilience strategies. Adolescents walk to and from school in groups and share information, knowledge and advice on risks and self-protection strategies. Youth groups and clubs not only serve as an absorptive activity, but also as a transformative form of resilience-building, through enhancing social connections and peer support.

Adolescents express hope for the future and wish to help improve their community through their career choices. Parents also contribute to challenging gender norms, and some mothers in the study reported treating their daughters and sons equally. Adolescents can also positively shape the world around them and participate in decision-making, if allowed. The participants in this research demonstrated the ability to positively influence their caregivers into prioritising their safety and wellbeing.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Challenge Harmful Gender Norms

- Gender norms contribute to violence and insecurity, affect the kinds coping strategies available to girls and boys, and interfere with potential solutions, such as education. Harmful gender norms must be tackled at all levels.
- Education is a source of hope. Government and CSOs must work to eliminate gendered barriers to education.
- Investment must be made in programmes which target the unique needs of adolescent girls and which shape gender equality, by disrupting harmful gender norms.
- Adolescent boys in this study perceive a lack of support and advocacy services for them. Further research should be conducted on the impact on adolescent boys of an international agenda focused largely on girls, to ensure parity and that the balance does not tip. CSOs need to offer visible support services aimed at and accessible to boys and work at local levels to challenge stereotypes within families and communities.

### Nurture Resilience

- Optimism and altruism are an important source of resilience for the community and should be nurtured. Children, parents and communities already work to protect children in Kibera and Kawangware and should be supported in continuing this work. However, this cannot be a substitute for specialised and targeted support. There needs to be careful analyses of precisely what and where specialist support is needed and investment made in providing necessary the programmes. Government and CSO interventions must not interfere with or undermine existing individual and community resilience strategies.
- Child protection mechanisms and reporting routes must be adolescent-friendly. There is also a need for tailored psychosocial support services for adolescents and better access to information around services and support that already exist.
- Skills & Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (SOYEE) programmes within the community would help adolescents develop knowledge, skills and confidence and access to financial assets and decent work. This will help better their outcomes, reduce gang membership and decrease poverty levels.
- Civic society organisations must support adolescents' participation in decision-making and build their leadership skills. Adolescent girls and boys must be allowed to shape programme design and implementation processes, including ensuring accountability mechanisms are accessible.

### Create Safer Futures

- CSOs must continue to amplify adolescent voices so they can advocate for their own needs in all areas of society, with support from family, local community leaders and school officials.
- The relevant state authorities and community leaders should enact policies and processes that ensure all community and civic spaces are safe for all members of the community.

- Government and CSOs need to further address the barriers for girls' and boys' participation in education. These include minimising the burden of household labour as well as removing practical barriers such as the financial cost of school fees and materials. Security barriers to education must also be addressed to ensure that adolescents do not have to travel through insecure areas on their own.
- Teachers need to be provided with greater support, as they can play an important role in child protection and are a key source of support. Teachers must be given equal access and knowledge of reporting mechanisms and referral processes.

# ANNEX 1: GLOSSARY<sup>x</sup>

**ACTUAL AND PERCEIVED SAFETY:** A child's perceived safety is made up of her feelings about the physical environment, the social environment, and her or her friends' personal past experiences in certain areas. Perceptions of safety are subjective, change over time and across different places, and are different for various groups of children. Actual safety relates to crime statistics and data. Crime statistics, while relevant, do not provide a complete picture of safety in cities.

**CHILD PROTECTION:** refers to all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to *prevent* and *respond* to all forms of physical or mental violence, maltreatment, abuse, neglect and exploitation affecting children. Child protection aims to address child rights violations and deficits related to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including the precursors and repercussions for children who are in conflict with the law or those children who have been victims of or witnesses to a crime. The nature and scale of child protection issues are diverse, multi-faceted and inter-connected.

**CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS:** operate within the framework of the law and a coherent regulatory framework of policies, procedures and guidelines. They provide a multi-sector approach to support the prevention of and response to protection risks and violations, including violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Typically, one ministry or department, such as a ministry of social welfare or its equivalent, interacts with all other sectors, such as justice, education, health and security, to lead and coordinate effective child protection responses.

**CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE:** is a broad category that, at its core, defines the harm caused to children by forcing or coercing them to engage in sexual activity, whether they are aware of what is happening or not. It is defined as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are – by virtue of their age or stage of development – in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim. The sexual abuse of children requires no element of exchange and can occur for the mere purpose of the sexual gratification of the person committing the act. Such abuse can be committed without explicit force, with other elements, such as authority, power or manipulation being determining factors.

**COMMUNITY:** is a group of interacting people who live in some geographical proximity to one another and usually shares common values and interests. The term refers to a social unit larger than the household. This definition applies equally to rural and urban settings.

**COMMUNITY VIOLENCE:** is broken down into violence by acquaintances and violence by strangers. It covers youth violence, assault by strangers, violence related to property crimes and violence in workplaces and other institutions.

**CORPORAL PUNISHMENT:** is any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.

**EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE:** involves both isolated incidents and a pattern of failure over time on the part of a parent or caregiver to provide a developmentally appropriate and supportive environment. Acts in this category may have a high probability of damaging the child's physical or mental health, or its physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Abuse of this type includes: the restriction of movement; patterns of belittling, blaming, threatening, frightening, discriminating against or ridiculing; and other non-physical forms of rejection or hostile treatment.

**PEER VIOLENCE:** is commonly concentrated among children and young people aged 10 to 24 years, occurring most often in community settings either among acquaintances or perpetrated by strangers. It

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<sup>x</sup> Unless stated otherwise, the definitions above are drawn or adapted from Plan International's global position paper, 'The Right to Live Free from Violence': Plan International, *The Rights of Children to Live Free from Violence: Position paper*, Plan International, Woking, 2018, pp.11-15.

includes physical assault with weapons (such as guns and knives) or without weapons, and may involve gang violence.

**PHYSICAL VIOLENCE:** of a child is defined as the intentional use of physical force against a child that results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in – harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning and suffocating. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishing.

**RESILIENCE:** The PRUV project defines resilience as the measure of individuals’, households’, communities’ and societies’ ability to both address their vulnerabilities by improving their capacities to absorb and adapt to existing and anticipated shocks and stresses while strengthening their capacities to transform to a level where these stresses are no longer relevant.<sup>105</sup> Situated within this definition, and for the purposes of this report, this report draws upon the following definition of resilience: “At the heart of the concept of resilience is the idea of strength in the face of adversity. Resilience-based approaches in humanitarian and development work aim to support people not only to survive and recover from current crises, but to strengthen their defences in the face of future threats.”<sup>106</sup>

**SEXUAL EXPLOITATION:** is distinguished from other forms of child sexual abuse by the underlying notion of exchange present in exploitation.

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE:** Sexual violence is defined by the World Health Organisation as: “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion ,by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. Coercion can cover a whole spectrum of degrees of force. Apart from physical force, it may involve psychological intimidation, blackmail or other threats – for instance, the threat of physical harm, of being dismissed from a job or of not obtaining a job that is sought. It may also occur when the person aggressed is unable to give consent – for instance, while drunk, drugged, asleep or mentally incapable of understanding the situation. Sexual violence includes rape.”<sup>107</sup>

**SAFE SPACES:** are both physically safe (physical environment, infrastructure) and socially safe (social environment, children’s perception of safety, what people use the space for, how they use it and at what times of day). A safe physical space is a clean and open area with streetlights, street signs and good roads and sidewalks. A safe social space is an area where children feel safe and do not feel vulnerable to violence. In a socially safe place, all types of people have equal access to the space at all times of day and night. The physical environment of a space has an impact on its social environment for children, and vice versa.

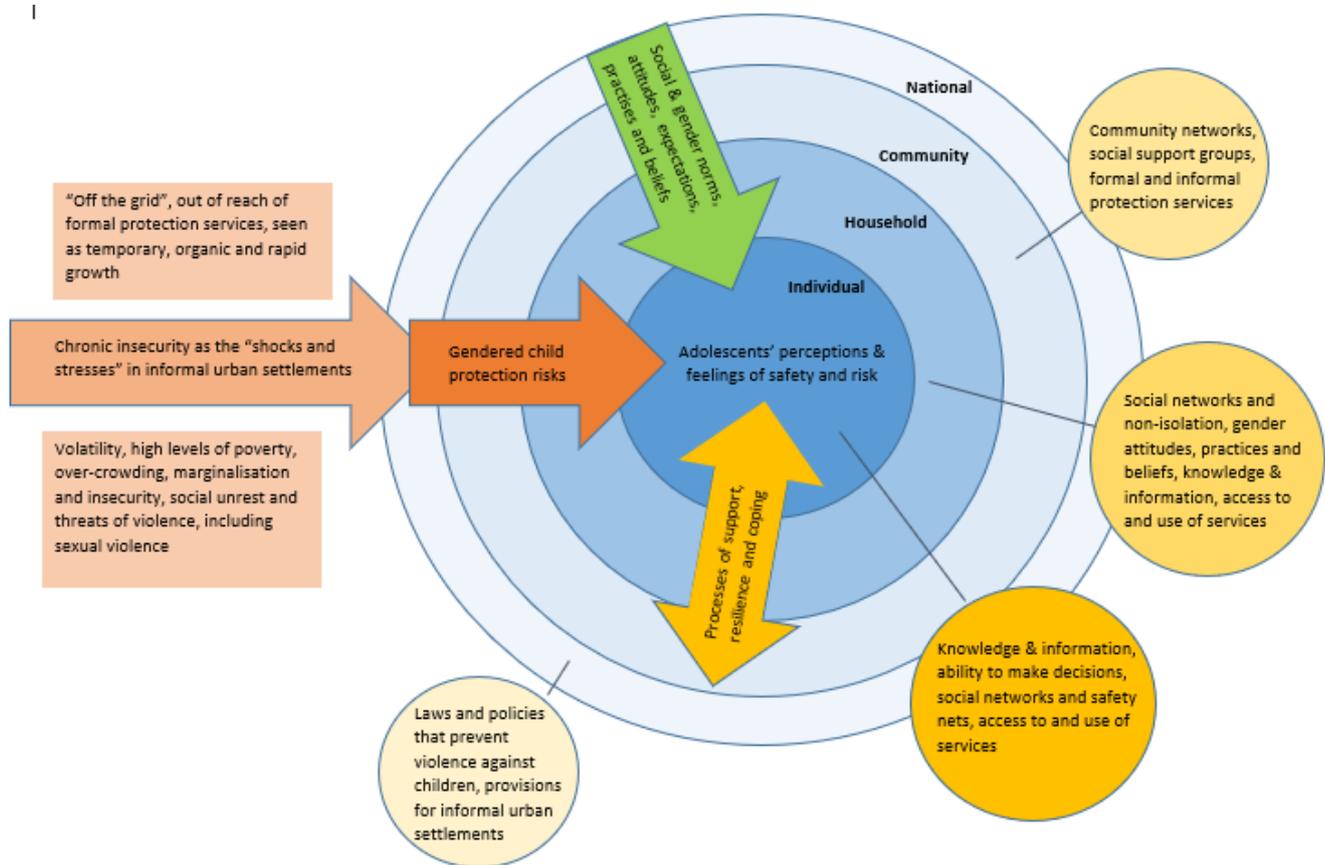
**SOCIAL NORMS:** are a pervasive feature of all our lives. Norms are shared beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour in a group of people, including women, girls, men and boys. Social norms are like informal rules, which also influence (and are influenced by) formal rules such as laws and regulations. Norms shape expectations and attitudes and can sustain and prescribe gender inequality. Around the world, social norms on gender shape the unequal status of girls and women and the expectations of their role in society.

**VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN:** implies all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, emotional or psychological violence. This is an “umbrella term” that includes all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation against children, in accordance with the UNCRC and General Comment No. 13 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

**YOUTH VIOLENCE:** is concentrated among children and young adults aged 10-29 years, occurs most often in community settings between acquaintances and strangers, includes bullying and physical assault with or without weapons (such as guns and knives), and many involve gang violence.<sup>108</sup>

## ANNEX 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual framework was developed during the design phase of this research and helped to inform the research approach and tools. It has not been adapted or revised following data collection.



## ANNEX 3: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS FROM THE IDSUE SURVEYS, 2015

This section provides descriptive statistics based on the quantitative data collected by Concern Worldwide (a partner on the PRUV research consortium) in 2015 as part of their IDSUE (Indicators of Urban Emergencies) project.<sup>109</sup> A sample of 735 individuals aged 18 to 60 years-old (all were heads of households or their spouse) participated in this survey (375 in Kawangware, 360 in Kibera). In terms of sex, 21% (155 respondents) of respondents were women, 79% (580 respondents) were men. Findings relating to safety and security in the community are presented here.

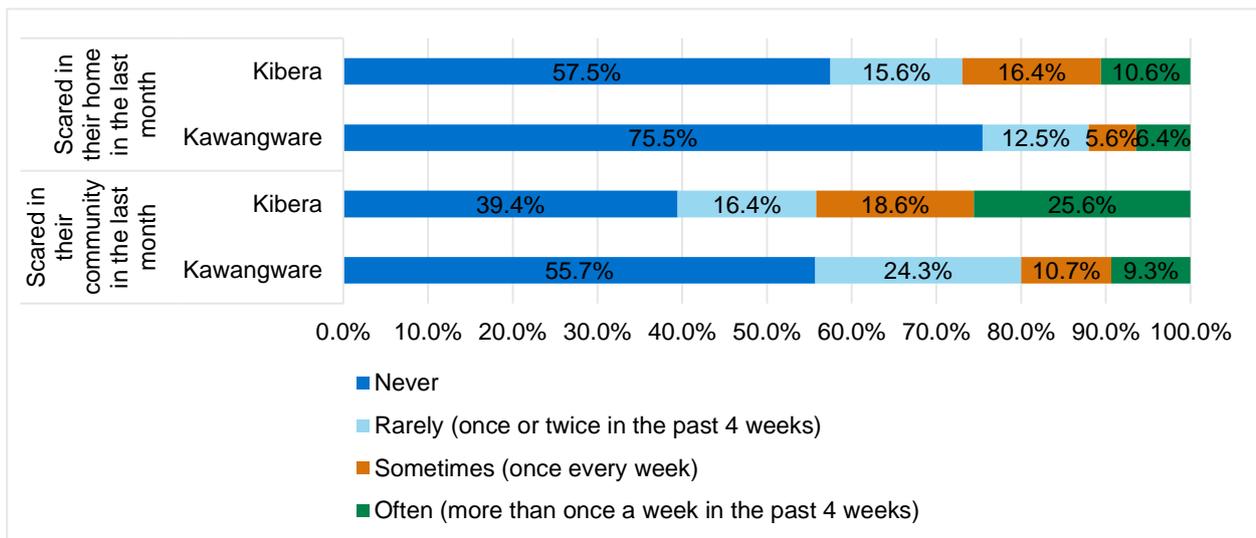
### Concern Worldwide's IDSUE surveys<sup>110</sup>

Survey data were drawn from a household survey conducted in both Kibera and Kawangware as well as other localities in Nairobi conducted as part of the Indicator Development for the Survey of Urban Emergencies project. The survey tool was designed on the basis of the sustainable livelihoods framework and received input from communities. The survey used a stratified random sampling technique using a probability proportionate to estimated size (PPES). Household respondents were selected randomly using an area-frame two-stage sampling approach. Enumerators were recruited and trained from within the communities and collected data using Open Data Kit software.

## 1.5. Perceptions of safety and security in the community

Respondents were asked to state how often they had felt scared in their community and their home in the last four weeks. As shown in Graph 1, across both Kibera and Kawangware a higher percentage of respondents reported feeling scared in their community in the last four weeks compared to in their home, highlighting the pervasiveness of feelings of insecurity in public spaces.

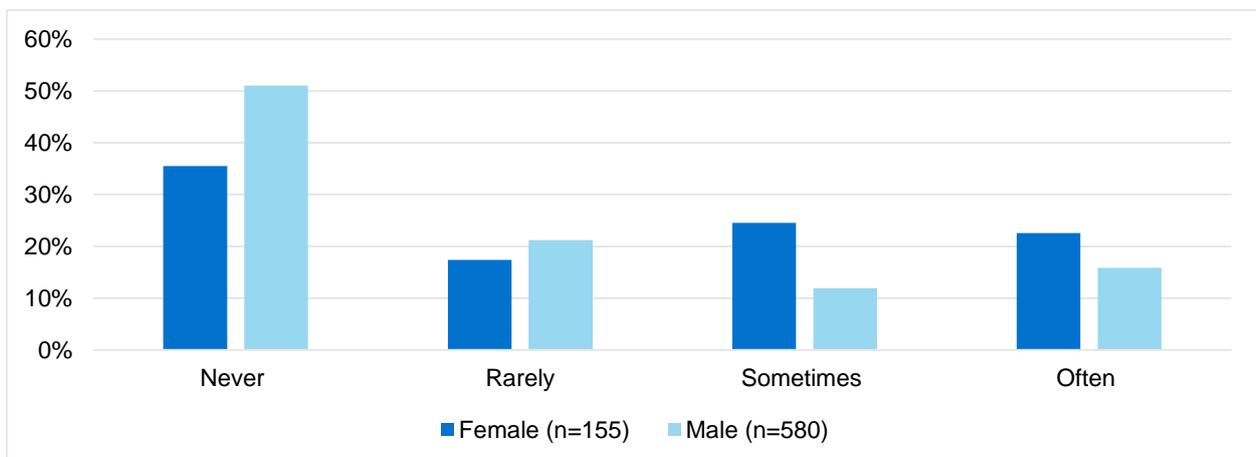
There are differences between the two urban slums. There were sharper feelings of insecurity in Kibera than in Kawangware: 44.2% of respondents in Kibera reported frequently feeling scared in their community (at least once a week over the last four weeks), compared to 20% in Kawangware. This pattern extends to feelings of safety in the home, with 27% of respondents in Kibera reporting frequently feeling scared in their homes, compared to 12% of respondents in Kawangware.



Graph 1: Respondents (n=735) responses to the questions: 'How often have you felt scared [walking in the community/being in your house] in the last four weeks?'

As shown by Graph 2, female respondents reported less often than their male counterparts that they 'never' or 'rarely' felt unsafe in their community in the last 4 weeks. This suggests that women experience heightened feelings of insecurity in the community as compared to men; nearly half of female respondents said that they frequently felt scared (sometimes or often) in their community, compared to 28% of male respondents.

Graph 2: Gender disaggregated responses to the question: 'How often have you felt scared walking in the community in the last four weeks?'



In a separate question, respondents were asked to give a security rating to their community: 62% of respondents in Kibera said that the security situation in their community was ‘very bad’ or ‘bad’, which is stark compared to 29.3% of respondents in Kawangware reporting on the same (see Table 2). This finding further highlights the differences between the two urban slums, and the heightened sense of insecurity in Kibera. Whilst there is no significant difference between male and female respondents’ responses in Kibera, a higher percentage of women in Kawangware (47.60%) gave their community a ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ security rating, compared to men (27%).

**Table 2: Security ratings given to the community in Kibera and Kawangware, with gender breakdown**

Locality			Security Rating				
			Very bad	Bad	Not very bad	Good	Very good
Kibera	Total (n=360)	% of total responses	23.90%	38.10%	20.00%	17.20%	0.80%
	Female (n=113)	% of female responses	31.00%	34.50%	15.00%	19.50%	0.00%
	Male (n=247)	% of female responses	20.60%	39.70%	22.30%	16.20%	1.20%
Kawangware	Total (n=375)	% of total responses	8.50%	20.80%	30.70%	38.70%	1.30%
	Female (n=42)	% of female responses	11.90%	35.70%	9.50%	42.90%	0.00%
	Male (n=333)	% of female responses	8.10%	18.90%	33.30%	38.10%	1.50%

## 1.6. Perceptions of safety when leaving a child at school

Interestingly, the heightened sense of insecurity felt in Kibera did not appear to extend to schools. Respondents were asked whether they had felt safe leaving their child/children at school in the past month: the majority of respondents in Kawangware said that they did not feel safe leaving their children at school (73.6%), and that their child did not feel safe at school (72.5%). For Kibera, the majority of respondents said that they did feel safe leaving their child at school (69.7%), and that their child felt safe at school (73.1%). This alludes to schools in Kibera being perceived as a safe space, an important source of protection for children amidst the insecurity that exists in Kibera; this later relates to qualitative findings (see section 5).

**Table 3: Responses to questions around feelings of safety in schools**

	In the last four weeks, did you feel safe leaving your children at school?		In the last four weeks, did your child feel safe at school?	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Kibera (n=360)	30.30%	69.70%	26.90%	73.10%
Kawangware (n=375)	73.60%	26.40%	72.50%	27.50%

## 1.7. Experiences of harassment

However, when it comes to reporting actual experiences of harassment and violence in the community, the frequency of reported incidents is starkly lower than feelings or perceptions of insecurity. As shown in the table below, only a small percentage of respondents reported that either they – or a member of their household – had been harassed in the last four months. There was no significant variation by gender or variation in responses.

The smaller frequency of reported incidents of harassment might not be surprising, particularly given evidence around underreporting. Yet it appears that even without personal experiences of harassment, individuals were still reporting high levels of insecurity.

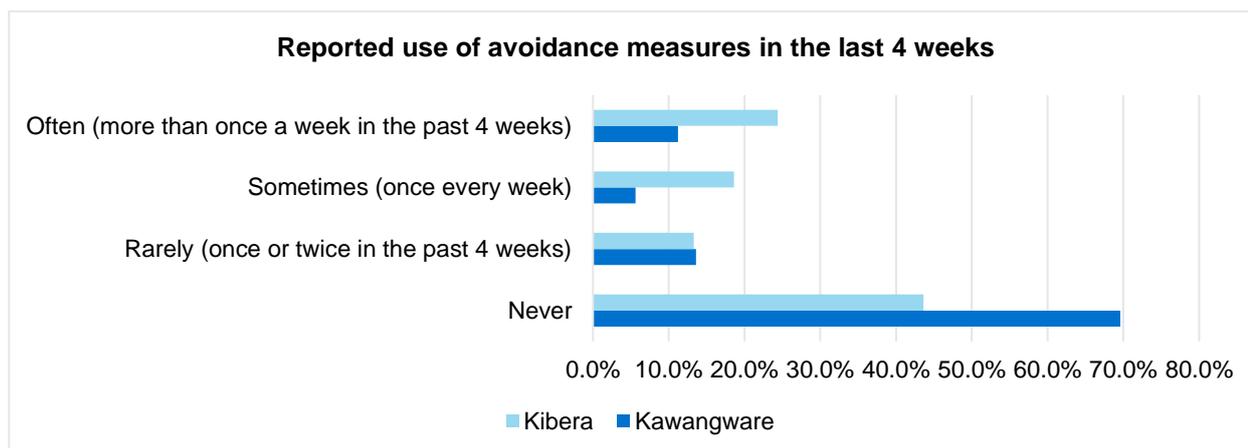
**Table 4: Responses to the question: ‘Have you or any member of your household experienced harassment in the last four weeks?’**

	No		Yes	
	Count	% within locality	Count	% within locality
Kawangware (n=375)	353	94.1%	22	5.9%
Kibera (n=360)	337	93.6%	23	6.4%
Total (n=735)	690	93.9%	45	6.1%

### 1.8. Avoidance measures and coping strategies

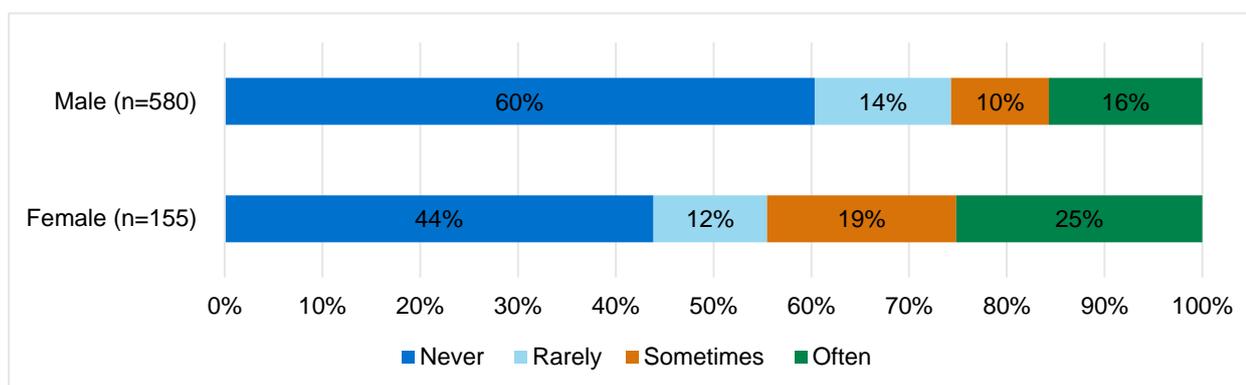
When asked whether the respondent, or any member of their household, had actively employed avoidance measures in the last 4 weeks in response to insecurity (such as using escorts, taking unusual routes or coming home earlier than usual), 17% reported that they had done so at least once a week in Kawangware. Corresponding to higher levels of unsafe feelings in the community in Kibera, 43% of respondents stated that they had used avoidance measures at least once a week in Kibera.

**Graph 3: Responses to the question: ‘How often have you/ a member of your household used avoidance measures in the last four weeks due to insecurity?’**



As shown in Graph 4, a higher percentage of female respondents than male respondents reported that they or a member of their household had frequently used avoidance measures (at least once a week), over the previous month than me (44% and 26% respectively). This supports existing evidence on the responsibility placed on women to change their behaviour to respond to threats or violence against them.<sup>111</sup>

Graph 4: Reported use of avoidance measures, by gender of respondents



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