



COUNTING THE INVISIBLE

GIRLS' RIGHTS & REALITIES

Technical Report – Zimbabwe

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ACRONYMS

NEET	A young person who is “not in education, employment or training”
RAs	Research advisers
RTT	Research task team
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Cover photo: Plan International. Adolescent girls participating in focus group for “Counting the Invisible”, Zimbabwe.

GLOSSARY

Adolescent girl – A girl in the transitional phase between childhood and legally defined adulthood (13 to 18 years of age). The legal definition of an adult varies from country to country but is usually between 17 and 21 years. For the purposes of this report, reference to adolescent girls includes the age range 15 to 19 year olds included in this research sample.

Agency – The ability to make meaningful choices and act upon them.

Basic services – Services delivered by the government, including water, sanitation, electricity, housing and health services.

Civil society – Citizens or groups participating outside formal government institutions. This can be non-governmental organisations (NGOs), organisations in local and community life, union organisations, and business associations.

Condition and position – Condition refers to our material state and daily life. This usually includes access to basic resources such as shelter, food and protection. Position refers to our social status and to the value that society places on us. This includes our ability to control resources and to make the decisions that affect our lives.

Decision-making – The capacity of a person to participate in the process of making decisions that affect their lives.

Empowerment – Power is the ability to shape one's life and one's environment. The lack of power is one of the main barriers that prevent girls and women from realising their rights and escaping cycles of poverty. This can be overcome by a strategy of empowerment. Gender-based empowerment involves building girls' assets (social, economic, political and personal), strengthening girls' ability to make choices about their future, and developing girls' sense of self-worth and their belief in their own ability to control their lives.

Exclusion – Defined as the process through which individuals or groups are partially or fully excluded from the rights, opportunities and resources that are available to others in the society they live in. The term exclusion is used as an umbrella term that covers related terms of marginalisation, at risk of exclusion, discrimination, inequity and others.

Exclusion and discrimination – Discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of people on the grounds of their identity. People's identity is shaped by their social surroundings, the multiple facets of exclusion and the vulnerability they experience.

Exclusion and vulnerability – Exclusion can increase a person's vulnerability by reducing her/his ability to overcome shock and adversity. Vulnerability, in turn, can create and reinforce exclusion. Both diminish life opportunities and can result in poverty.

Gender discrimination – Whereby people are treated differently simply because they are male or female, rather than on the basis of their individual skills or capabilities.

Inclusion – A sense of belonging, the feeling as though one is welcomed in an area without feeling threatened or uncomfortable.

Intersectionality and experiences of exclusion – Unpacking intersecting identities is key to understanding discrimination and exclusion. While it can be useful to understand the specific issues that are caused by gender inequality or by each form of exclusion, people do not fall neatly into social groups. Each individual can self-identify with, or be identified by others as, a range of social categories that overlap and intersect such as ethnicity, class and gender. For

example, an indigenous adolescent girl with a visual impairment may simultaneously be dealing with issues of discrimination on account of her age, ethnicity and disability.

Marginalisation – Refers to a process that situates rights holders in a state between “exclusion” and “inclusion”. For example, the marginalised may be those who have partial access to a service or facility, but are unable to make full use of it; or who may be able to speak at a meeting and express an opinion but are unlikely to be listened to or to influence any decisions. However Plan International uses the term exclusion as an umbrella term that covers related terms of marginalisation, at risk of exclusion, discrimination, inequity and others.

Masculinities – Conveys that there are many socially constructed definitions for being a man and that these can change over time and from place to place. The term relates to perceived notions and ideals about how men should or are expected to behave in a given setting.

Partnership/alliances – The coming together of different people, groups and institutions for cooperation, coordination, resource exchange, and the joint solving of problems. They bring together institutional capabilities and human resources in the form of skills, experiences and ideas to tackle common problems that are often beyond the capacity of a single organisation or group.

Public space – Spaces that are open for public use. This includes streets, recreation areas, parks, community squares, etc.

Principal duty bearers – Governments and institutions, responsible for changing laws, policies and services.

Safety – Freedom from the occurrence or risk of injury, danger, or loss.

Social environment – Community use of the space, joint social practices in the area, different groups of people using the space.

Social norms – Informal rules, gender role divisions and the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that regulate behaviour in society, prescribe what behaviour is expected and what is not allowed in specific circumstances, influence beliefs of what to expect of girls’ behaviours, for example.

Sexual assault – Any form of sexual contact (up to and including rape) between two or more people without voluntary consent. Consent obtained through pressure, coercion, force or threats of force is not voluntary consent.

Sexual harassment – Unwelcome sexually determined behaviour, both physical and non-physical, whether by words or actions. Such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem. Some examples of physical contact include sexual demand by action, such as touching a person’s clothing, hair or body, hugging, kissing, groping, pushing or pulling, patting or stroking, standing close or brushing up against a person. Some examples of non-physical sexual harassment include sexual demand by words, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, staring (“eve teasing”), “cat calling”, following, chasing, stalking and exposing oneself.

Social groups – Two or more people who interact with each other, share similar characteristics and have a sense of unity. Social groups can come in multiple forms and sizes; individuals can belong to multiple social groups at the same time. Belonging to specific social groups often determines the level of exclusion and inequality that individuals experience.

Violence – The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as: “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation”.

Violence against women and girls – Any act of gender-based violence, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

This glossary is meant to serve as a guide for reading the report, however please note that the definitions presented are dynamic and subject to change

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible with the advice and contributions of many people. Special thanks are due to the 121 adolescent girls and 16 adolescent boys who took part in the research study in Zimbabwe. This study could not have been possible without your involvement.

Thank you to Reinius Lennart (Country Director) and to all the staff at the Plan International Zimbabwe country office and the staff of the programme units for their in-depth commitment and support in this research project.

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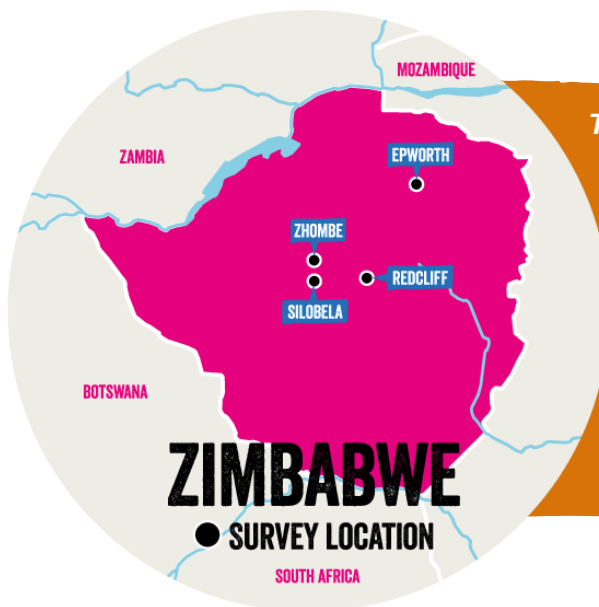
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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE



This research seeks to examine how intersecting vulnerabilities shape and determine the opportunities available to adolescent girls and how this, in turn, influences whether they can or cannot realise their rights. Within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which commit to focusing on the poorest, most vulnerable and furthest behind, the research aims to uncover the perceptions and experiences of a group of people at risk of being left behind unless their distinct experiences and voices can be heard.

1.1 Introduction

In 2016, in an effort to further the global understanding of adolescent girls' rights, Plan International commissioned and undertook a three-country study (in Nicaragua, Zimbabwe and Pakistan) on a set of themes related to the SDGs.

These themes, which can offer insight into advancing the rights of adolescent girls, included: girls' enabling environment, care and domestic work in the home, education quality and value, early pregnancy, child and early marriage, violence against girls, safety in public places, social relations, and interpersonal communications.

This aim of this research is to understand not only the day-to-day reality for the girls interviewed, but also to gain insight into their thoughts on how things *should* be. Asked whether they thought they *should* have more opportunities to get on in life and achieve their life goals, the girls surveyed in all three countries overwhelmingly answered: "yes".

This technical research report presents the analysis and findings from Zimbabwe. Additional country reports present the analyses and findings from Nicaragua and Pakistan.

1.2 Background and rationale

From 2007 to 2015, Plan International published a yearly flagship report called *The State of the World's Girls* (SOTWG). These reports explored the experiences of adolescent girls by looking at varying yearly themes, including education, disasters, the economy, and girls' position and condition in society.

The rationale behind these reports was that little data was available on the experiences of adolescent girls. Their experiences were instead commonly collapsed into those of women, which resulted in their voices being unheard and their life experiences being out of sight. Because of this, in the era of the Millennium Development Goals¹ it was often difficult to understand how adolescent girls were faring across the goals and which girls were being left behind in the effort to reach the goals.

The SOTWG reports – as well as other research commissioned by Plan International such as *Hear Our Voices*,² *Adolescent Girls' Views on Safe Cities*,³ and *Girls Speak Out*⁴ – shine a spotlight on the experiences of adolescent girls. The reports and research aim to bring new evidence to the fore to influence national and international policies as well as local and global development programmes. They also aim to raise awareness more broadly on the urgent need for disaggregation of data, not only on the basis of sex but also age, including a focus on adolescence as a distinct phase in a girl's life.

The final SOTWG report in 2015, *Girls' Rights: An unfinished business*,⁵ paved the way for a new series of reporting on girls' rights in the SDG era. Plan International's 2016 report, *Counting the Invisible: Using data to transform the lives of girls and women by 2030*,⁶ explores the current state of global gender data, identifying some critical approaches to data collection that will be needed in order to reach the SDGs by 2030.

To contribute to the development of meaningful approaches to collecting data about adolescent girls, primary research for *Counting the Invisible* was commissioned to show how rich qualitative research can reveal valuable insights that complement quantitative data. Key research findings from this research were published in *Counting the Invisible*, in October 2016. Technical research reports were also developed for each of the three countries where the research was conducted: Nicaragua, Zimbabwe and Pakistan.⁷

This report presents the full technical research findings from Zimbabwe.

1.3 Research objectives

In 2015, Plan International published *Girls Speak Out*, a primary research report focusing on the perceptions and experiences of girls regarding rights issues such as safety in school and public places, decisions and control over their own lives and bodies, and gender-based violence. A total of 4,218 interviews were conducted with girls aged 15 to 19 across Ecuador (1,000), Nicaragua (1,000), Pakistan (1,018) and Zimbabwe (1,200).

Girls Speak Out provided evidence on a large scale regarding the perceptions and attitudes of girls relative to core rights-based issues. In particular, the research showcased how adolescent

¹ United Nations Millennium Development Goals (www.un.org/millenniumgoals)

² Plan International (2014). *Hear Our Voices: Do adolescent girls' issues really matter?* Woking, UK: Plan International

³ Travers, K., Ranganath, M. and Livesey, A. (2013). *Adolescent Girls' Views on Safety in Cities: Findings from the Because I am a Girl: Urban Programme study in Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala and Lima*. Women in Cities International (WICI), Plan International and UN-HABITAT

⁴ Plan International (2015). *'Girls Speak Out': A four-country survey of young women's attitudes and recommendations for action*. Woking, UK: Plan International and Ipsos MORI

⁵ Plan International (2015). *The State of the World's Girls 2015: The unfinished business of girls' rights*. Woking, UK: Plan International

⁶ Plan International (2016). *Counting the Invisible: Using data to transform the lives of girls and women by 2030*. Woking, UK: Plan International

⁷ Technical research reports for Pakistan available at: planinternational.org/publication/girls-rights-and-realities-pakistan, and Nicaragua, available at planinternational.org/publication/girls-rights-and-realities-nicaragua

girls are not a homogenous population. In fact, their daily realities are shaped by a set of intersecting vulnerabilities, including the economic wellbeing of the household in which they live, their marital status, and their parental status.

Their identities are further defined by factors such as ethnicity, class, race and sexuality. Therefore, it is important to understand their experiences from a perspective of intersectionality, allowing the distinct and specific experiences of a diverse range of girls to be voiced.

The findings of the research in *Girls Speak Out* set the scene for a more in-depth exploration of the diverse experiences and distinct lived realities of adolescent girls, and led to a further set of questions. Of particular interest, for example, was an examination of how intersecting vulnerabilities shape and determine the opportunities available to adolescent girls and how this, in turn, influences whether they can or cannot realise their rights.

This is particularly relevant in the era of the SDGs, which promise to “leave no one behind”. Such research can help uncover the perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls who are marginalised or excluded and, therefore, most vulnerable to being left behind because they are not as visible in their communities, or because they are difficult to access due to social and gender norms that restrict their movement and visibility.

The conceptualisation of Plan International's 2016 report, *Counting the Invisible: Using data to transform the lives of girls and women by 2030*, offered a timely opportunity for the organisation to explore how qualitative research can reveal valuable insights that complement quantitative data. The purpose of this research was, therefore, to produce meaningful qualitative and quantitative research that captures the experiences and perceptions of adolescent girls on a set of themes aligned to the SDGs, from an intersectionality perspective.

To support the development of this research, Plan International commissioned a consultant to review SDG targets and indicators and determine available data to track the progress of adolescent girls as well as identify where data gaps exist. Recommendations from that review informed the development of this research through outlining goals, targets and indicators key to advancing the progress of adolescent girls to meet the SDGs.

The overarching research objective was to contribute to an understanding of the diverse perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls related to specific rights-based themes, aligned with SDG goals and targets. The research aimed to generate evidence on the following:

- **Dimensions of girls' empowerment and an enabling environment:** exploring experiences, perceptions and social norms. This theme is related to SDG 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”.⁸ The analysis will contribute to knowledge of how this goal relates specifically to adolescent girls. The findings are especially pertinent to target 5.5.⁹
- **Social and gender norms:** exploring positive and discriminatory social norms and care and domestic work in the home. This theme is also related to SDG 5, contributing to knowledge on targets 5.3, 5.4 and indicator 5.4.1.¹⁰

⁸ United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>).

⁹ Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.

¹⁰ Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations; SDG Target 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate; Indicator 5.4.1: Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location.

- **Quality and value of education, including access and completion of education:** exploring experiences, perceptions and social norms. This theme is related to SDG 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.¹¹ The analysis will contribute to knowledge on targets 4.1, 4.3, 4.5, indicator 4.5.1 and indicator 5.6.2.¹²
- **Early pregnancy:** exploring experiences, perceptions and social norms. This theme is related to SDG 3: “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”,¹³ contributing to knowledge on target 3.7 and on indicator 5.6.1.¹⁴
- **Child and early marriage:** exploring experiences, perceptions and social norms. This theme is related to SDG 5, contributing to knowledge regarding indicator 5.3.1.¹⁵
- **Violence against girls and safety:** exploring experiences, perceptions and social norms. This theme is related to SDG 5 as well as SDG 11: “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”,¹⁶ contributing to knowledge of targets 5.2, 11.2 and 11.7.¹⁷

The research also included a series of additional and inter-related objectives:

- To uncover experiences and situations where adolescent girls report feeling marginalised and excluded.
- To contribute to knowledge gaps in the area of adolescent girls’ rights and gender equality, to inform Plan International’s programming and advocacy.
- To demonstrate how qualitative data can be reputable and add value to measuring the strategic interests and practical needs of adolescent girls.
- To provide opportunities to young female researchers in each country by building capacity in research methods and application, ethics, gender and protection issues and offer a chance to learn more about the challenges that girls in their country face.
- To provide opportunities for Plan International in-country staff to participate in the research process including design, methodology, capacity-building, data collection and analysis, and offer a chance to learn more about the specific challenges that girls in their country face.

¹¹ United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>).

¹² Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes; Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university; Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations; Indicator 4.5.1: Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated; Indicator 5.6.2: Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15-49 years access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education.

¹³ United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg3>).

¹⁴ Target 3.7: By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes; Indicator 5.6.1: Proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care.

¹⁵ Indicator 5.3.1: Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18.

¹⁶ United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11>).

¹⁷ Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; Target 11.2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons; Target 11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

1.4 Methodology

The research methodology had two clear intents: generate meaningful data and analysis on the situation of girls from an intersectionality perspective, exploring the challenges that girls face and the quality and equality of opportunities available to them across a set of rights issues; and, by applying principles of participatory action research, to include young female research assistants and Plan International advisers in the research process, in order to build collective and critical knowledge of the areas of research.

In order to generate meaningful data that responded to the research objective, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were applied to the research, focusing more heavily on qualitative methods, as the sample was relatively small compared to many quantitative studies.

The mixed methods approach was designed to measure the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of adolescent girls through quantitative measures but also capture the complexity and changing realities of their lives through applying qualitative methods in the form of open questions and creative and reflective workshops.

Parallel to the quantitative analysis, the insights derived from the qualitative methods allow the research to go beyond the statistical data and provide insights into social norms within households, community dynamics and social relations.

1.4.1 Research sample

The target sample size was set at 120 adolescent girls in each country. Given the small scale and stronger qualitative nature of the research, a purposive sampling¹⁸ approach was applied. Guidelines were sent to the Plan International country offices in order to frame a selection of girls that aligned with the intersectionality focus of the research. The selection criteria was as follows:

- girls between the ages of 15 and 19
- three groups of girls with diverse identities reflecting intersectional characteristics and/or intersecting vulnerabilities
- three differing locations across the country, including both rural and urban settings.

1.4.2 Characteristics and identities of girls

Gender and programme staff from Plan International Zimbabwe collaborated with the lead researcher to identify specific groups of adolescent girls in Zimbabwe who face intersecting vulnerabilities and risks, such as being marginalised or excluded. The selection of the particular identities and groups of adolescent girls was based on Plan International Zimbabwe's current programme evidence and practice. The following target groups of girls were selected:

- married girls
- young mothers – married and unmarried
- adolescent girls for the Ndebele ethnic group
- adolescent girls with intersecting vulnerabilities and facing multiple discrimination: for example, environments where high levels of poverty restrict girls' opportunities and increase rate of girls dropping out of school.

¹⁸ Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling, applied when research targets specific characteristics of people or contexts. It differs from random sampling, as participants are selected on the basis of criteria most relevant to the research questions. Purposive sampling does not allow researchers to generalise findings to a population.

Shona adolescent girls: the majority of the adolescent girls (91) interviewed for the survey were Shona. Shona are Zimbabwe's largest indigenous group representing more than 80 per cent of the population, and mostly residing in the eastern two thirds of the country, including in the capital Harare. More than two thirds of the population speaks Shona as their first language. Shona girls surveyed came from Zhombe, Epworth, Mbizo and Redcliff in the KweKwe district.

Ndebele adolescent girls: 30 girls (25 per cent) who participated in the survey self-identified as Ndebele, the second largest indigenous group in Zimbabwe, whose language is Ndebele. The Ndebele people are more concentrated in western Zimbabwe in Matabeleland. Due to their geographic location they experience chronic droughts and water shortages. Unemployment is high and both adults and younger people migrate to South Africa in search of livelihoods.

The Ndebele girls surveyed came from Silobela in the KweKwe district. The Ndebele girls face distinct challenges: Silobela is a hard-to-reach area, where lack of infrastructure and severe economic instability result in a high rate of school drop-out, compounded by long distances to school. Girls are at high risk of child and early marriage and early pregnancy in these areas and poverty increases the risk of girls engaging in transactional sex to provide for basics.

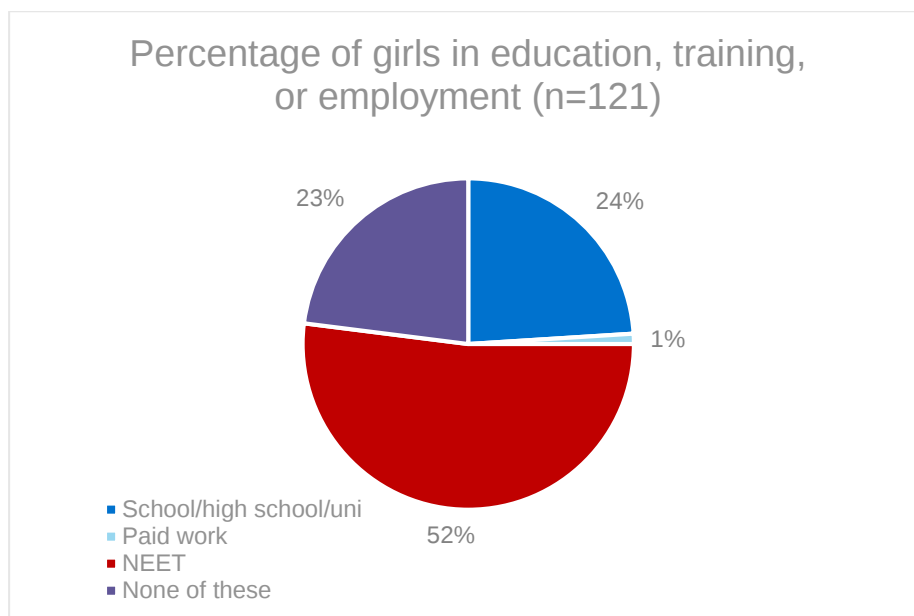
Young mothers: 50 girls stated that they currently have a child or children, and another six stated that they had once had a child. The majority of girls who had ever had a child gave birth to their first child between the ages of 17 and 19 (29 girls). Twenty-one girls had had their first child between the ages of 15 and 16; and two girls had had children between the ages of 13 and 14. Four girls stated that they were 12 or under when they had had their first child. For the purposes of the analysis, we report on the 50 girls who currently identify themselves as having children.

Married girls: 44 girls (38 per cent) stated that they were married; five girls stated that they were cohabiting with a partner. Among this total, 48 stated that their husband, boyfriend or partner contributed to household costs. For the purposes of this report, the experiences of the 44 girls who are currently married are analysed.

Adolescent girls facing intersecting vulnerabilities: Communities were selected to explore the daily lives of girls who face a range of diverse intersecting vulnerabilities. The conditions in these communities often mean that girls have low levels of support from their families, face high levels of poverty and are more susceptible to child labour, informal labour and dropping out of school.

The majority of the girls (63 girls) were not in education, training or employment (NEET), whereas 29 girls were currently in education. Two girls had never been to school and one girl was in paid work. Almost a quarter of the girls (23 per cent) stated that they were not in any of the work or education categories – young housewives most often fell into this category. The majority of the girls (61 per cent) had completed nine or more years of education and only 2 per cent had had just three or four years.

Out of the whole sample, 32 girls are both married and mothers; 31 of them have left education.



Young boys from Epworth and Silobela: 16 adolescent boys participated in creative workshop sessions, eight from the communities of Epworth and eight Ndebele boys from Silobela.

Adolescent girls self-identifying as having an impairment: eight girls self-identified as having an impairment (one with a visual impairment, one with a hearing impairment, one with a physical impairment that led to difficulties with walking or climbing, two with a mental impairment that led to difficulties with remembering or concentrating, three with an impairment that led to difficulties with communication). Where significant, the qualitative experiences of girls with impairments are highlighted.

Although disabilities were recorded as part of the survey, a specific and separate analysis was not conducted due to the small capture of this group and the limited time available to conduct further analysis. However, where interesting and compelling data was available for this small section of girls, it has been included in the report.

1.4.3 Field data collection

Once the characteristics and locations of target respondents were identified by gender and programme advisers from Plan International Zimbabwe, the country office contacted local offices from these areas and asked to collaborate with local partners in the communities to mobilise adolescent girls who fit the criteria (see point 1.4.2).¹⁹ With consent from parents and from the girls themselves, they were invited to participate in the research survey.

Adolescent girls who wished to participate in the research were given the date, location and time when the data collection would begin and presented themselves to the research team at the appointed time. After screening to ensure the adolescent girls matched the criteria, they were invited to partake in survey interviews.

A total of 121 adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 were surveyed, with an average age of 17.5. The majority of girls lived in Zhombe (30 per cent), and Epworth (28 per cent), with

¹⁹ This is similar to the “snowball” sampling technique, where the researcher is interested in a set group of people who can be hard to identify and access by usual methods, therefore the researcher cannot rely on a sampling frame and needs to rely on local networks of people in order to sample hard-to-reach populations.

the rest of the sample from Silobela (25 per cent), Mbizo (10 per cent) and Redcliff (7 per cent). While the majority of the girls were Shona, Silobela girls were Ndebele.

In addition to the surveys, 40 adolescent girls participated in reflective workshops and group discussions held at each of the survey locations. Sixteen adolescent boys between the ages of 15 and 19 from the areas of Epworth and Silobela also participated in reflective workshops. These adolescent girls and boys were identified and invited by local Plan International community staff to participate, based on criteria provided by the research team.

1.4.4 Quantitative survey questions

A perceptions-based survey was conducted with the 121 adolescent girls identified for the sample. A Likert-type scale²⁰ was applied to quantify and measure the perceptions and attitudes of adolescent girls through degrees of agreement and disagreement to statements related to the core themes for inquiry. Additional statements were added to gauge the differentiation between how the situation *actually is* for girls and how they perceive situations *should be*. For example, one might say “I have some opportunities available but I *should* have more”. It is important to highlight that the results of this research are not representative of the entire adolescent girl population from each country and should be framed as an insight into a diverse set of experiences and lived realities.

Descriptive analysis of quantitative data is presented in percentages of agreement and disagreement; perceptions of neither disagree or agree or don't know are not specifically presented and the reader should understand the missing percentage as allocated to this category.

1.4.5 Qualitative survey questions

The qualitative aspect of the research included open questions in the survey to complement the quantitative inquiry. This allowed the research assistants to dig deeper into the perceptions and experiences of the respondents, to identify influential factors and relationships, and to capture their ideas and personal reflections.

Open questions provided rich data for the research and facilitated the understanding of topics from the point of view of the adolescent girls. Each country's research task team and the research assistants, with support from the research lead, designed three country- and context-specific open questions to be included in the survey. The purpose of these questions was to allow the Plan International advisers and research assistants to tailor questions responding to a specific area of inquiry. This allowed for generating data on important issues relevant to adolescent girls in the context, and building knowledge where there were known knowledge gaps.

1.4.6 Creative and reflective workshops

To allow for a deeper understanding of root causes, six creative and reflective workshops were conducted, four with adolescent girls and two with adolescent boys. These workshops were guided by participatory action research principles, which centre around inclusive strategies for gathering information that involves the people directly affected by an issue in learning about or addressing that issue, and then linking that learning with identifying potential opportunities for addressing the issue or taking action.

Activities included drawings to elicit how adolescent girls understand their position and condition in their communities, critical and reflective focus group discursive sessions on the distinct challenges they face as girls comparatively to boys, and constructing poems or

²⁰ A widely used approach to scaling responses in survey research in which respondents specify their level of agreement or disagreement for a series of statements.

songs where girls voice, in their own words, the changes they would like to see to support the advancement of girls' rights.

The design of these workshops allowed the research team to investigate in detail some sensitive and difficult topics that are hard to explore in a survey – such as violence against girls. The same methods were used to undertake creative and reflective workshops with adolescent boys. Two workshops were undertaken in order to explore the perspectives of adolescent boys who live in similar conditions and environments to the adolescent girls surveyed, placing a particular focus on exploring adolescent boys' attitudes and behaviours in relation to violence against girls.

All workshop sessions were recorded and a note-taker transcribed the sessions into handwritten reports. All drawings were photographed and kept in the country office.

1.4.7 Research task team

Research task teams (RTT) were set up in each country to strengthen the participatory action approach of the research. These comprised of Plan International gender and protection advisers, programme and research advisers from each country where the field research took place. The task team advised on survey content and co-designed and facilitated the creative and reflective workshops. Their experience was invaluable to the research process, helping to strengthen the research project and generate more powerful and meaningful results.

Guided by a commitment to improving opportunities for young women in each country, the research team worked with local universities to identify young women from sociology departments who displayed a strong interest in community development and/or gender issues. In Zimbabwe, partnerships with the National University of Science and Technology and the University of Zimbabwe were established. No field research experience was required, but some exposure to social research methods and a sociological background was needed.

The research assistants (RAs) were given two days of training on research methods, gender and protection issues, the research project and applying the tools. The RAs were responsible for conducting 120 survey interviews per country with hands-on support from the lead researcher and the research task team. They participated in a collective analysis workshop where initial findings and observations were discussed and annotated. As part of their training they were required to write up a short research report, outlining their analysis of central findings. On completion of the research process they were presented with research certificates acknowledging their participation and contribution to the research. (To learn more about the personal experiences of the RAs in this research process please refer to the Annex.)

1.4.8 Data collection and analysis

Fieldwork in Zimbabwe was conducted over three weeks in June 2016. Data was collected in five locations: Epworth, Zhombe, Silobela, Mbizo, and Redcliff with each location selected on the basis of the prominence of the specific group or identity aligned with our target of participants.

Face-to-face pen and paper interviewing was undertaken for the 121 surveys. After quality checking, the quantitative data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet formatted for exportation into STATA, a data and statistics software package.

The lead researcher trained the RAs on quality control and data inputting. This process was closely supervised to support the RAs in executing the data entry process to a high

standard. The data was then transferred to London and subject to further quality control by a qualified data analyst. The data analyst constructed a code list to mirror the data, and descriptive analysis of data was conducted through STATA.

The RAs processed the qualitative data from the open-ended survey questions into Word documents. The content from the reflective workshops was also collated in a Word-formatted memo document. Quality control of all documents was undertaken and qualitative data was analysed in London using the Nvivo software. The data analyst and lead researcher co-designed the code list for Nvivo, and data was inputted, coded and analysed.

Sub-analysis was applied to the quantitative and qualitative data. Typical sub-group differences that were analysed included:

- age
- location
- ethnicity
- education (i.e. number of years of schooling completed or in school/out of school)
- marital status
- girls with or without children.

In line with the participatory nature of the research, a collective analysis workshop session was held in each country with the RAs and the RTT. This was an important process to gain an in-depth understanding of the findings from the perspective of those two groups. It also served as a learning space for the RAs and the RTTs. During the workshop, each person presented their subjective analysis and justified their understanding of what they captured during the data collection phase.

The lead researcher facilitated these sessions and compiled the results into a report. The detail of these results, although subjective, provided an excellent form of cross-checking anticipated versus actual revelations of the findings. The first-level analysis of the data (objective analysis of raw data) was conducted in the UK.

The draft country reports were sent to the RTT and Plan International Zimbabwe Country director for review and input, with specific responsibility to craft country recommendations. This was an important final stage of the process, ensuring inclusive and participatory approaches were guaranteed throughout the research.

The technical reports were then made available on line for dissemination internally (Plan International) and externally with peers and stakeholders.

1.5 Ethics

The design of this study adhered to Plan International's Research Policy and Standards and was subjected to an ethics review by senior management in the research department. Key ethical considerations included:

1.5.1 Child protection

One of the guiding ethical principles of this research is that no participant comes to harm as a result of the study. To this end, the protection adviser in each country trained all RAs on Plan International's key child protection issues and child protection policies. All RAs also signed Plan International's Child Protection Policy as a pre-condition of engaging in the research process. The RAs were informed of procedures to follow if concerns arose regarding the protection or

safety of an adolescent girl while conducting the research. During the training, the RAs were presented with examples of child protection scenarios that have arisen in past research projects and given guidance on how to respond.

Child protection advisers in each country reviewed all research tools, including the survey and tools for the creative and reflective workshops, as a form of protection quality control to reduce the risk of including any upsetting or disturbing questions that might impact the participants.

1.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

The anonymity and privacy of the research participants was respected. Any personal information regarding the participants was kept confidential. All data was stored in Nvivo and STATA with a unique ID and no corresponding information of participants.

1.5.3 Informed consent

Informed consent processes were undertaken for all participants engaged in the study in order to secure the approval of community leaders and school officials, along with primary caregiver informed consent and permission where necessary, as well as the consent of the participants themselves. The consent forms for parents and participants were adapted from Plan International's *Girls Speak Out* research and from international guidelines prepared by the World Health Organization.

The informed consent processes included information on the intended purposes of the research, how Plan International would maintain confidentiality of the focus group discussions and data, the anonymity of participants, potential risks and benefits of participating, participants' rights of silence and disclosure, and plans to utilise the research findings. Participants were assured that they had the right to stop or end the interview at any point if they so wished. Participants were also asked to advise researchers where they would like the interview to take place, somewhere within sight of parents or guardians but not within earshot, in order to do the utmost as researchers to assure participants' confidentiality and safety. Researchers were asked to note on each interview sheet if they observed any family member attempting to listen in or to report if the respondent became nervous at any point in the interview. Any such cases were reported directly to the research task team to assess if a participant was at risk or required a follow-up visit by Plan staff. The safety of participants was the guiding principle throughout the research process.

1.6 Layout of the report

Section two of the report focuses on the perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls regarding the opportunities they have to get on in life. By asking them about their own individual aspirations and life goals, the challenges they face, their sources of support and the type of support they receive, the report gets a good insight into adolescent girls' own agency. This helps to highlight some aspects of SDG 5, uncovering the experiences and perceptions of adolescent girls in relation to varying dimensions of empowerment, including: effective participation in decision-making in the home and the community; access to and control of resources; autonomy over their own lives; interpersonal communications and supportive relations; and perspectives of equal opportunities.

Section three focuses on the conditions and environments where girls live, exploring the gender and social norms, and the positive or discriminatory practices and traditions within their communities. This gives particular insight into how some cultures and practices inform

and influence decision-making of parents and adolescent girls in relation to child and early marriage.²¹

The section also explores the gender roles and responsibilities that shape adolescent girls' lives through the lens of care and domestic work, asking what types of tasks and care they carry out, how long they spend on chores and care and whether they believe this is shared equally within the household. This also provides valuable insights into Goal 5 from the perspective of adolescent girls.

Sections four through seven examine the biggest challenges that girls feel they face in their daily lives; exploring the perceptions and experiences that girls report in relation to education, early pregnancy, child and early marriage, and violence and safety.

More specifically, section four explores perceptions of access, retention and quality of education, including sexual education in the classroom and adolescent girls' own perceptions of the value of their education. In addition, drop-out rates of adolescent girls and the reasons behind these are examined, providing valuable insights into SDGs 4 and 5 from the perspective of adolescent girls.

Section five explores the drivers of early pregnancy from the perspectives of adolescent girls, including an investigation into their autonomy to take their own decisions on sexual and reproductive health, their experiences of accessing information on sexual and reproductive health, their access to health centres and the impact of early pregnancy.

Section six explores the drivers behind child and early marriage, adolescent girls' perceptions and experiences of child and early marriages, control and decision-making in the household once married or in unions, experiences of child and early marriages and the impact of child and early marriages from the perspective of adolescent girls.

Section seven looks at the perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls with relation to violence against women and girls in both public and private spaces and within their familial and interpersonal relations. It also explores perceptions of reporting violence and what can be done to address it. The perceptions of adolescent boys regarding the drivers of violence against women and girls are also investigated.

Section eight looks at the perceptions of adolescent girls regarding what opportunities exist to improve the situation of their lives and how this could be acted on. Section nine provides a summary of these findings highlighting the central points of analysis. Finally, the report concludes with some recommendations for policy and programme work that could serve to improve the condition and position of adolescent girls with diverse identities.

²¹ For the purposes of the report, reference to child marriage includes adolescent girls up to the age of 18 and early marriage includes adolescent girls in the sample who are 19. The term "child and early marriage" is used throughout the report to include the age range of 15 to 19 year olds included in this research sample.

SECTION 2

GIRLS' ASPIRATIONS –

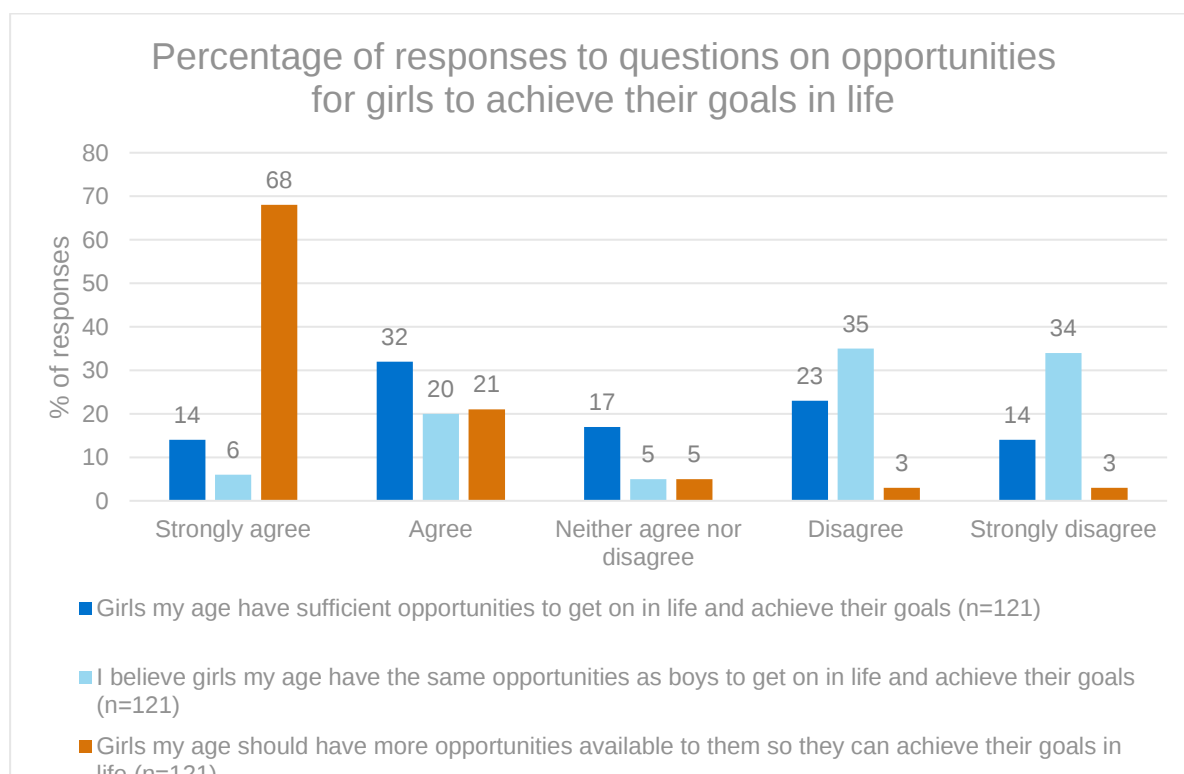
LIFE GOALS, BARRIERS AND WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM

This section explores girls' individual aspirations, identifying their life goals, the barriers they face in attempting to reach these, and the mechanisms and support systems that enable girls to progress towards achieving their goals.

SDG 5 is targeted at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Exploring dimensions of girls' empowerment, including girls' access and control of resources, and perceptions of their own agency, are important factors which affect girls' ability to make choices about their futures. Understanding these dimensions of empowerment from girls' perspectives is important in order to highlight which areas of their lives girls feel they can and cannot influence. Furthermore, through exploring girls' important social relations it is possible to identify where support for their individual progress can be leveraged. The combination of these two components provides valuable insight into the blocks and supports that either prevent girls from realising their rights or enable them to do so.

2.1 Opportunities to get on in life and girls' aspirations

Girls' opportunities and actions are often determined by the conditions of their communities as well as by the social norms that surround them. As such girls were asked whether they believe they have sufficient opportunities to get on in life and achieve their goals.



Just under half the girls interviewed in Zimbabwe agreed that they have sufficient opportunities to get on in life (46 per cent agree), whereas more than a third (37 per cent) disagreed. Married

girls and girls with children were less likely to agree that they have sufficient opportunities to get on in life. Of the 44 married girls interviewed, 22 disagreed that they have sufficient opportunities, 11 were neutral, and only 11 agreed. Young mothers' perceptions of opportunities available to them also followed a similar pattern with the majority (22 out of 45) disagreeing; 12 girls agreed that they have sufficient opportunities and 11 were neutral (neither agreed nor disagreed). Although the number of married girls and young mothers in the sample is small, it provides insights into their perceptions and their experiences regarding opportunities to succeed in life and achieve their goals, which overall becomes more restrictive once married or upon becoming a mother.

The large majority of girls (69 per cent) reported that they do not have the same opportunities to get on in life compared to boys, with only 26 per cent agreeing that they have equal opportunities. Girls were also asked if they were given as much opportunity as boys to use the internet and social media in order to access information. The majority of girls (58 per cent) disagreed with this statement while 39 per cent agreed.

Girls were then asked to share their aspirations for their future, outlining their life goals and the importance behind these goals.



Most frequently used words to describe girls' life goals were school, work and family. These are central to their aspirations.

The girls' life goals centred around four main themes: education, employment, family and "having a better life" which comprised of better accommodation, marrying someone with money, money to pay for food and to live a life free from marital violence. These goals were presented as a logical progression, from education to good employment, to being able to support and care for their family – with education as the keystone to employment and to providing for their family. These goals and their logical progression were commonly mentioned by all girls, which illustrates the extent to which their opportunities are restricted.

Education was the most frequently cited life goal across all the different groups of girls. Within the goal of education the most cited aspiration was to go back to school; this is not surprising given the number of girls surveyed who were not currently or regularly in school. Connected to the goal of getting back into school was passing and successfully completing the school year of their high school education.

*"To go back to school so that I can get a decent job which does not require hard labour."
(Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)*

“I want to go back to school and acquire education then get a job in the city and move away from this place.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

A smaller number of girls mentioned their education goals in connection to proceeding to tertiary education in order to gain degrees. These examples were mostly from Epworth and Mbizo with only one from Zhombe and none from the Ndebele girls of the Silobela area. Girls who were still in school were those who were more likely to report aspirations that extended to tertiary education, gaining degrees from university in law, telecommunications, accountancy, sociology, mechanics and engineering, for example.

“Go to university and study sociology and then get a proper job.” (Adolescent girl in school, Epworth)

“Have a degree in telecommunications and have an organisation that helps girls with a humble background like me.” (Adolescent girl in school, Epworth)

The majority of girls interviewed in Zimbabwe tended to discuss employment not in terms of a “career”, but in terms of having a job to enable them to survive and to help their families survive. After education this was the most cited goal for girls – getting a job was a clear priority for all the different groups of girls surveyed. Girls generally discussed setting up income-generating projects or small businesses, such as selling vegetables, chickens or clothes, or working as a housemaid – both as a form of employment after leaving school, and as a way of earning money to go to school. A small number of girls named a variety of careers that they would like to undertake which ranged from teaching, nursing, hairdressing, fashion or catering. Unlike the out-of-school girls, none of the girls who still attend school mentioned small income-generating projects such as poultry projects, or hairdressing.

This difference in type of employment goal seen among those girls not in school and those continuing an education is perhaps not surprising given the lack of opportunities available to girls, compounded by the constant struggle to stay in school.

“To get work as a housegirl [maid] or to be a hairdresser – anything in this world that can help me to get money. I’m sick and tired of not having money and ways to sustain myself. It is very difficult to get work in this country.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“To go back to school. To start a small project of poultry.” (Adolescent mother, Zhombe)

“Start a small business such as selling groceries or clothes.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

“I want to be a housemaid since I am not educated. I do not want to go to school. I was not good at school anyway.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

More than 25 girls mentioned that they wanted to support their families and children.

“To finish school and get a job which can help me to take care of myself, the unborn baby and my mother.” (Pregnant girl, Redcliff)

“Go back to school, pass and get a proper job then look after my aunt.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“To continue with my education, to get a job to cater for my family needs and provide for my family.” (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

“I want to go back to school and pass so that I can have a job and take care of my child.”
(Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“Work in order to help my family.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“To start my own business selling clothes so that I am able to have money to look after my family.” (Adolescent girl, living with a partner, Zhombe)

“To go to work. A formal work that gives me salary at the end of month so that I can take care of myself and my daughter.” (Adolescent mother, Epworth)

When exploring girls' perceptions towards careers and working women, it was positive to note that the majority of girls (61 per cent) disagreed that men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce. The majority (69 per cent) also disagreed that mothers should stay at home and not take on paid work: only 28 per cent felt that mothers should not take work and should instead stay at home to care for their children. Concurrently, however, an overwhelming majority (92 per cent) also disagreed that men should stay at home and look after children: only 7 per cent agreed with this statement. While perceptions are more positive in support of equal opportunities for women to work, strong perceptions persist around the clear division of gendered roles and responsibilities when it comes to caring for children, which can restrict women's access to work, as explored further in section three.

Examining the aspirations of married girls and young mothers in our sample

When discussing life goals with the 44 married girls in the sample, the girls focused upon returning to education, gaining employment or owning a small business. Their aspirations, although similar to the wider sample, were often linked to their responsibility to provide for their children and family: 32 of these girls were also mothers, and even if they did not have children, girls stated that they were expected to contribute to household income. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that out of the 44 married girls in the sample, 42 had left education either permanently, or for a short period.

“To go to work after finishing school; to do a project, e.g., keeping chickens.”
(Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

“To have a small market so that I can help my mother who is sick, ill at death bed.”
(Adolescent mother, married, never attended school, Epworth)

“To live happily, to live healthy. To take care of my child. To go back to school.”
(Adolescent mother, married, Mbizo)

“Do a business like going to South Africa, buy things there then sell them in Zimbabwe. Do a sewing course. (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“To start a small business maybe selling clothes, food and chickens.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“To work in order to give help to my husband. The money that he earns is not enough to sustain us for the whole month.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

Twelve girls' life goals concerned having a better life, with decent living standards, sufficient food to eat and clothes to wear for their children and accommodation. Out of these 12, five girls stated that their life goal was to get married. One girl mentioned that her goal in life was to live free from her husband's violence.

“My husband to get rich so that we can have food and money to pay fees for our children.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“I do not have enough money to pay school fees. I sometimes stay at home and then go back when my parents have the money.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“Poverty – I don’t have anything to be able to take care of my mother and daughter. I don’t go to work. I have tried looking for work in Harare as a house girl but unfortunately I didn’t get one.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“Money to start up the business and go to school.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

“No money to pay for my school fees. The place for the hairdressing course is far away which requires a lot of money that I am not able to afford.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

Girls with young children could not afford childcare if they did not have family support, compounding the difficulty they faced in accessing education.

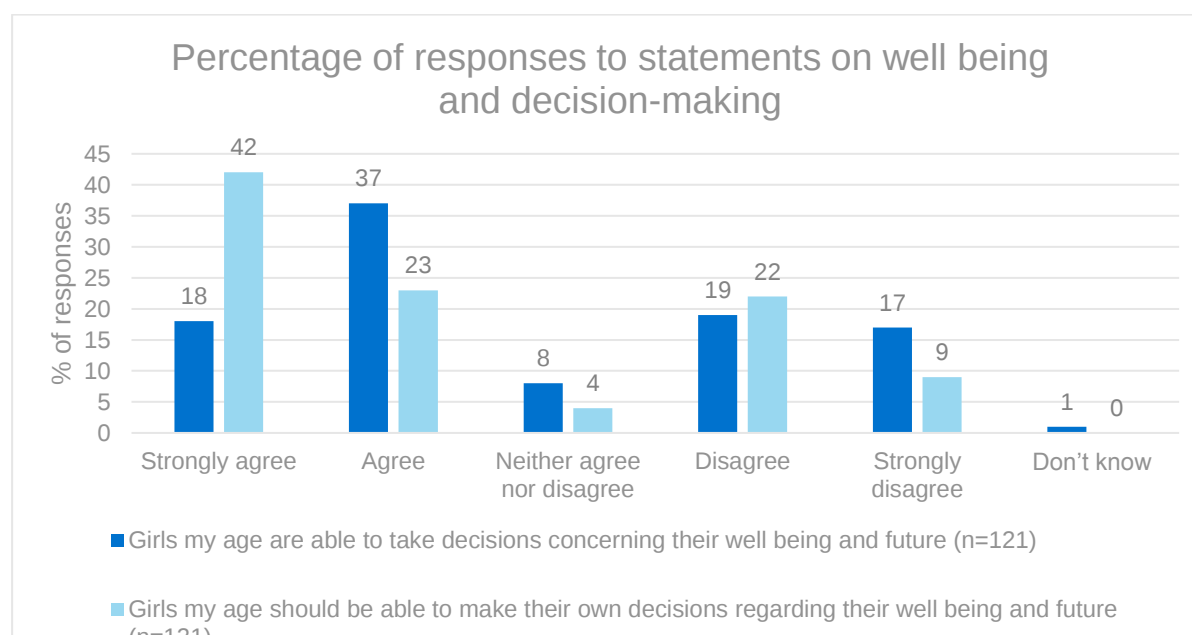
“I do not have anyone to look after my baby when I decide to go back to school. Also I do not have the money to pay for school fee.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“I have to take care of my baby until she is a bit older then I can look for a job. No money to go back to school. My parents cannot afford school fees.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“I have no one to take care of my child whilst I go to school. He is still very young, one year nine months, he needs my attention.” (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

Relationships with husbands and families as barriers

A significant challenge discussed by all girls interviewed – regardless of their location or identity – was the lack of autonomy they have over their own future. When asked whether girls are able to take decisions concerning their wellbeing and their future, a slight majority agreed (55 per cent), although 65 per cent of girls felt that they should have more autonomy with regards to their decision-making.



Girls felt that family – and particularly the husband or partner – was unsupportive of their wish to attend school or go to work. Many married girls or girls living with their in-laws or step-parents made reference to the fact that their husbands or family were unwilling to pay their school fees or that they were requested to stay at home to perform caring duties for sick family members. Additionally, many married girls reported that their husbands did not want them spending time in a school or workplace for fear that they would better themselves by learning more or earning more than them, in addition making them more attractive to other men. Control, jealousy and violence within marriages and relationships were frequently mentioned. The assigned gender roles and responsibilities of girls as carers and home makers also featured as a rationale as to why girls should stay at home and serve their family or husbands. The lack of family support was cited frequently by many girls as a central challenge faced in attempting to realise their life goals.

“I am being mistreated at home. I stay with my grandmother, she harasses me, makes me do all the household chores even if there are other girls to help me she won’t allow them to. I can’t go back and stay with my mother; she also mistreated me because she was going through a divorce. And I can’t also tell my father, he will think I am lying.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“My family in-laws, where I am married, they say that I am not supposed to do this or that. Do not have time to do these things.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“My husband does not want me to go to work. My husband’s parents say that your wife is too clever so she should stay at home.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“No because my husband is not working and we don’t have anywhere to look for money. If I get a job my husband does not allow me to go.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“My husband is jealous and he believes that if I go to work I will be taken by other men who have a lot of money.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

“My grandmother does not want me to work as a maid, she wants me to take care of my sick mother at home.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“My husband must go to jail because he is not supporting his child and I should get a job that does not need educated people. My challenges are worse than theirs [other girls in the community]. Because I do not have even the basics that I need in my life, for example, soap to bath me and my baby. Others of my age are married to very supporting husbands. My husband is not supportive. All he knows is beating me and harassing me.” (Adolescent mother, married)

Being orphaned or cared for by in-laws or wider family was also cited as a challenge by many girls. They described a lack of care, attention and financial support as an obstacle to achieving their life goals, as the following quote illustrates:

“I want to go back to school and become a teacher or a nurse. I have no father, my mother remarried so my stepfather is not willing to pay for my school fees. My father died. It is difficult to overcome these challenges. I have talked to my grandmother who takes care of me and she does not have money at the moment. Other girls’ challenges in my community are different because they are way better than me because their fathers are alive and can take care of them.” (Adolescent girl, Zhombe)

Girls participating in the focus group workshop also highlighted the intersecting vulnerabilities that girls face in their depiction of a (hypothetical) girl from their community – for example:

Chipo Dube is 16 years and from Zhombe. Chipo is thinking of getting married. She wants to run away from abusive guardians because she is an orphan. She is a school drop-out. Chipo is low in heart, sad and not happy at all. Chipo is now a prostitute, she falls in love with married men as a way of looking for some income; she also spends time washing, sweeping the yard and other household chores. The community complains a lot about her behaviour. They want her to go back to school as she is too young to be engaging in prostitution. (Adolescent girls' focus group discussion, Zhombe)

Being married also brought with it challenges that girls felt they had to find ways to overcome:

"No money to build a house, my husband's relatives are troublesome." (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

"I do not have money since my husband do not give me money and does not take care of my needs." (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

More than a quarter of the girls interviewed (28) mentioned the difficulty of finding employment because of their educational status, rural location or being too young. Five girls mentioned the compounding effects of poverty and having a disability: one did not have the money to buy glasses which meant that she was falling behind at school and worried that her low level of education would prohibit her from getting a good job. One girl who mentioned a hearing and speech disability became pregnant as a result of being raped by her neighbour, and was rejected by her community.

"My mother doesn't go to work so sometimes I am home because I have no money for school fees. I am deaf and dumb and pregnant and the challenge is I am failing to really fit and be accepted in the community." (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

"I think somehow the other girls are not disabled, they do not have a disability like me. I am disabled and in abject poverty. I completed my Ordinary level at Simana Secondary School. It was easier for the other girls to walk swiftly to school; I found it difficult to walk. I did not collect my results because I did not pay school fees. Even at school I was always troubled. At school the other girls did not like me because I live with a disability." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

For four girls, the difficulty in accessing work was compounded by not having any official identification or passport. This was a barrier to getting work or travelling overseas to find work. A small group of girls also mentioned their own lack of motivation as a barrier, connecting this with relationships which they felt were unsupportive.

"Lack of enough documents to travel abroad where there are job vacancies." (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

"Lack of birth certificate and national identity card. I cannot have a passport to start my own projects because of birth certificate." (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

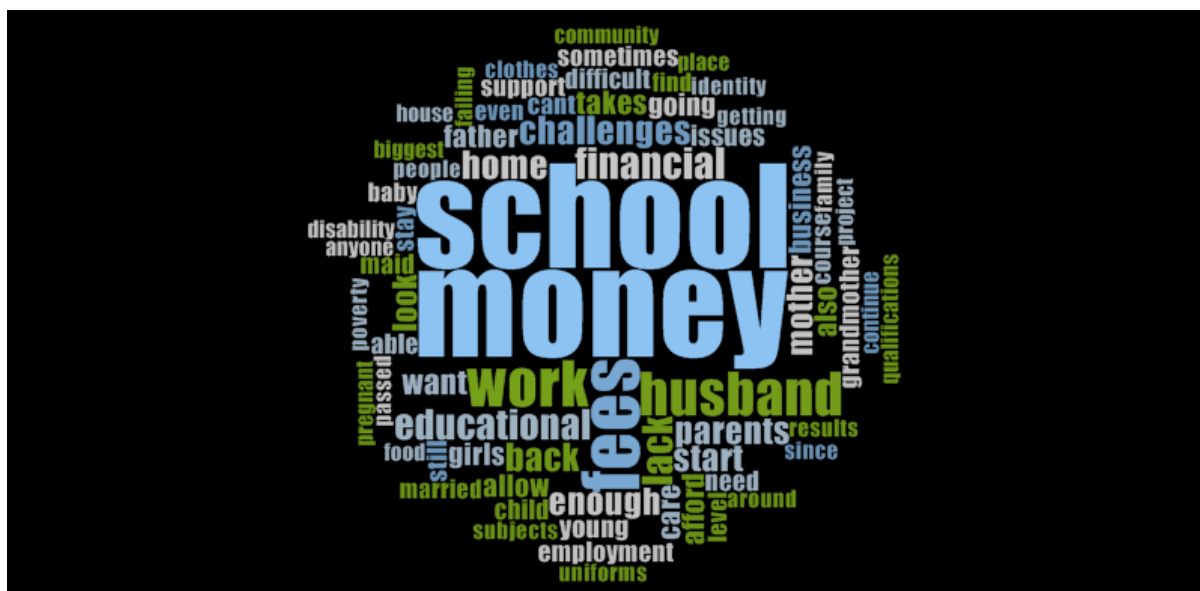
When asked if they thought girls have the same opportunities as boys to get on in life, only 26 per cent of all the girls agreed, whereas 69 per cent disagreed. The proportion of married girls agreeing with this statement also diminished: only seven married girls out of the 44 agreed that they have the same opportunities as boys to get on in life; two were neutral, 35 disagreed. Overall the results show that girls, particularly young mothers both married and unmarried, feel

that they lack sufficient opportunities to support them in achieving their life goals and aspirations.

All of these challenges are discussed in further detail throughout the next sections of the report.

2.3 Overcoming barriers to achieving life goals

Girls identified the importance of improving their economic situation, getting back to school and having supportive relationships as key components when attempting to overcome the challenges they face in trying to realise their goals.



A word cloud of the most frequently used words when describing how girls could overcome the challenges they face in trying to achieve their life goals; education, generating income, fees for school and supportive relationships are all central.

When asked what they could do to overcome the barriers they face, the majority of girls focused on external help, indicating that many of these girls felt that they did not have enough power or control over their own decisions and futures. This is however in contrast to their desire for greater autonomy. When asked if girls their age *should* be able to make their own decisions regarding their wellbeing and future, the large majority agreed: 42 per cent strongly agreed and 23 per cent agreed. Interestingly, 31 per cent disagreed that girls should be able to take their own decisions regarding this. These negative responses were spread among all the various groupings of girls and included both girls with and without children, married and unmarried. There were 98 girls who had dropped out of school, either temporarily or permanently, who responded to this question; 68 of whom agreed that girls should be able to make their own decisions regarding their wellbeing and future.

When considering how to overcome the obstacles they face in attempting to achieve their life goals, the majority of girls stated that they would ask for money or financial help from their immediate family, husbands or relatives. Securing money was mostly discussed in relation to getting help with paying for school fees and uniforms – getting back to school was considered an important pathway to overcoming the barriers they face and securing a better future. Getting financial assistance or capital was equally considered important for those girls with life goals of starting their own income-generating project. Mothers discussed having money for help with childcare as important to overcoming their obstacles. Twenty-four girls stated that they would find their own way to earn money such as selling groceries or washing people's clothes as a

maid in order to earn money to go to school. Seventeen girls stated that they appeal to sponsors or donors to help them financially or with school scholarships. Four girls mentioned that they did not have national identification cards and without this they could not get any work. Other girls (nine) felt that it was just not possible to overcome the obstacles they faced:

“No I don’t think it is possible. Things are difficult for us. There is nowhere that we can get the money from. I have been sitting at home since two years ago and nothing is changing. Things are getting worse. Telling my mother every time that I want to go to school is as good as adding stress on top of the other.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“My sister can help me with money for school fees. Will have to look for somewhere closer to do the hairdressing course though the quality of education differs from where I want to go.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“If I get a small project like selling clothes, I will get money for school fees, stationery and books.” (Adolescent mother, Zhombe)

“I wish I could have someone to help me, I wish I could find donations. I do not know where to find donors and donations. I only hear that donors are in the cities. I cannot go to the cities lest I get lost. If only someone could help me get access to the donors.” (Ndebele adolescent girls, Silobela)

“I don’t have anyone to help me.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

“There is no one to talk to, my father was a promiscuous man, he left four other children after from different mothers. I struggled to pay for my young brother. I only afforded to pay for the first two years of his primary education. I am the first born so I have no means, no one to talk to.” (Adolescent mother, married, Epworth)

Girls stressed the importance of having someone to talk to and share their problems with, and family support featured highly in their responses about overcoming their challenges. The majority (65 per cent) of girls stated that their opinions were asked for and considered in their homes; 32 per cent of girls disagreed with this statement. Girls overwhelmingly reported that more could be done to include them in family decisions, with 89 per cent of girls stating that their opinions and concerns *should* be heard in the home.

The importance of the family and the community in determining girls’ wellbeing was equally apparent when the girls were questioned about whether they had anyone to talk to when they were worried about anything. The vast majority (83 per cent) stated yes, and that this person was usually a female relative: 86 girls mentioned mothers, sisters, aunts and grandmothers as a source of support and strength. Twelve girls mentioned friends, church leaders and counsellors. Only eight girls mentioned a male relative – and only two of these were their fathers (others included uncles, grandfathers and husbands).

The girls interviewed detailed a range of support they received from their families: advice and support on matters such as marriage and schools (81 girls mentioned this), financial help for food, children and school (26 girls mentioned this) as well as love and care (31 girls discussed this), and practical support, such as being taken to the clinic.

However, 15 girls (12 per cent) said they had no one to talk to, and six girls (5 per cent) said they only sometimes have someone to talk to. The majority of these girls were not in school or employment and were from Silobela and Epworth. Among the girls who reported that they had no one to talk to, three identified themselves as 24-hour carers in their families and two identified themselves as living with a disability. One girl in the Epworth community explained

that she had no one to talk to and didn't trust anyone – highlighting the extent of social isolation and lack of support that some girls are experiencing.

“Some girls are orphans but they may have help from their relatives. I am alone in this world: I have no one to help me, no one to turn to. Others are helped by their mothers. My mother is on a deathbed as we speak, she needs my help. Others are better than me. On the contrary others are even in more difficult situations than me, others are destitute at least I have a husband who provides shelter for me. Even though sometimes he is not able to provide.” (Adolescent mother, married, Epworth)

“My aunt sells vegetables, fruits and tomatoes at a small market. She manages to give me some money to buy food for me and my family. My husband only gets part-time jobs in the fields, these jobs do not really pay much. We usually go for days without food and my aunt helps me so much. If it wasn't for my aunt, I would have been dead by now.” (Adolescent mother, married, Epworth)

“She protects me and she is always there for me. For example, when I was raped, she helped me report the case to the police and made sure the man was kept away from me since he had threatened me not to report the case.” (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

The girls who reported that they have someone to talk to highly valued this relationship and found a great comfort in being able to discuss their problems and receive advice. The majority of girls who said that they talked to their mothers, aunts or other female relatives referred to them as a source of support and strength. When reflecting on the type of help they received, many spoke of how their mothers counselled their daughters on issues to do with their marriage and relationships, particularly around issues of violence within the marriage.

“My mother is there to give me advice. At one point I had a disturbing misunderstanding with my boyfriend. She was there to tell me how to handle the situation. She gave me a great counselling because I was at a point where I had thought of committing suicide. My boyfriend was telling people that I am HIV positive.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“My grandmother is the person I turn to. Every time I have a problem she is always there to help me and advise me even if there are financial problems. She is my role model and she is responsible for my day-to-day welfare of my life.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“I was involved in a serious relationship with my boyfriend then he went to South Africa and forgot about me after impregnating me. I was heartbroken because he wanted to marry me. My grandmother comforted me and told me to move on with life. My grandmother is special to me, she takes good care of me, she provides food, shelter. When I am sad she comforts me, she rescued me from the hands of my stepmother.” (Adolescent girl, Redcliff)

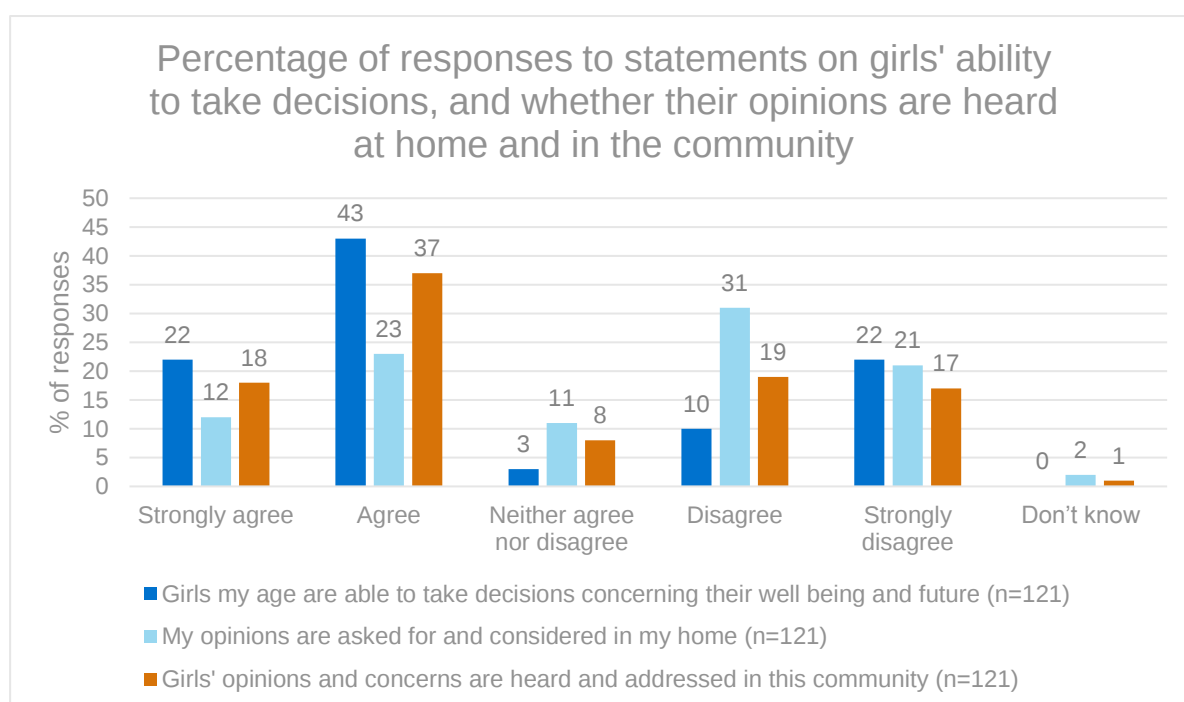
“My grandmother helped me stay strong – for example when the father of the baby ran away, I wanted to commit suicide. She stopped me. She is always there for me.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“My mother gives me advice on what to do, for example I was harassed by this other guy who was asking me out because I had refused his proposal. So my mother told me to stay away from him. She is the only parent I have, I have never met my father. So she is always there for me, to help me. She understands me more.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“My mother helps me. She provides counselling when I have a problem – for example when I was facing discrimination at school because of my poor background.”
(Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Whenever my husband doesn’t give me money I go and tell my mother. My mother will tell me not to worry because it is part of life, men are stingy. My mother helps me with money to buy washing soap for my baby’s clothes. My father is very angry at me for being impregnated so my father does not support me especially at this difficult time when illegal mining is not flourishing. My husband is a gold panner here in Silobela.”
(Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“I once told my mother when I had a beating from my husband. She told me to stay and she said that it is typical of marriage. My marriage is very complicated. I usually get beaten by my husband. My mother is always there to comfort me.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)



Girls did not readily identify the community as a supportive mechanism for addressing the challenges girls face, with the majority (52 per cent) disagreeing that their opinions and concerns are heard and acted upon in the community. This is in contrast to girls’ perception of what should be happening, with 92 per cent stating that their opinions and concerns should be heard and acted upon in the community. The low value that girls feel that the community places on their needs and concerns was discussed in focus group settings: girls were asked to describe a typical girl from their village, including what she thinks, does and feels in the community environment. Below are some interesting and illustrative excerpts of girls’ responses in relation to this task.

Princess Moyo, a Ndebele girl from Silobela, is 17 years old. She is thinking of looking for a job and assisting her family. She did not finish school due to lack of fees. She feels sad, her wish is to go back to school and finish her studies. When she is home she basically engages in a lot of household work, as well as selling vegetables around her community. This community does not value girls’ education. (Ndebele adolescent girls, focus group discussion, Silobela)

Cleopatra is aged 15 from Zhombe. Cleopatra is a school drop-out and she wants to go back to school. She feels sad especially when she sees girls of her age going to school, living happy lives. She earns income for her family through selling wares at the market. The community she lives in is poor and does not value girls' education at all. They see girls as marriage objects. (Adolescent girls, focus group discussion, Zhombe)

"As long as you come from a poor family, communities don't value you." (Adolescent girls, focus group discussion, Zhombe)

"Girls end up opting for marriage as way out of poverty." (Adolescent girl, focus group discussion, Zhombe).

"Communities spread a lot of lies about adolescent girls and that kills us emotionally." (Adolescent girls, focus group discussion, Zhombe)

"Our culture does not encourage girls to speak out in public gatherings." (Adolescent girls, Epworth)

"Girls themselves should know their rights, stand up and talk." (Adolescent girls, Epworth)

Most of the girls interviewed (69 per cent) stated that there were female community and political leaders. When asked if they were as capable as the male leaders, however, 42 per cent disagreed. When asked if men make better community and political leaders than women, 62 per cent agreed. This illustrates prevalence of gendered perceptions among girls that males are perceived as natural born leaders in comparison to women. Interestingly, girls did not mention women leaders in their communities when responding to what or who could help improve the situation for girls like them. This indicates that while girls note the presence of female community leaders, they do not immediately identify them as agents of change or allies who could help to improve the situation of girls in the community. However, an interview with an elder female village head, Sinoli Mugwagwa, indicates that things are beginning to change in some respects.

Sinoli Mugwagwa, elder female village head²²

After her husband died, Sinoli Mugwagwa took over the role of village head in Muchape, a small agricultural settlement of fewer than 40 families in the district of Silobela. She is one of only a handful of women who fill this type of role. "Things are beginning to change," she says. "People are becoming more accepting of women taking on leadership positions."

Muchape is in an area where life predominantly revolves around the mining industry. While the wealth extracted from this region was once estimated at around 40 kilos of gold per month, worth several hundred thousand US dollars, most people in the area live in extreme poverty.²³ Most are members of the Ndebele ethnic minority.

A recent lack of rainfall has meant subsistence farming has all but ceased. Many men resort to illegal gold panning, at great risk to their own safety and liberty, as they face being arrested. Poverty, hunger, school drop-outs, child and early marriage and teen pregnancies are just part of the trouble, according to Sinoli Mugwagwa.

²² Interview conducted by Jean Casey and Nono Mgutshini. Case study written by Zahra Sethna.

²³ <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2013/04/10/silobela-the-cursed-land-of-flowing-riches/>

Girls, particularly adolescent girls, face a bleak future, she says, with little to look forward to except getting married as soon as possible – possibly to a gold panner who might have a bit of disposable income.

When she was young, Sinoli remembers boys and girls herding animals together. When the days became hot, everyone would swim together in the dam. These days, that sort of behaviour is not tolerated, nor would it be safe for the girls.

She attributes some of this change to a different mindset in boys and girls. Also to blame, she says, is the fact that girls have limited opportunities to finish school, as the nearest secondary school is several kilometres away and the walk there is not safe. Girls fear being raped as they walk through the bush. Instead, they have no choice but to stay in the village, where they have little to occupy their time.

These results demonstrate that girls perceive that they have some level of autonomy but when faced with overcoming their challenges, their low level of participation and voice in the home and community means that their power to negotiate better life opportunities is restricted. This is further compounded by the struggle of families to survive amid daily economic hardship. The need to meet the survival needs of a family becomes the priority and girls' rights to attend school, for example, become less important in the face of such adversity.

SECTION 3

THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT OF GIRLS – LOCAL CULTURE AND GENDER NORMS

Girls' opportunities and actions are impacted by social norms, gender roles and the beliefs that girls have in their own capabilities. These in turn are shaped by the conditions and environments of the communities where they live. Social norms are integral to advancing gender equality in order to challenge the discriminatory norms and practices that restrict girls' access to rights and resources. With this in mind the research explored the gender norms and the social and cultural norms of girls' environments in order to get the girls' perspective on whether their environment enables them to progress and reach their desired life goals – or whether it holds them back. For example, girls' autonomy in choosing whom to marry can be dependent on what is deemed acceptable and appropriate for girls in their communities. Equally a girl's agency with regards to where and how she spends her time can be determined by the gender roles and responsibilities within her household.

These norms can be difficult to explore in a tangible way. In order to understand further how such social norms impact, positively or negatively, on girls' sense of self, opportunities and progress, the report will first consider the experience of the Ndebele girls who shared their perceptions and experiences of their culture. The report will then consider the whole sample of girls interviewed, exploring their perceptions and experiences of household chores and care in order to better understand how these social and gender norms impact girls' agency.

3.1 Ndebele culture: norms and traditions



A word map highlights the words most frequently used by Ndebele girls reflecting on aspects of their culture; marriage, education, tradition and values are central to this.

In a focus group workshop Ndebele girls were asked to reflect on their identity by depicting a fictional girl from their community; outlining what an Ndebele girl thinks, feels, does and how

she feels in her community environment. The following paragraph is a short summary of the key challenges faced by Ndebele girls.

Gloria Moyo is an Ndebele girl from Silobela and is 18 years old. She is thinking about the problems she is facing: being poor, an orphan and always chased away from school because of lack of school fees. She thinks about going to look for a job in the urban area. She feels so sad and in pain, especially when she sees girls of her age going to school while she is always absent. She feels so excluded. When she is home she basically does household chores. The community thinks it's high time she looks for a job or gets married. Basically this community does not value girls' education.

In order to explore these insights further, the Ndebele girls were asked an additional set of qualitative questions within the surveys to explore what aspects of their culture they most value, some of the challenges their culture poses for girls their age and how to overcome these challenges.

Ndebele girls cited marriage as the most valued aspect of their culture, followed by an education and preserving their virginity prior to marriage. The importance of not disgracing family and respecting one's husband was a recurring theme when girls were reflecting on their culture and traditions; this was mostly discussed in connection with girls getting pregnant outside wedlock. Girls frequently reported that pregnancy before marriage resulted in girls being disregarded by their communities, leading to them feeling isolated, sad and in some cases desperate.

"Value virginity, respecting parents and your husband." (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

"They value virginity." (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

"Education and marriage before 18." (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

"We are taught to wake up early and do household chores so that when we get married, we do not disgrace our families." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

"Marriage is very important and a valuable achievement in our tradition. There are no challenges in our community but in your family you face challenges like being accepted – for example if you are impregnated. This makes you feel depressed and heartbroken. It hurts so much and it can lead to decisions like I can be a sex worker instead because my family hates me." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

A minority of girls felt that Ndebele girls should not rely on husbands and should earn their own income. They criticised the low value that their culture places on girls and the lack of empathy and support that community elders and family show to their daughters, as the following quote highlights:

"Girls should work hard, in fact girls and women should not just wait for the husbands to give them money, they should work and earn their own money. Girls are seen as not important especially when they get pregnant whilst at school, they are seen as immoral people. Girls feel neglected. One girl I know tried to commit suicide when her family rejected her. Elders should be taught to forgive and forget, if they could accept their daughters back." (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

When discussing the challenges that Ndebele girls face, girls frequently talked about the pressure to get married. This, they felt, was an important factor in order to be accepted by the community and to fit in.

“They are being mocked at if they get to their 20s without being married. It is so embarrassing and stressful to reach your 20s without being married. I like our culture. Girls should go to school but by 18 years one should get married.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Maybe they are orphan and are being mistreated by the people they live with so they won’t be living the same life ... as other girls. They have to get married to fit in. They get married when they are still young for them to live a better life and be like others.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“They are forced to get married at a tender age because that’s what our cultures are like.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“A girl is forced to marry her sister’s husband when her sister has passed away even if she is under age or even when she does not consent. The husband can be abusive.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“As young girls, we are taught to be submissive and taught different household chores so in a way, we are being trained to be better wives.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

Other challenges discussed were the negative perceptions and the discriminatory attitudes of the Shona community towards the Ndebele community and the language barriers between the two. The perception of many of the Ndebele girls is that they are not valued by the Shona community. This, in turn, leads them to restrict their interactions with the Shona community.

Language barriers make it difficult, for example, to be an Ndebele in Shona-speaking communities. There is conflict between Ndebele wives and Shona mothers-in-law. These challenges affect Ndebele girls in that they only socialise among themselves sometimes. There is a belief that “Ndebele girls are loose and immoral and that this is what causes problems in their marriages.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“We face stigma since I was divorced and rejected. People look down on me, they see me as someone who does not have morals. This lowers our self-esteem and we are shy to speak out whilst among others. They should treat us the same because mistakes do happen in life.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

“There is a belief that Ndebele girls are immoral. This may make them to be segregated and to be attacked, called names – ‘mundebele’ for example. The girls are psychologically traumatised, belittled and then feel less human than the majority.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

“There is nothing wrong about our culture. We are just like any other culture except the language only.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

Two girls mentioned female genital cutting and circumcision as a specific challenge that girls of their culture face, acknowledging that this continues to exist despite being made illegal, as the following quote highlights:

“Pulling of some genital parts like labia minora which is resulting in bleeding ... It results in loss of self-confidence.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

The Ndebele girls were finally asked to reflect on anything that they would like to change in their culture so that girls feel more accepted. Interestingly, although marriage was identified as the aspect of the Ndebele culture that girls value most, it was also reported as one of the traditions that girls would like changed, indicating that, although child and early marriage is valued by the community, this value is not shared by all the girls. Also discussed was the need for the

community to value girls' education and to be more accepting of young girls who "make mistakes", as well as the need to bring to an end the unlawful practice of female genital cutting and circumcision. One girl felt that improving the situation for girls of the Ndebele culture was impossible for girls, as their concerns are not listened to nor acted upon by their community.

"Early marriage culture. They think a girl should get married as early as in her teenage [years]. It's not fair because we will be still young to handle marriages." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

"The elders should change our culture of early marriages." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

"That tradition of pulling labia minora is supposed to be removed." (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

"Think family members and the society should be taught to learn and accept the young mothers and girls despite the mistakes they have done in the past." (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

"They [community] should know the importance of education therefore they won't exclude girls with passion of education." (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

"I have nothing to change because even if you say anything they never consider what we contribute." (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

3.2 Gender roles and responsibilities in the household – Care and domestic work in the household

One environment where discriminatory gender norms are at play is within the household and this can be illustrated when examining the distribution of household chores. It reveals the gender-biased socialisation of roles and responsibilities which impact on girls' notions of what they can and cannot be, and what they can and cannot do. Social and cultural norms are of particular importance when considering factors that enable girls to progress, and to achieve their life goals, or not.

SDG 5.4 outlines the importance of recognising the value of unpaid care and domestic work, including the promotion of shared responsibility for household tasks within the household and family. Exploring girls' attitudes and perceptions around household chores and the care responsibilities of family members offers a good lens to gain insights into gender norms in a given context. Household chores and care are part of girls' realities in Zimbabwe. All girls who took part in the research were therefore asked which household chores they carry out, how long they spend on chores or care and if they feel the distribution of these tasks is fairly shared in their household between the boys and the girls.

When girls were asked to reflect on the challenges they face in attempting to realise their life goals, girls often reported being kept at home to care for sick or older family members, or being unable to attend school or find work due to lack of childcare support for their own children..

3.2.1 Time spent on chores and care

When girls were asked to reflect on the biggest overall challenges that girls their age face, time, household chores and caring duties were commonly mentioned. This is not surprising given that the girls interviewed reported having spent an average of 5.6 hours on household chores in the week prior to the interviews, with 25 girls reporting having to manage caring responsibilities 24 hours a day. When asked about the types of household tasks they contributed to, 77 per cent of the girls mentioned shopping, and 99 per cent cleaning. In addition, 92 per cent washed clothes

and 100 per cent of the girls cooked food; 54 per cent cared for siblings; 20 per cent cared for family members; 75 per cent collected water. Mostly, chores were assigned by mothers, step-mothers or female relatives; but many girls also reported that no one assigns tasks – that they carry them out of their own accord.

Average time spent in the previous week on each task

Shopping: 35 minutes

Cleaning: 52 minutes

Washing clothes: 1 hour 10 minutes

Cooking: 56 minutes

Caring for siblings: 5 hours 47 minutes²⁴

Caring for family members: 2 hours 11 minutes²⁵

Collecting water: 35 minutes

More than half the girls interviewed (55 per cent) stated that they had to do chores which put them in danger or at risk, such as collecting water or firewood: one focus group discussion with girls in Redcliff revealed that “[girls] face sexual violence when [they] have gone out to fetch firewood.”

Marital status and motherhood impact on the time spent on chores and care

The minimum amount of time spent on chores in the previous week was 40 minutes, and the maximum was reported to be 24 hours, with an average of 5.6 hours. Married girls were found to spend more time on chores than unmarried girls: the former spent an average 7 hours the previous week, the latter an average 4.8 hours. Young mothers spent more time on chores than those without children: girls without children spent an average of 4.69 hours the previous week on chores; girls with one child spent an average of 6.55 hours on childcare, and girls with two children spent an average of 8.52 hours on chores and household tasks the previous week.

24-hour carers

This picture is complicated somewhat by the presence of 25 girls who stated that they cared 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for family and for siblings. Silobela and Epworth had the highest reporting of 24-hour carers, with nine girls from Silobela and seven from Epworth, 16 in total. Six girls who care for 24 hours a day said they were 15 years old, indicating the early age of undertaking such responsibilities. Only six of the 25 girls reported that they attend school; the large majority were not in education, training or employment. Twelve girls stated that they had children – six were married and six unmarried. Three of the 25 girls reported that they have no one to talk to, highlighting the isolation that some of these girls bear in their caring roles. The life goals of the 24-hour carers focused on returning to education and gaining employment, similar to the aspirations of the wider sample. One girl from this sub-set reported her goal was living a life without violence.

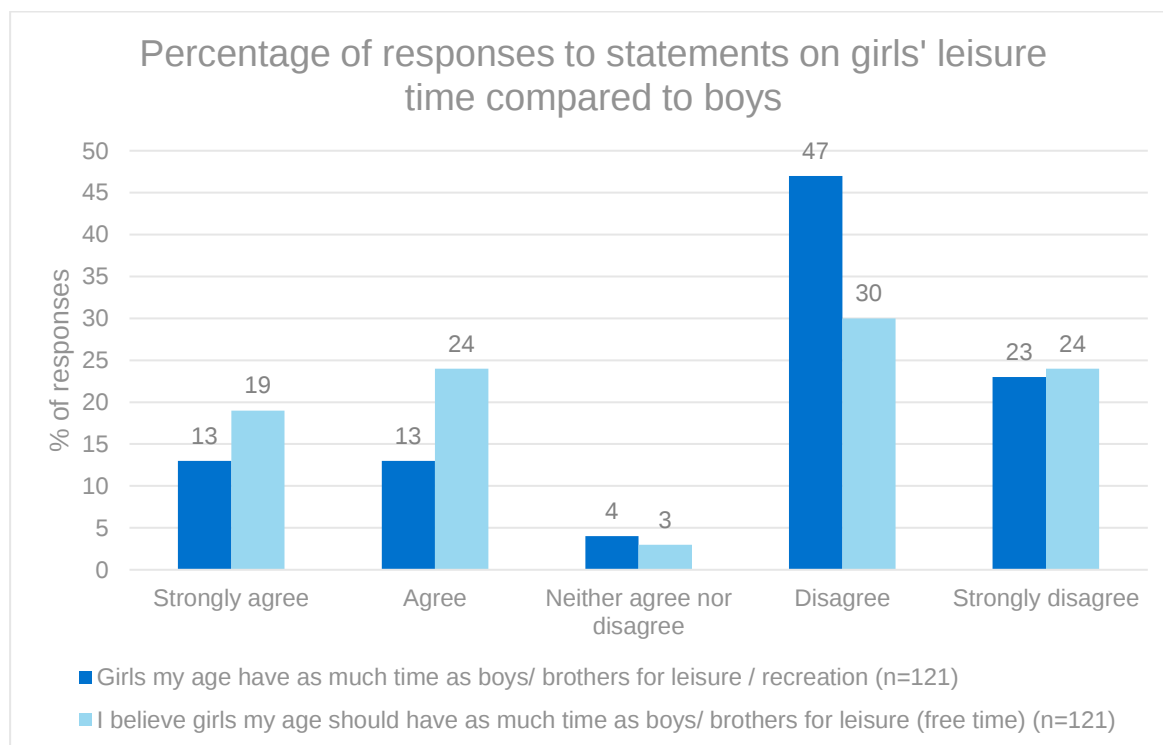
3.2.2 Attitudes towards gender roles and responsibilities in the household

The majority of girls (68 per cent) disagreed that household chores and tasks are shared equally between boys and girls and men and women in their families. Two-thirds of girls disagreed that caring for siblings or family members is shared equally between girls and boys in

²⁴ This increases to 32 hours if the girls who care for siblings on a 24-hour basis are included.

²⁵ This increases to 13 hours 10 minutes if girls who continually care for family members are included.

the family. Furthermore, 70 per cent of girls acknowledged that boys have more free time for leisure and recreation than girls. One focus group discussion with boys in Epworth revealed that these boys were aware of the disparity in leisure and study time available to girls because of the distribution of chores: they stated that girls have more household chores than boys, and that the household chores undertaken by girls take more time to complete than those of boys. A focus group discussion with girls in Silobela revealed that this division of labour meant that “boys have ample time for learning”.



Many girls stated that they enjoyed domestic work because it was their duty, because it is training them for their future lives as wives and mothers, and because it prevented them from being 'lazy'. Ndebele girls from Silobela often reported that carrying out household chores was a way to demonstrate their value and worth to the household; this was often connected with girls living with their in-laws, feeling that they have nothing valuable to contribute to the household.

“My mother doesn't like someone who is lazy.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“I am preparing for my future. I have to be someone better in terms of household chores. One day I will be a wife and I will be expected to do the chores.” (Adolescent girl, Silobela)

“Because I am a girl so I am supposed to do them.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

The majority of girls reported that they liked undertaking their household chores and furthermore that the distribution of chores should not be changed. Many comments from girls who supported this notion reveal a clear distinction of roles and responsibilities in the household along gender lines. These findings indicate that girls have been socialised to believe that this is the correct order and nature of division of labour, with strong perceptions emerging around the cultural expectations of men and women which should not be challenged. Some girls talked in terms of the idea of husbands or boys carrying out household chores as a cultural taboo.

“Because that’s the tradition and we cannot change it. Girls should do all the household chores whilst the boys do hard tasks such as fetching for firewood.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

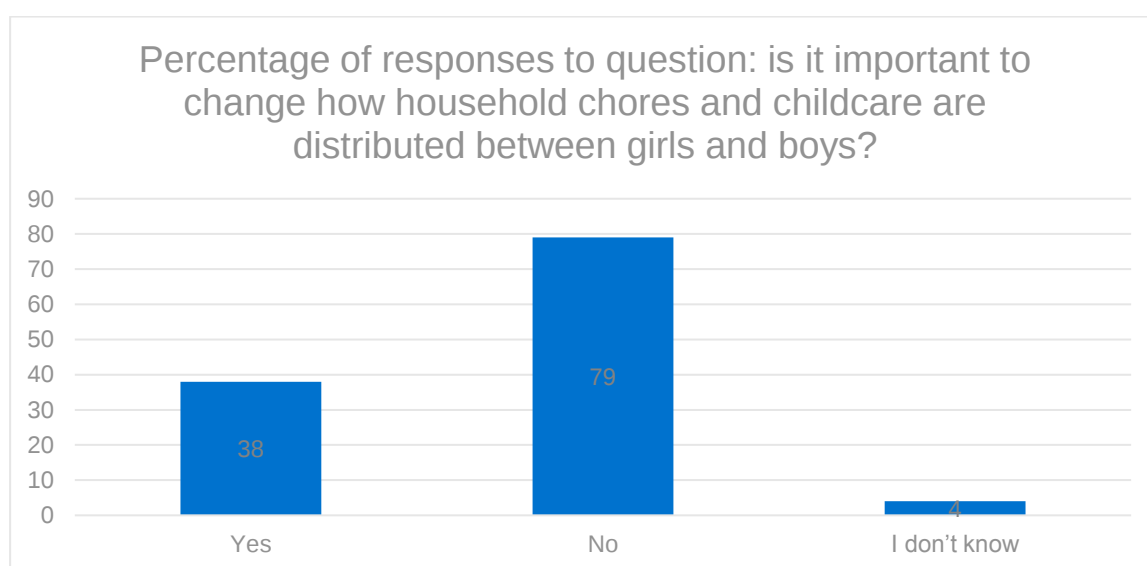
“I like carrying out chores because I want to reduce the burden on my mother.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“No, girls should do the household chores and childcare alone because boys have more energy than girls therefore they must do all the outdoor chores only. It is OK like that. Girls should stick at home all the time.” (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

“It is impossible and a lot of people may believe that I bewitched my husband, when they see him washing our baby’s nappies.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Cannot find a boy cleaning or cooking, it’s an embarrassing thing and if his friends find out, they will laugh at him saying that he is dumb.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“We were socialised that way so nothing has to change.” (Adolescent girl, married, Mbizo)



In focus group discussions, boys shared their perceptions of what girls in their communities do on a day-to-day basis. Household chores were frequently mentioned as a core and consistent activity in a girl’s day. They were also asked to outline the type of chores that girls and boys carry out. Below are the responses from the focus group discussion with boys in Silobela.

Chores carried out by boys	Chores carried out by girls
Herd cattle Fetch firewood Mining Farming Weeding and harvesting	Fetch firewood Washing plates Cooking Washing clothes Fetch water Preparing young children before they leave for school Weeding and harvesting Sweeping the yard Cleaning houses Gossiping

Overall, boys from both focus groups, in Silobela and Epworth, conceded that girls have more household chores than boys. Their responses were mixed: some said that they believed girls' tasks took less time and were 'light'. Boys' tasks, they argued, took a long time and needed a lot of strength. They cited ploughing or herding cattle as examples. "It's a whole day activity" (Silobela). Others felt that girls' chores took far longer to carry out compared to boys: "Girls have more household chores than boys. Household chores for girls take more time to execute and complete than that of boys" (Epworth). Both groups reflected on the numerous chores that girls have to carry out before school, which can make them late for school. On returning from school they have more chores to carry out, a routine that limits their energy and time to study. As a result, girls can fall behind in school and often drop out. Girls confirmed the boys' perception: only 26 per cent agreed that they have as much free time as boys.

Interestingly, while both groups of boys – Shona boys from Epworth and Ndebele boys from Silobela – confirmed that they carry out chores to help with the running of the household, there was a division in attitudes connected with tribal identity concerning the acceptability of boys carrying out chores. Shona boys felt that overall their culture had a more negative view of boys who help with chores compared to the Ndebele culture. Underpinning this was the notion of the social and cultural norms of the Shona community, as the following quote highlights:

"In some tribes like the Ndebele it is acceptable for boys or men to assist with household chores than in other tribes. In [the] Shona tribe men are viewed as weak if they engage in household chores like sweeping, cooking, fetching firewood." (Adolescent boys, Epworth)

Ndebele boys highlighted that the cultural and social norms of their communities value and prioritise boys over girls and this leads to boys feeling superior. This is also reflected at home through the division of household chores, where boys' free time for recreation and study is prioritised over that of girls.

The perceptions of girls on equalising the division of and time spent on household chores was mixed: only 43 per cent of girls felt that they should have as much time as boys/brothers for leisure while 54 per cent disagreed with this statement. The majority of girls strongly echoed the belief that division of labour was a biological and cultural necessity, stating that strength was needed for certain household tasks: these must therefore be completed by men. This perceived necessary biological division of labour therefore justified the unequal amount of time spent on household tasks. Furthermore, some girls mentioned that girls should be kept busy and not left to become idle; the suggestion was that girls being idle was linked to an increased risk of girls engaging in sexual activity.

"Sometimes girls are put at risk because they are told to go and fetch water after school and sometimes there will be a lot of people, so by 8.00pm they still will be there which exposes them to abuse and they can also become promiscuous because they are away from home so household chores should be distributed equally." (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

"Because that's the culture, girls should not equalise themselves with boys; they should do their own tasks alone and boys do theirs like fetching for firewood." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

"Because boys should do hard things and girls should only do light things such as cooking, washing clothes and doing the dishes whereas boys should herd the cattle and do the farm works." (Adolescent girl, Zhombe)

“Boys are not able to perform household chores like girls. They are not able to clean as girls do, so girls should continue doing household chores. It would be a disgrace if a visitor comes and finds that the house is not that clean because a boy has cleaned whilst there are girls.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

3.2.3 Attitudes around distribution of household chores

Interestingly, only 43 per cent agreed that girls *should* have as much free time as boys – with a higher proportion (54 per cent) disagreeing with the concept of equal leisure time for girls and boys. Only 31 per cent of girls thought that the distribution of chores should be changed: 65 per cent said that the current distribution should not be changed.

Of those who agreed that the distribution of chores should be changed, many discussions centred around the idea of a ‘back-up plan’: for example, if the girl or woman was away from the home working and a job fell to a man, he should know how to carry out the task. It might be that this language of necessity is a means of making equality more palatable for men and boys. Other girls openly discussed the need to lessen the burden of tasks on women and girls to give them more free time to study and play.

“If the boys are to move out and start their own life [bachelors] they cater for their household chores so yes, there should be change so that it won’t be hard for the boys to cope when they move out to stay alone.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“I think household chores should be shared equally among girls and boys so that they equally have free time, not putting all the burden on the girl child.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“It is the duty of everyone to do household chores. What if I am not there? Who will look after the children as child care is allocated to women only.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“Because the husbands must also take part in life’s experiences. Men need to experience the domestic sphere equally as they want to experience the professional sphere. The husbands or men can cook just like the wives or women.” (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

“I think we should share the chores in order to ease the burden on girls. Like my situation: I take care of my sick mother, I cook, clean, do everything whilst my brothers just go out and play and come back to me.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

While many girls affirmed the gender-assigned roles and responsibilities in the household, not everyone agreed. The opposing group (31 per cent) firmly believed that the distribution of chores should be challenged and changed but in practice this was difficult on account of the ingrained gender norms and the socialisation of distinct gender roles. However, when these girls reflected on how the burden of chores could be more equally shared, they gave some very interesting insights. These included dialogue between husband and wife on the importance of sharing the workload and mothers educating their sons from an early age on contributing to chores within the household, such as washing, cleaning and cooking. This set of girls however, did not perceive that boys could be included in sharing the care of siblings, which aligned with the perceptions of the wider sample of girls.

“Yes we should share household chores. It is not fair to shift the burden to the girls only whilst boys just go out to play with their friends. I think as a family we should discuss the issue of sharing household chores. I think parents should also encourage boys to do household chores.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Mothers should groom their sons to believing that household chores are also for males.” (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

“Both the husband and the wife should sit down and agree on how to equally share household chores peacefully without arguing.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“Have a family meeting and talk about helping each other on the household duties and how to distribute them equally – especially on collecting water, boys should help too.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“We are socialised according to those household chores. I believe it will be very difficult to re-distribute them. In most cases it’s difficult for a man to do childcare.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“Families and parents should talk and discuss with all their children about the issue of distributing household chores.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Parents should put a policy that states that all children are the same, whether boy or girl therefore they should help each other to do the household duties.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

SECTIONS 4–7

GREATEST OVERALL CHALLENGES THAT GIRLS FACE: EDUCATION, EARLY PREGNANCY, CHILD MARRIAGE, AND VIOLENCE



Most frequently used words describing the biggest challenges girls face: education, poverty, marriages, abuse and relationships are central.

Girls were asked to reflect on what they perceived to be the biggest overall challenges that girls their age face. A range of issues were cited, including: violence and abuse; child and early marriage; pregnancies; relationships; and poverty. Education, or more specifically the challenge of staying in school and completing school, was a cross-cutting and recurring challenge that was discussed as inter-related to all the aforementioned challenges. These issues were commonly reported among the diverse set of girls interviewed and the next sections of the report will explore each of these themes in detail. It is worth noting that some of the themes such as education, decreased risk of violence, employment, access to and control of birth control are also considered to be some of the most important pathways for women to gain agency.²⁶ These issues will be discussed in turn, beginning with education, early pregnancy, child and early marriages, and safety and violence. Throughout all these sections girls' perceptions and experiences will be explored. The final section explores some of the opportunities perceived by girls as having the potential to improve their condition and position in their communities and societies.

²⁶ "On Norms and Agency: Conversations about Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries", World Bank, 2012 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1164107274725/On-Norms-Agency-Book.pdf>

When asked about the value of education, girls mentioned increasing their reading, writing, language and reasoning skills, linked with increasing their opportunities to obtain employment. Also mentioned were the values that were taught in school. Both Shona and Ndebele girls mentioned the importance placed on education in their communities.

“It made me a multilingual person. I can now communicate in many languages. Education has made me someone who can fit everywhere.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Education helps me to think better in life. It helps me to reason.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Going to school helped with security. I never had the chance to be abused or [made] pregnant with anyone. I believe if only it wasn’t for school I could have had two children by now.” (Adolescent girl, married, Mbizo)

“I learnt how to live well with others and to respect each other.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Able to read and write – for example, when I go to town I will be able to read all the signs.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, married, Silobela)

“Helped me not to rush in to marriage though I dropped out of school when I was in form two because of financial issues. But I managed to get married when I was older. If I was still in school maybe I would have not been married by now.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“I can get a job if they advertise for people with O levels.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“Socialising, interacting, exchanging life experiences with others and learning.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

Girls also mentioned the value of education in “keeping them safe”. For many they perceive school as an environment that keeps them safe, reducing the risk of being exposed to situations of sexual abuse, early pregnancy, child and early marriage and violence.

Ndebele girls mentioned the value of education in relation to learning additional languages – Shona and English – that they felt would help them fit in better in other towns and societies.

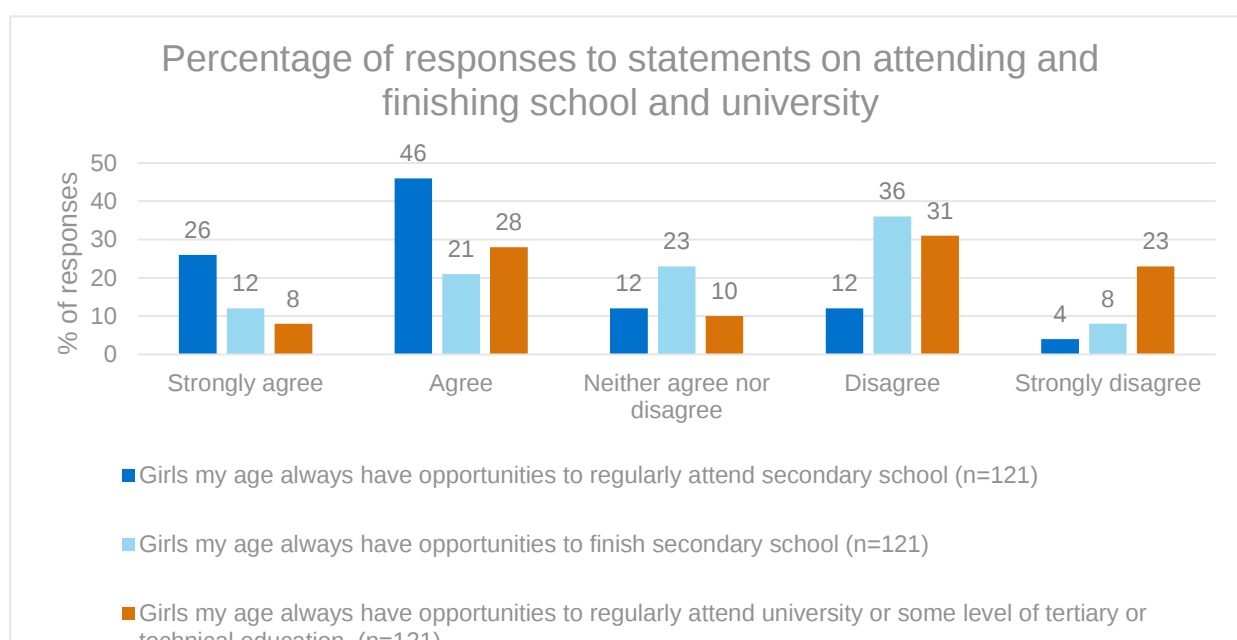
“My dreams of being a nurse made education a very important aspect. Could be able to speak in English and this would help to fit in the other societies like in towns.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

“Helped me with a lot of language. For example when there is a community meeting, if the person who is addressing the meeting speaks Shona, English or Ndebele. I will be able to capture everything he or she says.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

There was little reflection from girls on the value of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. This was also evidenced in the low number of girls who mentioned aspiring to scientific or medical careers. This could suggest that girls are not encouraged to take on what are presented as traditionally male subjects in school.

4.2 I dropped out of school because...

The majority of girls (72 per cent) agreed that girls always have opportunities to regularly attend secondary school. However, when asked if they always had the opportunity to finish secondary school, responses were split, with a higher disagreement level: 44 per cent disagreed, 23 per cent were neutral, while only 33 per cent agreed. When asked if they had the opportunity to attend university or technical education, the majority disagreed (54 per cent). These results indicate that although there is a strong perception among girls that they are able to regularly attend school, their opportunities to finish school are dissatisfactory, as almost one in two girls disagreed that they could finish school. This is further evidenced by the qualitative responses from girls discussing the challenges they face in realising their life goals; money for school fees and opportunities to finish school were pressing challenges for the majority of girls. Only 29 girls out of 121 were currently attending school or tertiary education, highlighting the extent of this challenge.



When girls were asked about reasons for dropping out of school, responses focused on economic reasons and the non-payment of school fees – these were by far the most frequently cited causes for leaving school (69 per cent), followed by pregnancy (14 per cent), marriage (11 per cent) and menstruation (5 per cent). Many girls felt that parents put a low value on girls' education – this was particularly the case for girls who were orphaned or who lived with step-parents. These girls were found to be particularly susceptible to dropping out for economic reasons, reporting that their caregivers were less willing to pay school fees for children who are not their own.

During discussions with young mothers on the difficulties they faced in education, one young mother summarised the particular challenges for young mothers: *“As a young mother, I think life stands still the moment you have a baby. You do not have time to go to school. This is the same predicament that the other young mothers face. They have to wait for some more years, maybe two years, before going back to school. You cannot find any reliable person to stay with the baby whilst you go to school. There should be many Day Care Centres which enrol children as young as six months so that the mothers can go back to school.”* (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

Girls were also asked to reflect on aspects of their education that they felt were least valuable to them. These discussions revealed that not being able to finish their education or collect their certificate, often due to lack of school fees, were the most dissatisfactory aspects of a girl's education.



Word cloud of the most common words used when discussing the challenges around education. Money and financial challenges are clearly prominent.

“I am not happy about the education I received because it was hard to attend school because [I] did not have school fees.” (Adolescent girl, Redcliff)

"I did not manage to collect my results because I did not finish school fees so I am not able to look for a job or proceed with school." (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“I did not manage to write my examination with all the years that I spent at school and all the efforts.” (Adolescent girl, Redcliff)

Few girls mentioned dissatisfaction with the subjects or content of their education, however some did mention aggression from teachers as a dissatisfactory aspect of their education. Many girls mentioned the fact that they go to school hungry and therefore cannot concentrate which was a challenge they found difficult to overcome. Distance to schools and the dangers of the journey to school were also mentioned: the girls stated that boys who had dropped out of school would “lie in wait” for girls on the way home, which made the journey to and from school perilous. Girls from more rural locations cited the risk associated with long distances to school.

“My teacher used to beat me without a proper reason. My mother talked to the headmaster. The teacher was called and asked, and she apologised.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“The girls are not going to school because of economic reasons. Parents/guardians genuinely have no money. Most of them are no longer going to work meaning they can’t provide for their children.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“They have nothing to eat at home. Girls my age go to school with empty stomachs because there is completely nothing to eat at home.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

"Yes, most of the girls here do not finish school, especially those who are orphaned or those who live with step-parents. My friend is also in the same situation. She dropped out of school because her grandmother could not afford to pay her school fees."
(Adolescent girl, Redcliff)

“In this community we have a lot of school drop-outs, and boys drop out too to be touts and drug abusers. These careers differ though with what girls partake in. Girls drop out for marriages, there is no income generation in their career paths.” (Focus group discussion, Epworth)

“Almost everyone is not going to school. Most of their parents don’t know the importance of education. Some of the children are forced to go for prostitution by their parents than go to school. They believe education will wipe away their money.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“A lot of them did not finish school just like me, due to early pregnancies and lack of school fees.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

Ndebele girls, like other girls, spoke about being unable to stay in school and successfully finish their schooling. They spoke about being chased away from school for being unable to pay school fees and being excluded and discriminated against on account of their Ndebele culture.

“Going to school inflicted pain in my life. I was always depressed at school seeing other children affording even a decent meal for break-time. I had nothing. I could only go with wild fruits. I would spend the day very hungry. I could not even listen to the teacher.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Most girls who do not stay with their real parents do not go to school, so they need someone who can take them to school and pay their school fees.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“I walked a tiresome distance of 20km to school ... I would not go to school once in two weeks. I also passed through the bushes and I did not attend school because of the fear of being raped in the bushes.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

One girl specifically outlined her father’s preference to value her brothers’ education over that of her and her sister and how this impacts their right to education.

“Girls are deprived of their educational rights. For example at my home, my father is always buying my brother books but me and my twin sister we never received any books to use at school. My father thinks me and my sister are dull and my brother is intelligent. If my father is educated that we are the same and told to treat us the same, things will get better.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

Other challenges mentioned included sign language difficulties for those with disabilities, as well as the quality and quantity of textbooks.

“The sign language sometimes changes, so it has been confusing especially if teachers change.” (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

“There are no textbooks at school.” (Adolescent mother, Zhombe)

A focus group discussion with boys in Silobela revealed that while these challenges can apply to both boys and girls, girls are more severely affected due to the gendered division of labour in the home and perceptions surrounding the future social roles of girls and boys (boys being breadwinners and needing to earn money, so they are therefore worth educating). Interestingly when boys created their pictorial descriptions of what both girls and boys do, boys were

depicted as attending school while girls were not, indicating that the challenges that girls face in order to attend school are greater.

4.3 Sex education in the classroom

Given the relationship between adolescent pregnancies and school drop-outs, the teaching of sex education as part of the school curriculum is vital. Of the girls surveyed, 85 per cent stated they had received sex education classes in their school, and the majority agreed (90 per cent) that teachers taught them about different contraception methods. The response was more mixed, however, when discussing whether teachers taught them how to actually use different contraception methods: 50 per cent agreed that teachers taught contraception use, while 45 per cent disagreed. This finding is particularly important given the weight that the girls gave to information about sex and contraception in preventing pregnancy – which will be explored in detail in the next section.

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF EARLY PREGNANCY

One of the main tenets of the SDGs, articulated in Goal 3, is ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages. This section explores some of the factors that prevent girls from living healthy and full lives in adolescence. It investigates the drivers of early pregnancy, whether there is access to health centres and information on contraceptives, responsibilities around early pregnancy and the desire to discuss relationships and sex with parents.

The impact of early pregnancy is discussed from adolescent girls' perspectives, providing insights into how early motherhood can obstruct the wellbeing of girls and their personal development, including the restriction of the types of opportunities that are available to them as young mothers.



A word cloud of the most common words cited when discussing the reasons for early pregnancy: money, poverty, marriages, school drop-outs, abuse, knowledge and education are important concepts. Again school drop-out and lack of education cuts across many of the reasons cited.

5.1 Drivers of early pregnancy in Zimbabwe

Discussions with the girls outlined various factors contributing to early pregnancy. The most prominent driver was attributed to poverty; other factors included peer pressure, lack of knowledge, use and access of contraceptives, sexual abuse and a girl's lack of power to negotiate condom use.

The principal reason that girls attributed to early pregnancy was poverty. Familial poverty resulted in a lack of school fees, resulting in daughters dropping out of school – with two central options left for girls: either being married off early and as a result becoming pregnant at an early age or becoming pregnant often through peer pressure from boyfriends, unprotected sex or transactional sex.

Boys were asked in a focus group setting to identify factors that contribute to girls getting pregnant at a young age in Zimbabwe. Their responses mirrored those of the girls, identifying: poverty, peer pressure, girls being unable to pay their school fees and dropping out of school, and the lack of positive parenting and role models. Boys did not identify male behaviours and attitudes, refusing to wear condoms for example, as factors that contribute to girls getting pregnant.

The range of sexual activity attributed to poverty ranged from gift exchange between girls and their boyfriends, to girls having sex with boys and/or older men in exchange for money, food and gifts, to prostitution. Girls then fall pregnant, either through non-use of contraception or through contraception failure. The responses also evidenced a perception of girls being greedy and materialistic: placing the blame for early pregnancy on the shoulders of girls who “love money too much” or who have a “lust for money” even when the respondent also acknowledges the deep levels of poverty that these girls find themselves in. There is little mention of or reflection on the responsibility of older men seeking out young girls and paying them to have sex. Pregnancy is, instead, presented as a result of girls’ urge to have more material possessions. While some girls echoed these perceptions, many however underlined poverty and subsequent lack of choice as key drivers behind early pregnancy.

“I think young girls are so attracted by little things like money and gifts, so they exchanged their bodies for money. This is happening in most poverty-stricken areas in Zimbabwe.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“I think young girls especially in deprived areas are engaging in sex work so that they get money for food, clothing, so in the process they get pregnant since most of them do not know how to use contraceptives.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“Girls’ fascination and obsession with material gains from men.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo,)

“Poverty and abuse is causing early pregnancy in Zimbabwe. Some girls are physically abused so they tend to find boyfriends that comfort them and give them money. By so doing they engage in sexual activities, thereby getting pregnant.” (Adolescent girl, Redcliff)

“Because they are struck by poverty so have to sleep with men to get money for food.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“Some are running away from poverty. They will be looking for a caretaker or care provider, not a husband. Some are into early pregnancy because they were forced into sexual intercourse.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Poverty is causing Zimbabwe girls to engage in sexual activities that lead to early pregnancy, thereby marrying at a young age.” (Adolescent girl, Zhombe)

“They are prostituting their bodies for survival. They are usually prostitutes who exchange sex for money and favours from men. In the process they do not use condoms and get pregnant.” (Adolescent wife, Zhombe)

“The love of money can result in one getting pregnant.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“Peer pressure from friends and they are easily manipulated by small things like chips, sweets and biscuits. This will result in them exchanging sexual benefits for chips, sweets and biscuits.” (Adolecent girl, Epworth)

Married adolescent mothers cited as causes of pregnancy: poverty, lack of information on contraceptives, sexual abuse, violence and a husband's refusal to use contraception.

"Boys rush into having sex with the girl before she is mature enough and also able to make her own decisions." (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

"Abuse from parents, hunger, poverty, starvation and no knowledge for contraception." (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

"The man usually refuses to use condoms. This was the case with my husband: he refused to wear a condom. My husband is 20 years older than me." (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

5.2 Information on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and access to health centres

After poverty, the second most mentioned factor that adolescent girls attributed to early pregnancy was a lack of information and knowledge on how to prevent pregnancy. While 70 per cent of the girls agreed that they had enough information about avoiding early pregnancy, a smaller percentage (38 per cent) agreed that they had enough practical information about how to use different contraception methods, whereas 44 per cent disagreed. The majority of girls (68 per cent) agreed that they could take decisions about their own sexual and reproductive health, however access to contraception was a big issue: 42 per cent disagreed that they had access to contraception and 60 per cent of girls agreed that they had to ask permission to visit the health centre. The girls were, however, positive about the health centres, with 82 per cent stating that they provided information and services suitable for girls their age.

"Some just fall into sexual intercourse without enough knowledge on how to use contraceptives." (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

"Some of them do not have access to condoms and family planning pills." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

"Because of poverty and lack of sex education and how to prevent early pregnancy." (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

"Lack of knowledge about sexual information, like some girls my age are ignorant [about] sexual education yet they are sexually active resulting in them being pregnant early. They are violently treated by their men/boyfriend because they are too young, desperate, they have nowhere to go or even because they are afraid to report." (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

Interestingly although the majority of married adolescent mothers said that they had enough information on how to avoid getting pregnant, this changed when asked if they had enough practical information on how to use different contraception methods – only 10 out of 32 agreed with this statement. This indicates that while there is general knowledge on how to avoid getting pregnant, more specific and practical knowledge around types of contraception and how to use them successfully is somewhat missing in girls' lives. Again, there was higher disagreement among married adolescent mothers in relation to whether girls their age have access to contraception, with 17 out of 32 disagreeing.

When asked if their mothers shared information and talked with their daughters about sexual education and relationships, the majority of girls (71 per cent) agreed. However the overwhelming majority (87 per cent) stated that they wished their mothers spoke more to them about these topics. When asked if they talked with their fathers about sexual and reproductive

health, the majority of girls (77 per cent) disagreed. The majority (77 per cent) also disagreed that they wanted to talk to their fathers more about the subject.

“Mothers and aunties are supposed to sit down with their daughters and talk with them issues to do with relationships and sex.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

5.3 Girls’ having too much freedom and peer pressure

The third most commonly mentioned reason for early pregnancy concerned the idea of girls having too much freedom and no self-control. This theme incorporated the idea of peer pressure, of girls rushing to be like their friends and having a boyfriend. It also reflects the idea that too much freedom for girls is a negative influence – that girls’ behaviour must be policed at all times, otherwise they will be ‘promiscuous’. Little was said about boys having too much freedom.

“Poverty, lack of school fees is also contributing because you will be idle, there is nothing else to do than practise sexual intercourse.” (Adolescent girl, Zhombe)

“It is due to peer pressure. Even me, when I was pregnant, I just wanted to be like my friends who came with nice foods from their boyfriends. These girls are fooled by pretty things. At the tender age of 16, I could not tell my boyfriend to use a condom.” (Adolescent mother, Zhombe)

“Misbehaving, being influenced by other people like their friends, then end up pregnant.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Too much freedom at their homes and can do whatever they want anytime. Too much freedom leads to them having sex and ending up pregnant.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

5.4 Violence, power relationships and early pregnancy

The fourth most commonly mentioned reason for early pregnancy was violence and sexual abuse. Violence at home either caused girls to run to the arms of men for comfort – and pregnancy swiftly ensued – or pregnancy was a direct result of sexual abuse, either from relatives or from men in the street. The compounding vulnerability of disability was also mentioned during discussions, indicating the importance of working with girls with intersecting vulnerabilities.

“Some are raped and they do not report the matter to the police and they get pregnant.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

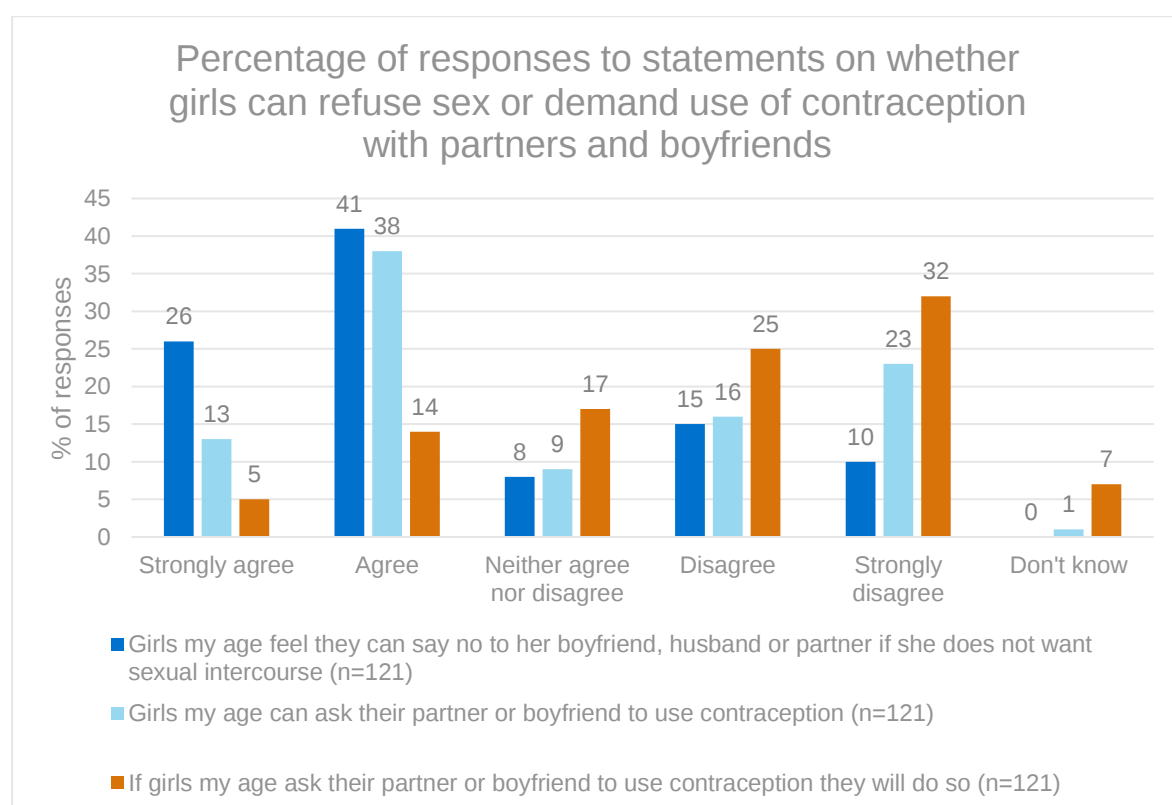
“Some are being impregnated by their relatives. I know of my friend who was impregnated by her uncle. She stayed with her uncle and they related as flirt mates, then one day he raped her.” (Adolescent mother, Epworth)

“Physical/sexual abuse. Personally I got pregnant because I was raped. We are easily manipulated because we are deaf and dumb. It is easy for us to be trapped because if someone threatens me I usually get so frightened that I don’t tell anyone, thus it gives room for us to be raped.” (Adolescent mother, Redcliff)

“Child abuse, especially by step-parents and religion in the apostolic sector is also causing children to rush into early pregnancies since young girls will be looking for someone to take care of them.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Ill-treatment from guardians may lead to the girls being vulnerable to men whilst they will be seeking comfort.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

A related theme was girls’ powerlessness vis-à-vis their boyfriends or partners. When asked if they felt that they could say no to their boyfriend, husband or partner if they did not want sex, the majority of girls (67 per cent) agreed that they could. However a quarter of girls disagreed with this statement, indicating a high incidence of non-consensual sexual relations. Only 51 per cent felt that girls their age can ask their partner or boyfriend to use contraception: worryingly 39 per cent disagreed with this statement. Furthermore, when asked if girls their age can ask their boyfriends or partners to use contraception when asked, the majority of girls, 57 per cent, disagreed and only 19 per cent of girls agreed with the statement. This indicates that inter-partner power relations is firmly tipped in favour of male preference and the adolescent girls surveyed feel that they have little power or authority when it comes to saying no to sexual relations, asking boyfriends to use condoms or boyfriends actually using condoms.



This coincides with the earlier responses from girls on causes of early pregnancy. A small but significant number of girls specifically mentioned that boys or men are unwilling to use condoms and furthermore that they are tricked into sexual relations with men.

“They do not have knowledge about how to prevent pregnancies. They are forced by their partners not to use condoms – that is what happened to me.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

A very slight majority of married mothers felt that they could ask their husband to use contraception (16 out of 32). However, this changed when questioned on whether their husband will use a condom if they are asked – only seven agreed with 22 out of 32 disagreeing. This indicated that although there is some negotiation around condom use, as with unmarried girls, married mothers do not have the decision-making authority when it comes to husbands using condoms when asked. Consent also remained an issue among married girls with 19 saying that

they can say no to their husband if they do not want sexual intercourse and nine in total disagreeing with this statement, three disagreeing and six strongly disagreeing.

“They cannot tell their partners to use condoms – to protect themselves from the HIV/AIDs virus and to use a condom as a contraception.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“The man usually refuses to wear condoms. This was the case with my husband, he refused to wear a condom. My husband is twenty years older than me.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“They are forced by their partners not to use condoms – that is what happened to me.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

5.5 How does early pregnancy impact the lives of adolescent girls and young women?



Most frequently cited words associated with the impact of early pregnancy – school drop-outs, birth complications, marriage, responsibility, HIV, poverty, struggle and survival are important concepts highlighted.

When asked about the impact of having children at a young age, the responses from girls were largely negative. Girls mentioned death, birth complications, leaving school, being left by their partner and ending up in prostitution, as well as difficulties with employment and taking care of the child. The overall consensus of girls was that challenges are heightened for pregnant girls and young mothers. Girls who are mothers and those who are not, both affirmed that “life gets hard” for those who are pregnant or mothers and their lives are marked with feelings of regret.

“When girls get married or pregnant at a young age they may stop going to school. When they want to give birth, they will still be young so this may cause complications on giving birth. Even me when I gave birth I spent three months in hospital. More so, girls may be infected with the HIV/AIDS virus when they are impregnated.” (Adolescent mother, Zhombe)

“They may fail to give birth and in some cases it ends up taking their lives. In some cases they are having challenges in taking care of the baby, for example, clothes, Vaseline, soap and so on”. (Adolescent girl, married, Mbizo)

“Life gets hard for them because the father of the baby may abandon the child hence [they] have no one to take care of the baby and [are] forced to drop out of school.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Her friends make fun of her that she got pregnant while she was still in school and cannot go back to school because she is demotivated. She then lives a life with regret of ever getting pregnant.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

Fear of HIV was also apparent in discussions with the girls.

“Birth complications, various diseases such as HIV and AIDS, and [being] left out by those who gave [made] them pregnant.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“They are usually infected with the HIV/AIDS virus, this is very serious.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

“There is a high rate of teenage pregnancy. They are greedy, they are obsessed with both the sexual pleasures and the material gains they find from men when they have sexual intercourse. These girls want money – some end up dating sugar daddies, these white-headed potbellied man who reward them with not only expensive gifts but with the bonus of HIV/AIDS and an unwanted pregnancy.” When the respondent was asked to expand on why these situations emerge and what could be done about them, she responded: “This is what is happening. This is what I am observing and seeing in this community. I don’t know if anything can be done to overcome these challenges.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

Ndebele girls mentioned the impact of being rejected by their families if they become pregnant out of wedlock and the disadvantages that young mothers face comparatively to young fathers.

“When girls fall pregnant it has a direct bearing on their education and future which is different from boys, they can easily proceed without too much disturbances.” (Ndebele girls, focus group discussion, Silobela)

“Girls are seen as not important, especially when they get pregnant whilst at school, they are seen as immoral people... girls feel neglected. One girl I know tried to commit suicide when her family rejected her.” When the respondent was asked what she would change in her traditional culture so that girls of her age do not feel excluded, she responded: “Elders should be taught to forgive and forget. If they do so they can be able to accept their daughters back.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

When looking in particular at the responses of the 32 married mothers, (31 of whom have left education), they cited the central impacts of early pregnancy as: birth complications, difficulties taking care of their babies, leaving school early, struggling to survive and regretting their decision as their partner leaves.

“One can have complications whilst giving birth. It is likely the girl will not continue with school.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“They will not finish school. Others may even abort their children, some may die in trying to abort.” (Adolescent mother, married, Mbizo)

“They are different because they are pregnant and the boyfriend abandoned them so [they] have no one to take care of them, and are not able to go back to school. Some are forced to be prostitutes because of the situation. Sometimes the father of the baby would have left hence have no one to take care of her and the baby. Therefore try to find ways for survival – that’s by prostitution.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

Only one girl spoke about the impact of pregnancy as positive from her own perspective; she admired mothers but also associated early pregnancy with a risk of stress and miscarriage:

“Some are happy, some are not. For example I was happy when I got pregnant. I always admired other mothers with their children. For some it troubles them and may miscarry because of stress.” (Adolescent mother, Zhombe)

5.6 Taking responsibility for early pregnancy and parenthood

When considering the perceived responsibility for cases of early pregnancy in Zimbabwe, two opposing ideologies concerning the role of girls and women emerged. Girls often placed the blame and responsibility for pregnancy on the girl’s shoulders. The opposing view called for shared responsibility between men and women for early pregnancy, as well as a call for families to protect girls from sexual violence. There was a distinct lack of reflection from boys’ discussions on their responsibilities when it came to sexual relations with girls: their responsibility to engage in safe sex and the responsibility for assuming their roles as fathers was absent from discussions.

“Talk to young girls about not getting into relationships.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“They boys who impregnate girls under the age of 18 should be arrested. This will reduce early pregnancy.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“Those who are impregnated, the fathers do not take responsibility. The women will struggle to make ends meet to take care of their children. They do not have money, they do not have love. They are just the unwanted women in the society, who will find it difficult to get men to marry them.” (Adolescent mother, married, Mbizo)

“Usually the father of the children deny responsibility for their children, thus these young mothers will be faced with a mammoth task to care for and provide for their children. These mothers usually drop out of school and they will not have money to go back to school. I am way much better. I am way better my husband takes care of me... They end up being segregated, lonely. Parents will prohibit their children from associating with these young mothers. The scenario is more complex when the fathers deny the responsibility of the babies. That’s when they will be given denigrator names like, ‘single mothers’. This erodes the pride and sense of self-esteem. They become marginalised in the society, even those married, they do not want to associate with these low esteemed ‘single mothers’.” (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

6.2 Poverty and child and early marriage

Poverty, a commonly recurring theme in the lives of the girls in Zimbabwe, was the principal reason mentioned for girls to be married early (under the age of 18). According to those interviewed, girls would get married in the hope of escaping poverty or their parents would marry them off to obtain the bride price (*lobola*). When asked whether getting married at a young age could help reduce a family's financial burden, the majority, two-thirds of the girls, disagreed; however, a third agreed that it could.

"Poverty – some girls don't have parents who can pay school fees for them. So they think getting married is the only thing left." (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

"They are running away from poverty – some struggle to eat so they think getting married will solve their problems." (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

"Early marriage is due to poverty, [being an] orphan and lack of job opportunity. They believe that marriage will solve their problems." (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

"There is drought in Zimbabwe which drives young girls to get married because of poverty." (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

"Girls tend to think that getting married will lessen the financial burden at home. At the same time they think marriage is better and the solution to their hardships." (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

"Economic hardships make us think it is better to own your own family than staying home and be starved because parents are failing to provide for their children. The rate of school drop-outs is quite increasing due to lack of finances for school fees, thus the girls end up getting married because they have nothing occupying them." (Adolescent mother, married, Redcliff)

Although many girls perceive that marrying will increase their chances of escaping poverty and of living a better life, married girls themselves talked of a different reality. Married girls comprised half of the whole sample discussing poverty as one of the biggest challenges (17 out of 38). They indicated that their lives remain marked by poverty.

"Most of the girls of my age are facing financial challenges. Those who are married are also languishing in extreme poverty. A lot of them are finding it hard to feed, to clothe themselves to pay rent." (Adolescent mother, Epworth)

"Those that are staying with their husbands are always fighting due to misunderstandings and economic hardships." (Adolescent mother, Epworth)

"They do not finish school. So they end up into early marriages and poverty." (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

"They will not finish their education therefore they will remain in poverty for the rest of their lives." (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

Girls stated that they rushed into child and early marriage to escape problems of poverty, abuse and neglect at home. Parents' inability to care for their children due to poverty was commonly referred to as a form of parental neglect and abuse, lying at one end of a sliding scale of abuse and violence reported by the girls interviewed in Zimbabwe.

“Some are staying with step-parents and [are] abused so they are not taken good care of. Some lack school fees and food so they think marriage is the only solution.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Lack of proper care from step-mothers. I personally believed that marriage was a good solution, though I somehow regret [it] because it’s now a problem on top of the other problem.” (Adolescent mother, married, Mbizo)

“They are abused by step-mothers, step-fathers, so these girls take marriage as a means to escape.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

Child and early marriage was discussed as both a cause and an outcome of school drop-out. The majority of girls (62 per cent) stated that getting married before the age of 18 meant they were less likely to complete their education. Girls also stated that if they had already left school (due to non-payment of fees), they would be married off as there was nothing else for them to do. Girls reported pressure from families and communities to marry so that they would not be “idle” or engage in sexual relations.

“Pressure from guardians that ‘you are just home not going to school, better get married than being an expense here’.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Most of them are not going to school and they feel that the only thing they can do is to be married.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Most girls are getting married early because they are not going to school.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

6.2 Indigenous culture and child and early marriage

Less commonly, girls mentioned culture and religion as contributing factors to child and early marriage.

Ndebele girls were asked additional questions in relation to child and early marriage and their indigenous culture. The majority (74 per cent) disagreed that child and early marriage was due to their culture, and only a third stated that those in child and early marriages were more valued in their communities (33 per cent).

Although many Ndebele girls did not perceive that their culture and traditions influenced the incidence of child and early marriage in their community, a smaller group of girls did acknowledge the value that their communities and families place on it. This has resulted in some girls perceiving child and early marriage to be an achievement, while others are opposed to the custom and wished it could change.

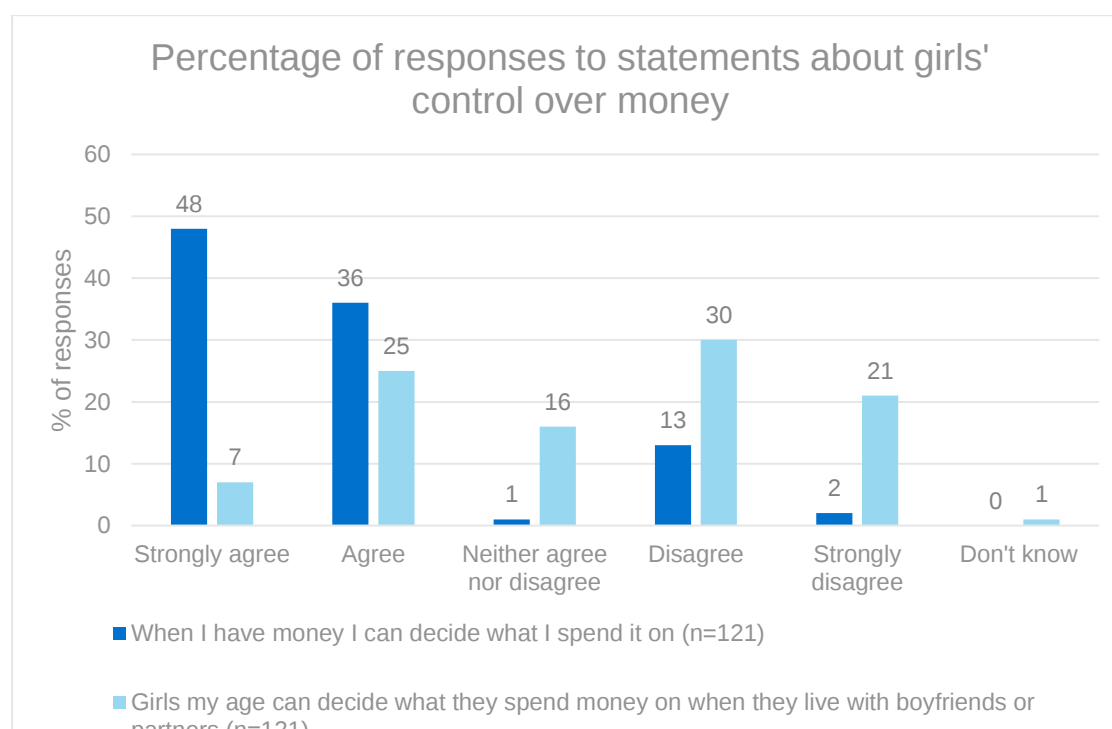
“It is a very good achievement in our culture to get married. So you would have made your parents proud if you get married early.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“They are forced to marry at a tender age ... because that’s what our cultures are like. The elders should change our custom of early marriage.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

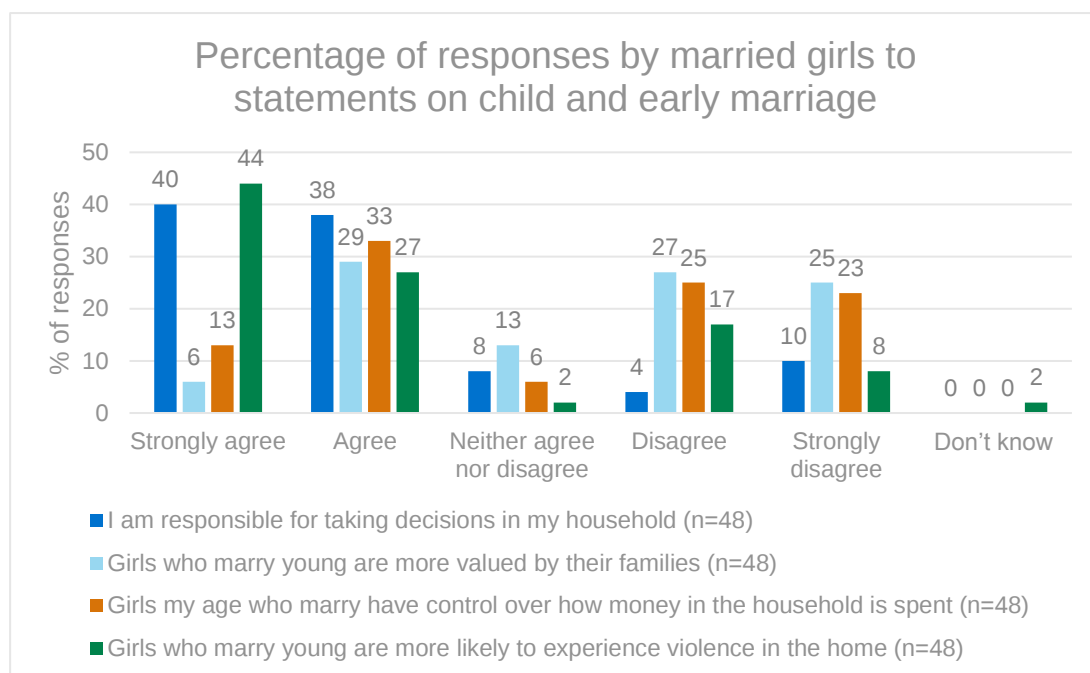
“Early marriage culture. They think a girl should get married as early as in her teenage [years]. It’s not fair because we will still be young to handle marriages.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

6.3 Financial decision-making and relationships

Among all the adolescent girls surveyed, there was a perception that marriage involves a lack of autonomy, as well as a loss of independence and freedom. The majority of those interviewed (84 per cent) agreed that they could spend their money as they wish. But this perception changed when asked if girls could do so when living with a boyfriend or partner; only 32 per cent still agreed with that statement.



6.4 Married girls' experiences of child and early marriage



Forty-eight girls answered further questions relating to child and early marriage: this is a greater number than the 44 girls who initially stated they were married. This discrepancy may be related to the fact that girls grew more comfortable as the survey developed and finally felt confident to reveal that they were in fact married. This discrepancy may also indicate a 'fluid' understanding of what constitutes marriage, or engagement to be married, among young girls and their partners.

Of the 48 girls, 78 per cent agreed that they were responsible for taking decisions in their households. When asked if girls who marry young are more valued by their families, just over a third (35 per cent) were in agreement. Just under half (46 per cent) stated that they had control over how money was spent in the household.

"Don't have anyone to help me. Including my husband, he has his own plans with the money he earns from mine." (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

"My husband... he is loving, caring and buys me everything that I want... my husband works but he cannot afford to pay school fees; the money is not enough." (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

The majority of these girls stated that girls who marry young were more likely to experience violence in the home: 44 per cent strongly agreed and 27 per cent agreed. This will be discussed in further detail in section 7 on violence.

6.5 How child and early marriages impact girls' lives



A word cloud of the most common words used when discussing the impact of child and early marriage. Education, poverty, violence and responsibility are important concepts.

Overall girls discussed the many negative impacts of child and early marriage: leaving school, experiencing violence, giving up life goals, having many marriages and contracting diseases such as HIV. Education and violence were key components of these discussions.

“Those who are married experience violence as their breakfast, lunch and supper. These girls are impregnated at a very young age. This is because they are struggling to survive, they did not go to school; they did not have the school fees to go to school. They are left with no option other than marriage. In the marriage they usually experience violence. I am tired of the way my husband gives me blows every day.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“You cannot be what you dreamt of. For example, if I get pregnant I won’t be able to be a nurse.” (Ndebele adolescent girl, Silobela)

“High chances of being abused by their husband because most of them are married to people who are twice their age.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Those who are married are in way worse situations than mine. Their husbands are promiscuous, they maybe affected with sexually transmitted diseases or even with the HIV/AIDS virus. They are young, naïve, they cannot argue with their husbands. They cannot say no if their husbands want sex with them. They are oppressed; they are not allowed to go back to school. Most men are uneducated; they feel threatened that if their wives go to school they will leave them for the educated men.” (Adolescent mother, Zhombe)

“As young as they are, they cannot take care of their husbands. They will make their marriages fail. They will move from one marriage to another. They will lose their dignity and integrity as a person, they will become public vaginas.” (Adolescent mother, married, Mbizo)

“They cannot take care of their babies. They cannot take care of the husband too. It is very difficult to take care of the husband. For example, how to impress him in bed, how to make him stay at home [be faithful].” (Adolescent girl, Zhombe)

“Marriage is not easy. I have many responsibilities at home. These responsibilities restrict me from going to school and work.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“Early marriage then suffer in the marriage and maybe left by the husband for another wife or girl.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

6.6 Boys’ perceptions of child and early marriage

Boys from Silobela and Epworth also reflected on situations that cause girls to get married at an early age. They also identified poverty as one of the driving factors behind child and early marriage. They discussed child and early marriage as a risk to girls, in terms of being exposed to violence in the home once married. They also associated marriage with girls dropping out of school.

“Girls are at risk of early marriages and challenge to staying in school.” (Boys’ focus group discussion, Epworth)

“She thinks of early marriages because of poverty.” (Boys’ focus group discussion, Epworth)

But others suggested that girls get married because they think it is the best option for their future. In Silobela, one focus group discussion mentioned that some girls think that “early marriage is better”. In Epworth, boys commented that some girls “[increase the magnitude of the probability of her getting married by engaging to more than one partner.](#)”

A promise of a better life for Privilege²⁷

At only 19, Privilege Buzabani is already a wife and a mother. Raised by her grandmother in a village in rural Zimbabwe, she was forced to quit school years ago because her family didn’t have enough money to pay school fees or buy school uniforms. Marriage, she felt, was the only option.

Being married since the age of 15 has made Privilege’s life hard. She used to have to ask her husband for money to buy whatever she needed, no matter how small. He often left her alone at home for long periods of time – sometimes three weeks out of every month – when he was out trying to make some money as a gold panner. When he was home conflicts arose. Privilege didn’t always know where to turn.

But that all began to change in January 2016, when she and ten other young mothers formed a group they call *Ruvimbo*, a Shona word that means “promise”.

When the group came together, every member put in a small amount of money – about \$0.50 each. With this money, the girls bought flour, salt, cooking oil and other materials so they could start a small business. They began baking and selling scones. The money they earned was used to support group members who are in need.

²⁷ Interview conducted by Jean Casey and America Ndlovu. Case study written by Zahra Sethna.

A few months after Ruvimbo was formed, their activities came to the attention of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Plan International, who bolstered their efforts with additional inputs. This included 54kg flour, 4 litres cooking oil, 2kg salt, 5kg sugar and yeast. Plan International also provided educational materials and helped the girls to learn about reproductive health issues – such as how to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections, for example.

With Plan International's help, the group members also built life skills. "We know how to sit down together with other group members who might have encountered some problems within their families," Privilege says. "We are now able to counsel them and give them support."

In the group, the girls feel comfortable sharing their experiences and talking with others in a similar situation, facing similar issues. They are happy that they now have somewhere they can talk quite freely, and get advice from each other. They have even begun extending the services of the group beyond the founding ten members. A drop-in session on Thursdays is available to any girls in the community who are interested in coming to learn and discuss.

Privilege says Ruvimbo has helped the girls to develop as young women. "Personally [the club] has helped me to become more independent." She says the feeling of independence is both financial and emotional. "I no longer rely on my husband to buy those small things – like soap, lotions. Now I can buy them on my own without even consulting him," she says, explaining that this financial freedom has made her feel more dignified.

"I have also gained a lot of confidence. Initially I was very shy, but now because we give each other topics for discussion and someone leads those discussions, I am much more confident. I can stand in front of people and start speaking out."

It still disturbs Privilege that she wasn't able to finish school. She still hopes to one day continue her education. She intends to make sure life is different for her own daughter.

"Three things I would make sure I do for my daughter: pay her school fees so she completes her education; sit down with her and educate her on the dangers of getting involved in relationships when you are still at school; and urge her to stay away from boys until she is married formally or ready to get married."

Boys should also be educated so they don't impregnate a girl at a young age, Privilege says. "They are not working themselves, but having impregnated a girl, they marry that girl and go back to their parents looking for them to support their wife and child, which is bad. They should also concentrate on schooling and avoid disturbing girls' education."

All girls have the right to make important decisions about their lives, including when and whom to marry and when to have children. That's one of the messages Ruvimbo members tell each other, and the community at large.

Promise is an appropriate word for these resilient young women because they are assuring each other that something will be done to make their lives better. It's also an important reminder of the promises made in the SDGs to leave no one behind, least of all girls.

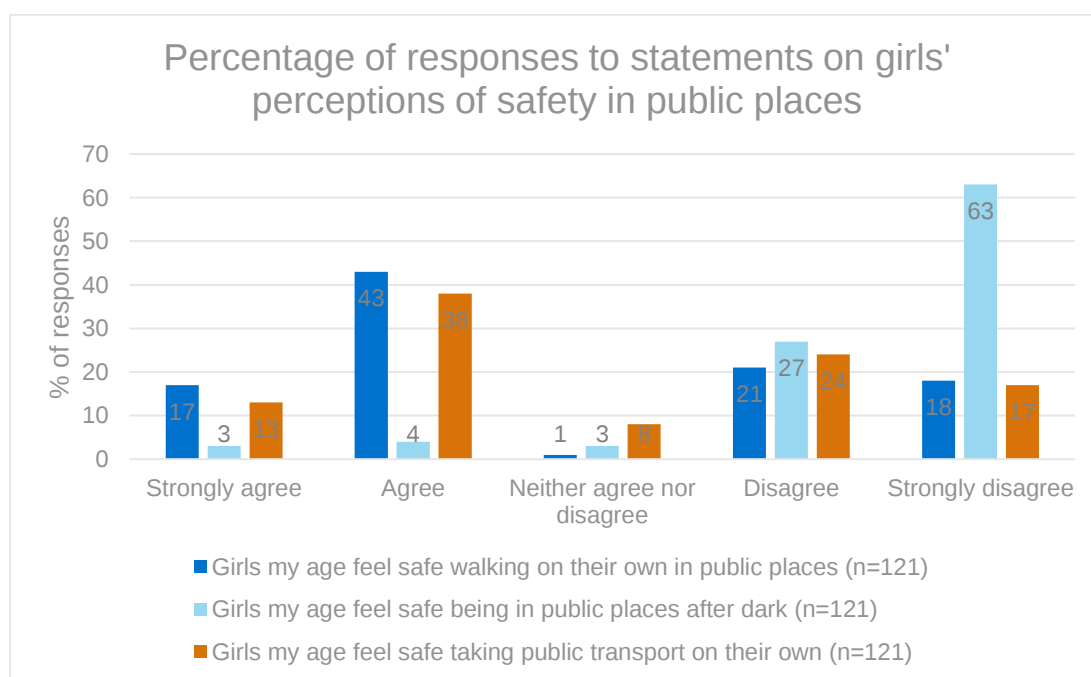
SECTION 7

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

This section considers safety and violence against women and girls in public and private spaces, the risks girls face comparatively to boys, perceptions and experiences of girls reporting violence and reflections on who is responsible for addressing violence against women and girls. These are important components of SDGs 5 and 11 and integral for advancing the rights of girls and women to live a life free from violence.

Violence and safety were recurring themes throughout the interviews with the girls, and violence was cited as one of the biggest challenges that girls face. Types of violence cited in the interviews included domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, physical abuse, harassment and verbal abuse.

7.1 Safety in public spaces



When asked if they felt safe walking on their own in public places, the majority of girls agreed (60 per cent), however 39 per cent strongly disagreed. Many girls expressed fear for their own safety while walking to school, as evidenced in the section on education. This was of particular concern for those girls walking long distances to school.

The vast majority of girls (90 per cent) stated that they don't feel safe in public places after dark. The girls were divided on whether they felt safe taking public transport: 51 per cent agreed that

they felt safe, whereas 41 per cent disagreed. The overwhelming majority of girls agreed (67 per cent) that they had to ask permission to use public transport or go to public spaces.

7.2 Violence and the fear of violence in relationships, households and communities

Violence at home from parents and step-parents was the most commonly reported form of violence. There was a clear split in opinions on whether it was acceptable for fathers and mothers to hit their daughters:

- when asked if it was acceptable for *fathers* to hit their daughters, 32 per cent agreed;
- when asked if it was acceptable for *mothers* to hit their daughters, 84 per cent agreed.

This suggests that girls perceive acts of violence, such as hitting, to be largely acceptable if carried out by the mother, but unacceptable if carried out by the father. The following quotes indicate the level of violence that some girls are experiencing at the hands of their mothers and step-mothers.

“I have my friend who was abused by her step-mother. She is 15. She decided to go and get married at this very tender age; she could not bear the psychological, physical abuse from her step-mother. Her father was never on her side. Poverty and abuse are two of the major problems of our contemporary society.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Some girls are abused by their step-parents, but I’m abused by my own mother. If I tell my mother that I need food or clothes, she tells me to go sell my body.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

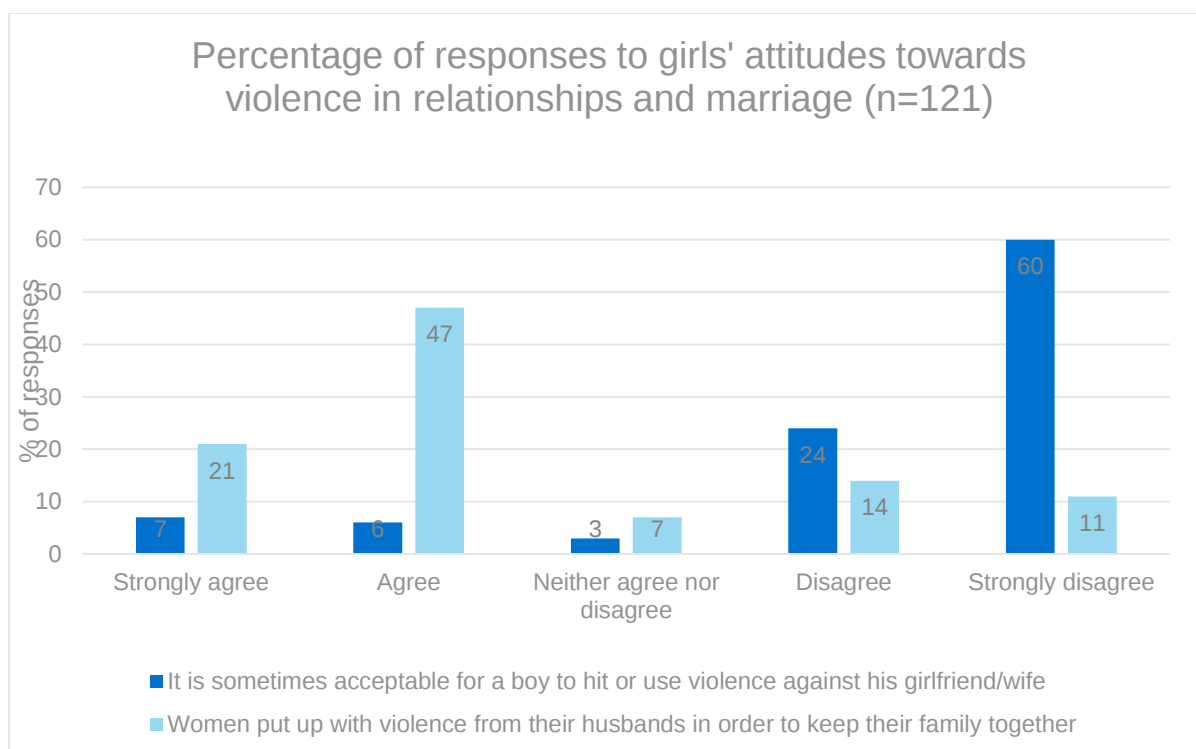
“[A] certain girl was abused by her step-mother and she was physically abused. She could come to school with scars all over her body. She was not the only one.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

A small number of girls talked about their experiences of being orphaned and the abuse that they suffer from extended family members as the biggest challenge they face. Other girls, not orphans themselves, reflected on the difficulties that orphaned girls their age face. Although this was mentioned only by a small number of girls, it nonetheless illustrates worrying instances of abuse and lack of care.

“The biggest challenge I face is lack of proper care from step-parents. Some of them are orphans like myself and we are not able to say what she wants to a parent who is not hers. We are abused physically and emotionally.” (Adolescent girl, married, Mbizo)

“This generation is orphaned. The guardians will abuse the children, for example, my aunt did not give me food for a complete week. This is when my mother was in hospital when I was 10 years old. I can imagine the trauma that I will face if I were to lose my mother. Moreover, I am oppressed by my mother-in-law. She shouts at me using vulgar words and abusive words. I think this is the problem of this generation – it has limited options to survive. Many orphans cannot sustain themselves. They will easily run into the arms of a man to provide for her. I’m not an orphan but I see other orphans.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

As raised in Section 3.1, Ndebele girls mentioned female genital cutting and circumcision as a particular form of violence that should be eradicated from their communities.



Violence from partners and violence encountered in the street were the next most commonly reported forms. Violent, physical and verbal abuse was frequently cited as a form of violence that girls are exposed to in relationships with boyfriends and husbands. Yet 84 per cent of girls surveyed believe that it is not acceptable for a boy to hit or use violence against his girlfriend or wife. It is interesting to note however, that this perception changed when asked to reflect on violence within a marriage; the majority of girls (68 per cent) stated that women put up with violence from their husbands in order to keep the family together.

“My friends and I used to be beaten by our boyfriends after misbehaving... girls should learn to be faithful so they are not physically abused by their boyfriends.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“They are violently treated by their men/boyfriends because they are too young, desperate, they have nowhere to go or even because they are afraid to report.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“If a girl is married young and not able to wake up early [to do chores], she is called names and said she is disgracing her family... She will be experiencing violence daily from her husband.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Early marriage is causing violence since most of [the girls] are not mature enough. They tend to clash interests with their husband. At the end of the day they end up fighting.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

“Prioritising boys over girls is also a form of violence, for example, when girls marry young they [boys] control them and ban them from working.” (Girls’ focus group discussion, Epworth)

“Girls being verbally abused by other community members especially boys. This happens when passing by public places. Boys can shout what they want.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“At least if I can get someone to stay with [me], maybe I will be protected and safeguarded from boys... girls are being raped because they are not protected.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“The road which we use on our way to school is so bushy and some girls who are unfortunate are being raped.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“Physical violence by their husbands. They are being beaten by their husbands.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

“Sexually abused... [because of the] type of dressing they are wearing, for example, miniskirts.” (Adolescent mother, Redcliff)

Girls also noted that they are verbally abused by boys who are not their boyfriends or ex-boyfriends. This was confirmed by discussions in the boys’ focus group in Silobela.

“Boys verbally abuse us especially when you turn down his proposal.” (Girls’ focus group discussion, Redcliff)

“Girls also face violence on the way from school at the hands of boys who they turn down if proposed.” (Boys’ focus group discussion, Silobela)

7.3 Adolescent girls’ perception of the risks they face compared to boys

In the focus group sessions girls were asked to reflect on why they feel that girls experience more violence comparatively to boys and what types of violence girls are more exposed to. Girls responded by outlining that sexual abuse, abuse from parents, forced marriages and physical abuse from ex-boyfriends were common forms of violence that girls face. They felt that girls are more exposed to violence because boys in general are stronger and they have the strength to resist, but they can also use this strength to force girls to have sex with them as the following excerpts highlight:

“Biological difference mainly lead to a lot of abuse for girls compared to boys.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Zhombe)

“Boys are powerful and can force girls to indulge in sex.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Zhombe)

“It’s because of our biological make-up.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Epworth)

“We are weak biologically, boys can stand and fight back but we can’t.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Redcliff)

“Boys, just like girls, do encounter abusive relationships at home although boys are better as they can fight back. They can stand their ground and refuse abusive acts unlike girls who are usually soft and dependent.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Redcliff)

Ndebele girls mentioned that religious beliefs also played a part in reasons why girls are exposed to more violence than boys although this was not expanded on further, but should be explored in future conversations about the relationship between religion and violence in their

culture. Girls from Epworth also mentioned cultural beliefs and traditions as a contributing factor:

“Our cultural beliefs and traditions also perpetuate violence against girls.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Epworth)

Girls from all three focus groups described the impact they felt violence has on girls:

“We are emotionally hurt, this results in alcohol abuse and prostitution.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Zhombe)

“We have no coping mechanisms except being a maid.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Silobela)

“Some of them are losing weight because of the violence and abuse they face.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Epworth)

“It cuts short girls’ dreams, takes away their confidence” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Epworth)

7.4 Adolescent boys’ perceptions of the risk girls face comparatively to boys

In group discussions, adolescent boys made clear that they were aware of the specific dangers that adolescent girls face on account of being female and young. They identified sexual, physical and emotional violence and rape as some of the biggest risks girls face, identifying marriage as a factor that increases the risk of violence that girls face.

Excerpts from boys in focus group discussion, Silobela:

“Girls are more vulnerable to sexual and emotional violence than boys. Cases of rape are more rampant than sodomy.”

“Girls also face violence on the way from school at the hands of boys who they turn down if proposed. They also fall victim to wives of married husbands whom they fall in love with.”

“Some of the girls who get married early have faced domestic violence at home at the hands of their husbands.”

Excerpts from boys in focus group discussion, Epworth:

“Girls are more vulnerable to sexual and emotional violence than boys.”

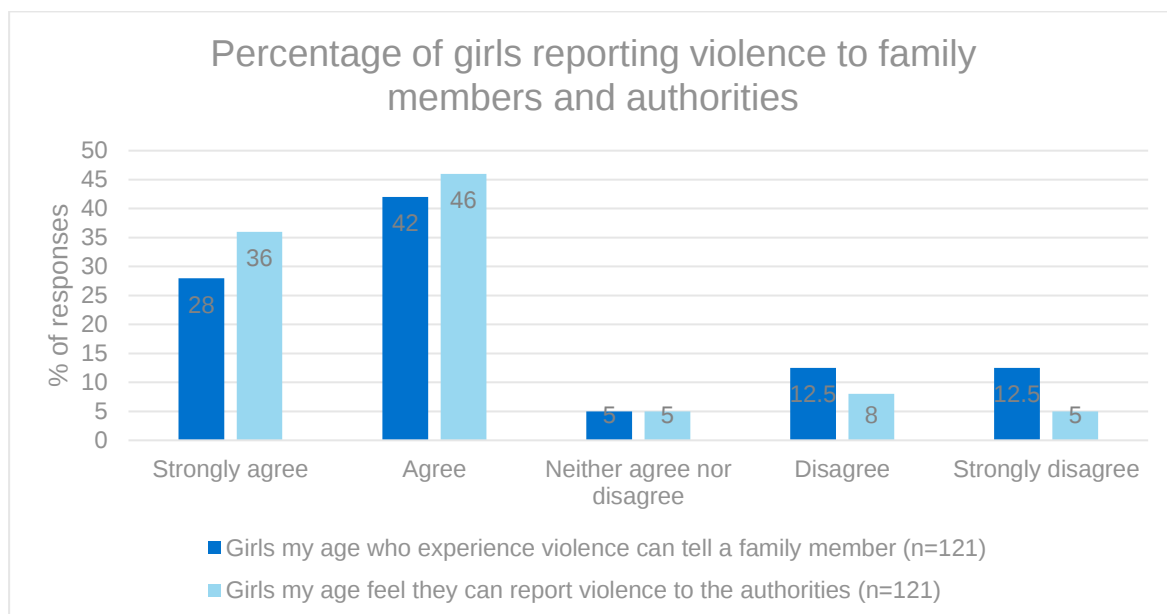
“Some of the girls who get married early have faced domestic violence in the home.”

Boys were also asked: “If they had the power to change the situation of girls what would they do?”. Interestingly while suggestions for equal opportunities and eradicating child and early marriage were discussed, there was no mention of reducing the risks that girls face in relation to violence. Even though boys acknowledge that girls are exposed to more violence than boys, and very harmful situations of violence, they did not articulate that something should be done to address this situation. Their lack of reflection on the importance of reducing and eradicating violence against women and girls indicated that for boys too, violence towards girls and women in the communities is somewhat normalised.

7.5 Girls’ perceptions on reporting violence

When asked about reporting violence, only a minority of girls (10 per cent) stated that if a girl were raped, it would be better for her not to tell anyone, with 84 per cent of girls disagreeing

with this statement. The majority (88 per cent) of girls stated that they knew where to go in their communities to report violence.



While the majority of girls (70 per cent) said that they felt confident telling a family member if they experience violence, one in four girls (25 per cent) disagreed with this statement. Girls on the whole felt more confident about reporting violence to the authorities: 82 per cent agreeing and 13 per cent disagreeing. However, girls stated during discussions in Epworth that while rape is commonplace, usually girls do not report violence because perpetrators are often relatives or the girls' guardians. Reporting perpetrators who are family members can be associated with the fear of losing their financial support to attend school or their chance to remain within the household.

“[Reports of] rape cases, but they are not common because the girls do not report because of the threats or being ... raped by the same guardians they stay with. So they will be afraid of the outcomes after reporting.” The respondent was further asked if she thinks there is anything that can be done to overcome this challenge and replied: “Yes, taking rapists or abusing parents to jail so that the girls feel safe” (adolescent girl, Epworth).

SECTION 8

GIRLS' OWN PERCEPTIONS ON HOW TO BRING ABOUT POSITIVE CHANGE

Girls' perceptions regarding how to overcome the various challenges they face revealed that girls principally felt that the responsibility lay on them to avoid violence, sexual abuse and child and early marriage. They stated that they should be submissive, dress decently, occupy themselves, and learn the importance of education. Parents should advise and monitor girls' behaviour in order to ensure that girls avoided experiencing violence and getting pregnant.

"Girls should learn to be faithful so that they are not physically abused by their boyfriends." (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

"Girls my age should dress well and decent in a way that does not attract men." (Adolescent girl, Zhombe)

"Girls of my age who get married must listen to their mother-in-laws and husbands, they should be submissive." (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

"Parents should also teach young girls not to engage in pre-marital sex." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

"The girl child must find something to occupy them." (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

"Parents should escort their children to school to ensure that they are as safe as possible." (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

"Women should not be allowed in bars." (Girls' focus group discussion, Redcliff)

"School buses to ferry children to and from schools." (Girls' focus group discussion, Redcliff)

Other girls suggested that parents and the community should be sensitised and educated about the importance of girls' and children's rights.

"Educate parents about the importance of children." (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

"Parents should be taught ways to treat their children." (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

"The authorities should strengthen measures to stop child abuse. Anyone seen abusing a girl child should be sent to jail." (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

"Parents should be educated that even if we are deaf and dumb we have the same rights to education as the others." (Adolescent girl, pregnant, Redcliff)

"The elders should change our culture of early marriages." (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“Meetings should be conducted with young girls and address issues to do with rape and that they should report.” (Adolescent mother, married, Zhombe)

A third option suggested by girls was that the government and wider economic environment be changed to enable girls to study and work.

“Providing scholarships for girls.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“Talk to the government that they should grant free education.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“There should be many day care centres which enrol children as young as six months so that the mothers can go back to school.” (Adolescent mother, married, Mbizo)

“I think organisations should help us to start small projects like horticulture so that we can get money to take care of our needs.” (Adolescent girl, Redcliff)

“The economy should change, get more jobs for people hence reduce their poverty and get something to eat. Also girls will no longer have to rush into marriages.” (Adolescent girl, married, Zhombe)

“Government of Zimbabwe should take charge and come up with laws that are gender-aware.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Epworth)

“Politicians and policy makers should promote girls’ rights, and NGOs should raise awareness on girls’ issues, churches should promote girls’ rights too, schools should promote girls’ clubs where girls can interact and support each other.” (Girls’ focus group discussions, Epworth)

Only one girl suggested that boys and fathers themselves should be taught to value girls equally and be educated about girls’ rights, while others suggested prison time for men who were violent or who impregnated young girls.

“Boys should be educated not to look down on girls. They should know that girls have the right to choose what they want.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

“If my father is to be educated that we are the same and told to treat us the same, things will get better.” (Adolescent girl, Mbizo)

“Every man who beats his wife must go to jail. Girls must be sponsored to go to school.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, married, Silobela)

“Men who impregnate young girls must be jailed.” (Ndebele adolescent mother, Silobela)

“I think the police should ban sex work especially to young girls. Organisations should also support young girls with finance, in order for them to start projects.” (Adolescent girl, Epworth)

This diversity in approaches to improving the situation indicates two polarised perceptions of the rights and roles of women and girls: one, encourages equality and support for girls. The other places responsibility for violence, abuse and pregnancy on girls’ shoulders, with a lack of reflection on challenging boys’ and men’s violent attitudes, behaviours and actions. This is discussed further in the following sections.

The poem below written by adolescent Ndebele girls clearly outlines the multi-pronged approach to change that is required to improve the situation of girls’ lives: free state education

with separate schools for girls, an improvement to the economic conditions in which they live and laws that protect girls from violence.

“We wish we could have a girl’s only school in our area,

We wish girls could go back to school

Girls should find other means of survival

Wish girls could resist peer pressure

Laws to protect girls should be strengthened”

(Poem written by Ndebele adolescent girls in a focus group discussion, Silobela)

SECTION 9

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The presentation of the findings across the themes of enabling environments, household chores, education, early pregnancy, child and early marriage and violence in the public and private spheres provide an insight into the lived realities of a diverse set of girls in Zimbabwe. Through examining these themes, exploring both the experiences and perceptions of girls, a clear sense emerges of the specific challenges that these girls face, how these challenges impact on their progress in life, their relationships, life opportunities and their wellbeing. This section presents the key discussion points covered in each previous section of the report.

9.1 Individual aspirations and opportunities to advance in life

Less than half of all girls surveyed agreed that they had sufficient opportunities available to them in order to advance in life. Married girls and young mothers felt that they had even fewer opportunities than those who are not married or mothers. When considering how gender impacts the availability and accessibility of opportunities, girls felt that boys had an unequal advantage: 70 per cent of girls stated that they do not have the same opportunities as boys to get on in life.

The results clearly indicate that opportunities for girls to advance in life are restricted, even more so when compared to opportunities available to boys. Girls have to negotiate a cultural and social environment that prioritises boys' needs and interests over girls'. Boys themselves agree this is the case, explaining that families and communities value boys more than girls. Girls strongly believed that more opportunities should be available to them as the challenges they have to overcome are significant.

The type of opportunities that girls are lacking becomes evident when asking about their life goals and future aspirations. Life goals focused on getting back into school to continue and finish their education. Girls voiced their intention to find a way to generate income so that they could return to school. Returning to school was linked with the idea that the more educated girls are, the better chances they have of finding a well-paid job and increasing their life opportunities.

One of the biggest challenges that girls face is the lack of access to economic resources due to family poverty and gender bias within families that prioritises boys' education (in terms of paying school fees, buying books, uniforms) over girls when money is scarce. The responsibility of finding the money to return to school fell on girls themselves for the large part. Securing paid work was a clear priority for the majority of girls out of school. All girls shared the goals of raising income to go back to school, and so they could look after their own and their family's basic needs.

Girls perceive that they have limited agency and control over their own destiny. Individual girls did not perceive these challenges to be unique to their situations but more reflective of most girls of their age in their communities.

9.2 The importance of the family and relationships as an enabling environment

Girls' lack of autonomy in taking decisions over their own future and wellbeing was a significant challenge for many. A third of girls reported that they could not take their own decisions regarding their future yet the majority of girls felt that they *should* be able to take their own decisions regarding their wellbeing and futures.

Girls described relationships within the family, and with boyfriends or husbands as either supportive or controlling and restrictive. Girls who felt that they had unsupportive relationships identified this as a challenge when attempting to achieve their life goals. Girls report that parents or husbands do not value girls' education, preferring not to invest in girls' education and instead prioritising boys' education. Married girls mentioned husbands' controlling or jealous behaviour, which restricted girls from attending school.

However, the importance of supportive relationships was widely articulated by the girls surveyed; having someone to confide in, receiving guidance and advice was central to a girl's sense of wellbeing. For the large majority of girls, this support came from mothers, aunts and female relatives. Advice on marriages and how to negotiate abusive husbands or boyfriends; financial support, provision of food or childcare; and also receiving love, attention and care were mentioned as integral components of supportive relationships.

Respondents reflected that positive and supportive relationships are crucial to increasing their sense of wellbeing and help them negotiate the challenges they face in life. Furthermore they felt that families and husbands should be more supportive of girls having equal opportunities to succeed in life as boys and particularly their right to education.

9.3 The importance of the community as an enabling environment

Adolescent girls did not feel that their community considered or acted on their concerns or interests. Girls felt that this should change and that the community should support their interests and rights. Girls reported that they felt pressured by the community and their families to marry at an early age, particularly when girls have dropped out of school. This was connected with girls' sense that the community does not always support girls' education; when girls drop out of school there is the expectation from the community that they should marry and not be idle. Also connected with this was the expectation and pressure that they felt from the community to marry young. Overall girls felt that the community on the whole values boys over girls. Boys also confirmed this; in focus group discussions they highlighted that the community places a lower value on girls' education comparatively to theirs and that its expectation for girls' futures is largely connected to their role as wives, mothers and housewives.

Many girls presented the community as an environment where their behaviour, movements and the way they dress are all monitored, while boys' behaviour goes unchecked and they are not subject to the same level of criticism. Overall the respondents felt that their relationship with their community could be much improved.

9.4 Women community leaders as role models

Although most adolescent girls reported a presence of female community leaders, only half of girls perceived that female leaders are as capable as male leaders, connecting this to the idea that men are the natural leaders and while women can assume these positions, they are not as capable as men. When girls were asked who could help to improve the situation of girls in their communities, female community leaders were not mentioned. There is a lack of awareness and sensitisation among girls in relation to the value of female community leaders as supporting

allies advocating for girls' issues and for promoting the rights of girls in the community. Although there is the perception that things are slowly changing and women are becoming more accepted as leaders, their influence and impact, from the girls' perspective, seems still limited and restricted on account of the ingrained gender stereotypes that value males as the natural leaders of communities.

9.5 Gender norms

Adolescent girls reported spending a considerable amount of time washing clothes, cleaning, cooking and looking after siblings. Two-thirds of girls reported that the burden of chores and care falls disproportionately on them. The large majority of girls also reported that boys have more free leisure and study time comparatively to girls. Married girls and mothers spent more time on chores comparatively to unmarried girls or those who are not mothers.

Among the sample, 25 girls reported caring for siblings or family members 24 hours a day. The youngest was aged 15, indicating the early age at which girls assume full-time caring responsibilities. Three of the 24-hour carers reported that they have no one to talk to, highlighting the increased risk of isolation that girls who are full-time carers face.

While girls acknowledge that they spend more time on chores and care, and have less free time compared to boys, two-thirds of girls surveyed felt it was unnecessary to distribute chores more equally in the household between boys and girls. The resistance to changing the responsibilities in the household was connected with the notion that it is a girl's duty to perform chores and care – good training for their futures as wives and it prevents “idleness”. The girls expressed that family and community expect them to carry out these roles, which allows them to demonstrate their worth in families. Furthermore, girls' perceptions of gender norms revealed a strong resistance to boys or men carrying out household chores, suggesting that this is a cultural taboo and an unacceptable idea for their families and communities.

Focus group discussions with boys revealed that girls spend more time on chores and tasks compared to boys. Furthermore, the amount of time girls spend on chores before and after school leaves them with insufficient time and energy, directly connecting the household responsibilities with an associated risk of girls falling behind in their school work and dropping out of school. There was a divergence of attitudes among boys over how to address this: some felt that the reason girls carry out more chores compared to boys is directly related to the low value assigned to them by communities and families, and they felt that boys should help girls more around the house in an attempt to equalise the burden of chores. Other boys felt that they should help with washing plates when the girls are not around to do so. However, boys admitted that there is a strong cultural taboo associated with boys or men carrying out household tasks that are traditionally done by women, aligning with girls' perception of cultural taboos. Interestingly Shona boys felt that it is more culturally acceptable for Ndebele boys to carry out household chores than boys from the Shona community.

The expectation of family and community with regard to assigned gender roles and responsibilities in the household appears to be ingrained in the majority of girls and boys. There is a strong sense of stigma conveyed in relation to men carrying out chores, reinforced by the communities' and families' ideals of masculinities.

One-third of the girls surveyed argued for household chores to be shared more equally; they felt this was desirable in theory, but in practice a difficult change to make and sustain. However some girls did provide insights into creating change – such as husband and wife discussion over the distribution of chores, sharing workloads, and educating boys at a young age, encouraging them to carry out chores.

9.6 Education and pathways to empowerment

Girls strongly perceive education as a pathway to a better life and future: linked with improving their employment chances, being able to provide for their family and improving their living standards overall. However, only a third of girls reported that they were satisfied with their education. This dissatisfaction was connected with the fact that girls are facing extreme challenges when attempting to complete their education. The extent of these challenges is evidenced by the survey results; in the sample of 121 girls only 29 girls reported that they are currently attending school. The principal driver of girls dropping out of school was economic: 69 per cent of the out-of-school girls reported non-payment of fees as the main cause for their failure to continue in education. Young mothers in addition cited the lack of childcare as a barrier they face in trying to continue their education. Ndebele girls also faced challenges with language in secondary school, struggling with speaking and comprehending the Shona language used.

Adolescent girls acknowledged the value of being taught subjects such as reading, writing and reasoning, again linking this with increasing their chances of gaining employment. Fewer girls talked about education in relation to the value of learning and increasing their knowledge. The value of education was also connected with a space for keeping girls safe, reducing their exposure to sexual abuse and violence. However, many girls reported the journey to school as increasing the risk of being exposed to rape, verbal and sexual abuse.

Both Shona and Ndebele girls reported that their community values education, however, they also acknowledged that community and families value boys' education over girls'. This gender bias presents a firm challenge to girls when money is scarce within families and boys' schooling is prioritised over girls'.

Gender stereotypes influence girls' and boys' perceptions of which subjects are suitable for boys and girls. Many girls did not see the value of the science-based subjects, perceiving them as boys' subjects. The majority of girls surveyed confirmed that they do not have as much opportunity to use the internet to access information as boys do. These gender norms were reflected in the low number of girls who mentioned aspiring to scientific or medical careers, with most focusing on aspirations of starting up a small income-generating project. Boys in focus group discussions also affirmed that they are more drawn to studying the "traditionally hard subjects" – mathematics and sciences – compared to girls.

9.7 Early pregnancy

Girls cited poverty, peer pressure, rape and sexual abuse, lack of knowledge, access to contraception and their powerlessness in relationships (with boys refusing to wear condoms) as the central drivers of early pregnancy among adolescent girls. Almost one in two girls reported that they did not have enough practical information to avoid getting pregnant.

Girls reported that they were at higher risk of early pregnancy once they had dropped out of school. Once girls are no longer in education they are faced with the pressure and expectations from their families and communities to marry, increasing the likelihood of pregnancy. Or they become pregnant out of wedlock and are faced with being disowned by their own families.

Girls felt that early pregnancy makes life harder for girls, citing birth complications, isolation, increased exposure to violence by the father, and the struggle to provide for their child where the father abandons the mother. Being a young mother heightened the challenges girls face, and young mothers talked of the feelings of regret, isolation and being stigmatised by their family and community on account of being unmarried mothers.

Poverty and motherhood combined drove girls to prostitution, which revealed mixed attitudes among girls. Some felt that poverty drives girls into prostitution in order to satisfy their and their children's basic needs. Others felt that girls engaged in prostitution because they "lust after money". Boys identified prostitution as one of the activities that girls engage in in their communities; while some boys felt this was because girls liked to indulge in sexual relations or earn money, others understood that if a girl did work in prostitution, it was a means to get income to provide for her children.

While the majority of girls perceive that they can take decisions about their own sexual and reproductive health, only 19 per cent of girls reported that if they asked their boyfriend or husband to use contraception they would. Almost half of girls surveyed said that they did not have access to contraception and the majority of girls said they had to ask permission if they wanted to visit a health centre.

This indicates the immediate importance of awareness-raising with girls and boys on consent, access to contraceptives, use of condoms and how to negotiate the use of a condom.

9.8 Child and early marriage

Results of the research highlight the common practice and strong traditions of child and early marriage in Zimbabwe. Again girls identify poverty as a factor that results in girls marrying at a young age. Although many girls perceive that marrying will increase their chances of escaping poverty and living a better life, the reality indicates that girls who marry young do not necessarily escape poverty or move on to a better life. Married girls frequently discussed poverty as one of the biggest challenges they face; additionally they cited violence and abuse as central challenges that married girls their age face.

Overall girls discussed the many negative impacts of child and early marriage: leaving school, experiencing violence and sexual abuse, having no money to provide for their children, giving up their dreams and contracting diseases such as HIV. Adolescent girls shared the perception that child and early marriage restricts a girl's life opportunities, increases her risk of school drop-out, increases her risk of experiencing violence in the home and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The perception of all respondents, including those who were married, is that things get harder for adolescent girls once they are married. Boys in discussion groups also agreed that girls marrying at a young age increased their vulnerabilities: particularly dropping out of school and increased exposure to violence.

Ndebele girls disagreed that their culture and traditions influenced child and early marriage. However, in their responses, Ndebele girls reported that their community and culture values marriage and this led some girls to perceive child and early marriage as an achievement.

Girls living in conditions of poverty, unable to pay the school fees, framed child and early marriage as the only viable opportunity available to them for their future. Girls were not convinced that they had any other choice or alternative and this was enforced by the attitudes and expectations of their families and communities: girls no longer in school should marry. Girls are therefore presented as redundant, lacking a suitable function in life and therefore encouraged or forced to marry so that they are no longer idle.

9.9 Experiences and perceptions of violence

Although the slight majority of girls feel safe in public spaces and using public transport, one in four girls still feel unsafe in public and when using transport. This is a significant proportion of girls who feel unsafe moving around in public spaces. This in turn restricts girls' movements and

participation in their communities and towns. Eight out of 10 girls report feeling unsafe in public places after dark; this indicates the extent to which girls feel threatened and at risk of experiencing violence.

Certain forms of intra-familial violence, such as hitting, is perceived to be acceptable if perpetrated by the mother but not if by the father. Attention needs to be paid to working with communities and families on breaking this assumption and clarifying that no physical abuse is acceptable in families, regardless of who is perpetrating it.

Girls described sexual abuse, abuse from parents, forced marriages, physical and verbal abuse from husband, boyfriends and ex-boyfriends as common forms of violence faced. They felt that girls are more exposed to violence as biologically boys are stronger and girls are weaker. Boys have the strength to resist but they can also use this strength to force girls to have sex with them. Girls felt that the impact of violence was severe, ranging from girls losing weight to turning to alcohol, prostitution and feeling suicidal. Girls overall felt that they lack mechanisms and support to cope with the impact of violence on their lives.

While the majority of girls said that they felt confident about telling a family member if they experienced violence, girls on the whole felt more confident in reporting violence to the authorities. However, there is a clear disconnect between girls' perceptions of reporting rape and sexual abuse, and the actual practice of reporting rape. Girls explained that although rape is commonplace, usually girls do not report violence because perpetrators are often relatives or the girls' guardians.

There was a dichotomy in the way that girls responded to the question on how these challenges could be overcome. Girls principally lay responsibility for avoiding violence, sexual abuse and child and early marriage on themselves: overcoming these challenges involved girls changing their own behaviour. They stated that they should be submissive, dress decently, occupy themselves and learn the importance of education.

Other girls suggested that parents and the community should be sensitised and educated about the importance of girls' and children's rights. Only one girl suggested that boys and fathers themselves should be taught to value girls equally and be educated about girls' rights; others suggested prison time for men who were violent or who impregnated young girls.

This diversity in approaches to improving the situation indicates two polarised perceptions of the rights and roles of women and girls: one encourages equality and support for girls. The other places responsibility for violence, abuse and pregnancy on girls' shoulders, with a lack of reflection on challenging boys' and men's violent attitudes, behaviours and actions.

9.10 The value of exploring intersectionality and intersecting vulnerabilities

Although adolescent girls share similar characteristics of gender and age, they are in fact a diverse group with differing experiences, needs and interests based on their identity and life experiences. Poverty, class, geographical location, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation are just some of the realities that shape each girl. These determine a girl's position in her community and society. Exploring the specific experiences of girls with similar identities and intersecting vulnerabilities in this research helped produce understanding of the specific challenges and barriers that these groups face when attempting to achieve their life goals and improve their condition and position in society.

Focusing expressly on the experiences of young wives and mothers as a group provided valuable insights into the home environments in which they grew up, how this affected their sense of self and in turn, impacted their life choices and opportunities. Young married girls and

mothers stressed the depth of challenges they face once they become married and enter motherhood. Once girls get married or become pregnant their lives get even harder: they are unlikely to be able to return to school, complete their education and this impacts on their opportunities for securing work. They are also more likely to face violence in the home once married and more likely to put up with violence in order to keep the family together. These perceptions and experiences provide valuable insights into how marriage and motherhood restricts girls' access to the knowledge, skills and the social relations they need to be empowered.

Exploring the perceptions and experiences of Ndebele adolescent girls offered valuable insights into the specific discrimination they face because of their identity. They faced additional challenges such as speaking and understanding the language of the Shona people. This impacted their participation in school and in community gatherings. They reported feelings of isolation and discrimination, feeling that Shona communities looked down upon them and valued them less. This led to feeling isolated and contributed to a lack of self-confidence. Many Ndebele girls stressed the importance of being accepted by communities. They also felt that Ndebele community leaders should do more to protect girls from child and early marriage, female genital cutting and circumcision, and violence, and should value girls and their right to education more.

As a focus group discussion with Ndebele boys from Silobela revealed, boys are aware that social norms and values cause them to feel superior to girls, and that the gendered division of labour is a reflection of this. Boys recognise that they are valued differently and that they have higher status and more opportunities than girls, who are viewed as men's assets. This difference in status allows violence against women and girls to be acceptable – and tackling violence will therefore require a multi-layered approach, working with families and communities in changing attitudes towards girls and women. Cultural and social norms also need to be tackled if girls are to realise their rights.

9.11 What adolescent boys think of violence against women and girls

Boys identified sexual abuse, rape, verbal abuse and violence in the home as the types of violence that girls are more at risk of comparatively to boys. Boys also outlined that girls who marry are more susceptible to violence than those who are not married.

When asked to consider what could be done to improve the situation of girls in Zimbabwe, boys did not identify addressing violence against women and girls as an important strategy or addressing the behaviour or perpetrators of violence and abuse. This highlights the degree to which violence towards women and girls is normalised in communities. There is an urgent need to undertake a critical analysis on these issues and furthermore on how to address and tackle the violent attitudes and behaviour of men and boys.

While there has been some progress in attitudes and perceptions towards girls' rights, there is still a long way to go. Tackling the violent and abusive attitudes and behaviours of boys and men in the community needs to be an integral part of the strategy to advance girls' rights in Zimbabwe.

SECTION 10

CONCLUSION

10.1 Opportunities for girls to succeed in the context of poverty

Girls did not feel that they had adequate opportunities to succeed in life and achieve their life goals. They felt that more should be done to improve their access to opportunities. Girls' most pressing concerns were economic. Widespread poverty not only had an impact on their health and wellbeing, it also increased their risk of dropping out of school, which in turn exposed them to child and early marriage and early pregnancy. Their ability to exercise their rights was often discussed as inter-related or dependent on the economic wellbeing of their household. This had an impact on girls' ability to successfully complete their education.

10.2 Education and the struggle to stay in school

Girls value learning and want to finish their education but expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to access and stay in school. The rate of girls dropping out of school, either temporarily or permanently, is alarmingly high among the sample of girls surveyed. The overwhelming majority said that the reason behind this was economic, while others cited early pregnancy, child and early marriage and menstruation as barriers to continuing education. The low value placed on educating girls meant that when resources were scarce, parents opted to educate sons instead of daughters.

Girls linked the value of education to better life opportunities and, specifically, to jobs that help increase their economic wellbeing and that of their families. They firmly believed that finishing their education would lead to decent employment opportunities.

10.3 Risks of child and early marriage and early pregnancy

Once out of school, girls said that the risk of child and early marriage and early pregnancy increased. They reported feeling pressure from families and guardians to marry in order to relieve the financial burden of the household and also to avoid girls being "idle at home". Girls themselves expressed a fear of being "idle" and linked this to the problem of having too much freedom, which often resulted in early pregnancy. Social and cultural norms also dictate the expectations that families and communities placed on girls to marry young. In Ndebele communities, girls expressed that their culture values child and early marriage and this led to some girls understanding it as an achievement.

Most girls felt that girls who were married early had even more complications to face. The majority of girls agreed that if girls marry before the age of 18 they are less likely to complete their education and more likely to experience violence in the home.

Reflecting on the impact of early pregnancy in their lives, young married mothers talked about birth complications, leaving school early, being beaten by their husbands, regretting their decision, and the struggle to provide and care for their child.

10.4 Challenging assumptions – violence against women and girls

Overall, girls did not think it was acceptable for boyfriends or husbands to hit them or use violence, however they did feel it is acceptable for women to put up with violence in order to keep the family together. A daughter being hit by her mother was also perceived as acceptable by girls. Violence is viewed as something to be expected by both older and younger women.

Boys did not reflect on addressing and changing the violent behaviour of men and boys as a strategy to reducing the risks of violence that girls face. Their perceptions of how to address violence revolved around girls not boys changing their behaviour.

Sensitising fathers and other male relatives on the importance of supporting adolescent girls can transform power relations, reinforcing the role of positive masculinity in contributing to gender equality.

10.5 The importance of supportive family and community relationships

Faced with such challenges, having someone to talk to about their problems was very important to most of the girls interviewed. Girls who did have someone to talk to highly valued this relationship and found great comfort in being able to discuss their problems and receive advice. The majority of girls said that they talked to their mothers, aunts or other female relatives and referred to them as a source of support and strength.

Girls want a better life but struggle to overcome the many barriers they face – including poverty and violence. Their drive and passion to achieve their goals, stay in school, finish their education, find employment and generate income to transform their lives was clearly articulated throughout the research. They feel more should be done to allow them to effectively participate in their homes, their schools and their communities.

SECTION 11

RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Strengthen access to resources and girls' own potential

Girls face substantive barriers when trying to realise their life goals. Lack of access to economic resources to keep them in school and discriminatory gender and social norms within families and communities all impede girls' individual empowerment.

Programmes for adolescent girls should focus on strengthening girls' agency, and supporting them to develop self-determination, decision-making skills and self-confidence. Programmes that support income-generating opportunities for girls are also key to supporting girls' own agency in terms of advancing their life goals and exercising their rights. This is particularly urgent for girls who want to return to school, for adolescent mothers, married girls and girls from Ndebele communities.

Girls' low level of autonomy when it comes to deciding about their bodies and motherhood needs to be examined. Programme work with adolescent girls should address the barriers to girls being able to make choices about whether or not to get pregnant. Such programmes should include working with girls to deconstruct the social norms and values that serve to prevent girls' access sexual and reproductive health services.

Work is needed on deconstructing gender-biased perceptions of what subjects are appropriate for girls and boys to study, to sensitise girls on the value of taking up STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects, expanding their aspirations to include scientific careers, with particular emphasis on increasing girls' chances of being able to avail themselves of the government STEM scholarship scheme.

11.2 Work with families, communities and ministries to advocate for equal opportunities and rights for girls

Focus should be placed on working with mothers, fathers and other family members to recognise the importance of supporting their daughter's wellbeing, challenging attitudes that normalise violence in the home and improving the low value that is currently attributed to girls within families.

Work is required with families and communities to challenge the discriminatory attitudes and beliefs that ascribe girls the role of mother, housewife or carer and to promote attitudes and behaviours that support girls in realising their goals and rights.

Work should be done with parents on positive attitudes towards discussing sexual and reproductive health and relationship issues with their sons and daughters, on awareness-raising with parents about the health risks of early pregnancy and on cultivating an understanding of early pregnancy as detrimental to young girls' chances of achieving their life goals and potential.

Programmes working with adolescent boys should increase a focus on raising awareness with boys in relation to taking responsibility for their sexuality and recognising their role in early pregnancy and violence against girls. This includes enhancing their understanding of their ability to take an active role in avoiding sexually transmitted infections, HIV and unwanted

pregnancies, and in generating positive changes. Engaging men as agents of change to promote the benefits of more gender-equitable relationships is integral to improving the situation for adolescent girls.

Understanding the factors and relationships that prevent girls from reporting violence to authorities is an urgent matter and mechanisms need to be put in place that support girls in reporting cases of violence and that protect them from further abuse by perpetrators.

At ministerial level, work is needed with the Ministry of Education, schools and teachers for gender-aware policies that encourage girls to take up STEM subjects.

11.3 Strengthen spaces to amplify girls' voices and increase their active participation

The organisational capacity of adolescent girls can be developed through opening up safe spaces for girls to participate, including activities that strengthen their self-esteem, their abilities and their potential for leadership. Working with community leaders can facilitate the opening of these spaces for girls, strengthening their active citizenship within their own communities.

Work can be done with elder women leaders in the communities to advocate with the wider community elders on challenging and changing attitudes and perceptions around child and early marriage and early pregnancy.

Other areas include: work on sensitisation of the value of women leaders in the community, demystifying gender stereotypes when comes to leadership; and work on fostering positive mentoring relations between younger and older women community leaders. This could provide adolescent girls with increased opportunities to have their concerns heard and acted upon in the community while strengthening intergenerational relationships.

Combined with these efforts, programmes should focus on developing girls' advocacy capacities so that they can demand change from local and central governments. This change can include improved policies to ensure girls can complete their education, access and information on sexual and reproductive rights, special programmes for young mothers, violence prevention programmes and sufficient budget resources to implement specific programmes for the empowerment of girls.

11.4 Strengthen alliances between civil society organisations: promote collective action on advancing the rights of girls

Strengthen partnerships between civil society organisations in order to support and advocate for the interests and rights of adolescent girls, to support the development of girls' potential and increase their capacity to advocate for transformative change and gender equality in their communities.

Organisations and networks must have dedicated budgets for programme and advocacy work to transform the low cultural value attributed to girls.

ANNEX

The reflections below outline the thoughtful experiences of two of young women research assistants from Zimbabwe that participated in the research training workshops and the field research. They share with us their reflections on situation of young women in Zimbabwe, the conversations that most impacted them and how this deepened their understanding of the challenges that marginalised adolescent girls face in Zimbabwe.

Caroline Jera: "The experience I had as a research assistant was important because it exposed me to different girls and young women's perspectives around Zimbabwe who have different beliefs and cultures.

"From my own point of view I noticed that no matter how young girls are taught on gender equality issues they still feel that boys are more superior to girls. This is because of their churches, society and cultures that socialised them to think that there is a total distinction between boys and girls.



"For example, with the issues of caring for babies and doing household chores, the majority – if not all the girls – strongly agreed that it is the women's duty to be responsible for the chores at home. Some girls explained that it is a taboo for men to be doing chores at home.

"I could feel the connection with the girls as they felt free to explain deeply and openly on their experience as young girls. It was also easy for me to ask further because I have been through the same road as an adolescent girl.

"During the training it was really touching to me that in some areas in Zimbabwe, like Zhombe and Silobela, do not value education and that the majority of them were school dropouts. However, I could understand them because in their communities there are no role models or people who have succeeded out of education.

"Others have cultural and religious issues that restricted them from seeing life as based on education. It is normality in their societies for a girl to be married as early as 16 in Zhombe and Silobela. People in such areas rely more on illegal mining, which does not require any educational qualifications thus education is not important to them.

"In Silobela Anna (17) was regretting wasting her precious time going to school, saying: "If I had not gone to school, I would have had three children by now." This reflected that to her, education was nothing at all.

"Anna and her husband were into illegal mining and she further mentioned that it had been taking care of their families. It was also surprising to me that some young women at the age of 18 are officially into sex working in Epworth as their way of living. Most of the girls in Epworth are still going to school while they were engaging in sex working.

"As a young research assistant, this training has made me think that the government alone cannot curb the issues of gender equality and women's rights. Rather they should come together with different religions, cultures and societies to facilitate easy implementation of such laws.

"For example, in Zimbabwe it is illegal to marry a girl who is below the age of 18 but some religions, cultures and societies in places like Zhombe and Silobela believe that a girl can be married at any age – preferably below 18 years. Again, it becomes difficult for young girls to exercise their rights in such communities. It is totally unacceptable in their culture for boys to be doing the household chores and caring for babies at home, so already they are socialised to think that girls must always be at home for household chores and caring for babies.

"In that same view, in Zhombe and Silobela the majority of the girls, if not all, confirmed that only the men are supposed to make decisions as they are the head of the family and as they are also the providers of the family. Young married women confirmed that they are beaten at home but cannot report it because they want to save their marriages. This was another view of life which I never thought existed before I got to mix and mingle with young girls in other parts of Zimbabwe."

Rumbidzai Kumire: "As a research assistant I learnt that it is very important to listen to fellow women without being judgmental. This helped me to understand that everyone has a story to tell about her own circumstances and life.



"Perceptions are implicitly the way one views circumstances or situations. The training was of paramount importance because I learnt that as a research assistant I must put aside my perceptions and establish a meaningful relationship with the respondent. This helps the respondent to be comfortable and have meaningful conversations. This had great positive impact to me, and as a young woman I am now able to listen, talk and understand fellow young women in Zimbabwe.

"There was a connection based on gender, similar age and same culture. It was very important that these young women talked to fellow young women, they were not shy to confide in fellow women. The age was very important because they felt they are talking to their peers.

"The interviews were done in vernacular language, which made it easy for the young women to communicate. It was very important from a cultural perspective that this field research was conducted by young Zimbabwean women because we understand the cultural aspects which came up in the research. For example, the issue of bride price which result in the exploitation of the girl child. In Zimbabwean customs the husband pays the bride price, leaving the young women submissive in the marriage.

"The conversation that most impacted me took place in Zhombe with a young mother who dropped out of school because of pregnancy and marriage and went back to school. She realises that it's not too late for those young mothers and those married to go back to school to enhance the development of the girl child.

"During the interview, where she was wearing her school uniform, she stated that the teachers also need to transform their attitudes towards these courageous women who go back to school. This made me think deeply about the life of the girls in Zimbabwe, and that they need to understand the emancipatory role of education. These young women and the early married need to understand that education helps in the development of the girl child. Educating the girl child will give them skills and opportunities in their lives to better their lives and consequently eradicate poverty, which is a cause and a consequence of early marriages.

"As a research assistant I have changed my attitudes towards the reality of the girls in Zimbabwe. Before this awakening research process I used to be judgmental towards the girls in Zimbabwe. I used to think that these young women participate willingly in early marriages but the reasons vary between abuse, abject poverty, and cultural practices, among others.

"This research made me realise that the customary laws in this country need to be revised. Laws which put importance on the bride price without stating the age at which the girls can be married. The law in Zimbabwe states that a girl can be married at 16 and a boy at 18, which further limits the chances of developing the girl. The adolescent stage is the self-discovery stage where these girls must develop themselves; allowing the girls to marry at a younger age than boys is not protecting the girl child, but crippling the development of the girl child."



ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

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Published in 2016. Text © Plan International