



Adolescent girl in Gaza with a disability © GAGE 2026

Young people's bodily integrity during the war on Gaza: longitudinal evidence from GAGE

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Introduction

Since the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, Israel has carried out actions that amount to genocide. It has systematically destroyed the Gaza Strip, killed tens of thousands of people, and deliberately deprived Gaza's population of life-saving humanitarian aid (Amnesty International, 2024; Asem, 2025; B'Tselem, 2025; Forensic Architecture, 2025; HRW, 2024; UN, 2025). Given the unprecedented level of violence and suffering, an often-overlooked dimension of the conflict is its impact on age- and gender-based violence risks, including within households and communities. The 'ceasefire in place since October 10, 2025, brought some relief to young people in Gaza; however, humanitarian aid continues to be obstructed, and hundreds of Palestinians have been killed because of continued Israeli hostilities (OHCHR, 2026).

This brief explores the impacts of the war on young people's experience of different forms of age- and gender-based violence (including not only by the Israeli armed forces but also violence perpetrated by caregivers, intimate partners, peers and community members), which could inform the post-ceasefire humanitarian response. It draws on two rounds of data collection (2024, 2025) with over 1,000 young people undertaken by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal research programme. The brief concludes by discussing implications for the post-ceasefire humanitarian response.

Methods

The brief is based on longitudinal mixed-methods data collected in August and September 2024 (Round 1) and October and November 2025 (Round 2) (shortly after the ceasefire of 3 October 2025) to assess young people's experiences and perceptions of the conflict and to show changes over time. The research sample was proportionately sampled across all five governorates of Gaza: Rafah; North of Gaza; Gaza; Khan Younis; Middle Area. In Round 1, we collected data with 1,011 young people (526 females and 485 males aged 10–24 years). For Round 2, we surveyed 1,380 young people (837 females and 543 males) (Annexes: Table 1). Throughout this brief, age groups are referred to as follows: 'young adolescents' or 'boys/girls' for those aged 10-14 years, 'older adolescents' or 'older boys/girls' for those aged 15-19, and 'young adults' or 'young men/women' for those aged 20-25. Collectively, all three groups are referred to as 'young people'. We were able to reach 76% of the original sample and applied the same sampling selection approach to select replacements. In order to better understand the challenges facing some of the most disadvantaged young people, we purposely oversampled married adolescents (aged 15-19), young people with disabilities, and, for Round 2, included an additional sample of orphaned children to reflect the experiences of the many many orphaned adolescents (aged 10-19) in Gaza as a result of the war (Annexes: Table 1). We use survey weights in analysis of Round 2 data. Although this brief primarily focuses on data from Round 2 (n=1,380), changes over time are examined using the panel of young people who took part in both rounds (n=772) (Annexes Table 2). This data is presented in Box 1, page 6.

Applying a sequenced mixed-methods approach, qualitative data for Round 1 was collected after the survey, in November-December 2024, with 100 young people (56 females and 44 males). The team also conducted 24 key informant interviews with service providers and community leaders. Round 2 interviews included in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) with 86 young people (44 females and 42 males), 10 focus group discussions (81 young people), 30 IDIs with caregivers (20 mothers and 10 fathers), and 24 key informant interviews with service providers and community leaders. The qualitative pool was selected from the larger quantitative sample, again deliberately oversampling the most disadvantaged individuals in order to capture the voices of those at risk of being 'left behind'. The tables below provide more details about the qualitative sample.

Ethical clearance for the research was granted by the Helsinki Committee (PHRC/HC/1245/24), the Gaza Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, and the ODI Global Ethics Committee (ODI R025002). All procedures strictly followed

international ethical guidelines, including the principles of informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Written consent was obtained from participants aged 18 years and above, while those under 18 provided verbal assent in addition to consent from their caregivers.



Findings

Violence experienced by young people

Since the war began, both boys and girls report a significant increase in violence across all areas of daily life. 90% of boys and 86% of girls say that levels of violence have risen since the start of the war, which includes physical assaults, verbal abuse and robbery. Most respondents reported that violence has increased at home and in public spaces, especially on the streets and around essential services such as water queues, aid distribution points, markets and health centres.

Exposure to war-related events is near-universal. Almost all participants had directly witnessed violent events: 94% had seen Israeli bombardments, 90% had experienced their house being bombed or destroyed, and 80% had lost close family members. Many had seen the remains of dead people (77%), and friends being injured (38%) or killed (25%).

Young people described community violence as having become a normal feature of life during the war. In the two weeks prior to the survey alone, nearly 1 in 10 (8%) reported that they or someone close to them had been robbed (40% in the past year), and just under 1 in 10 (8%) had been physically assaulted by someone outside their family. Almost 1 in 5 (19%) had been verbally assaulted by a non-family member in the same period. Boys and young men (15%) and younger adolescents (10–14 years) (21%) reported higher exposure to physical violence outside the family than their peers. Violence was also reported on the street (26%), in water queues (26%), at aid distribution points (25%), in markets (12%), and in health centres (11%).

Half of respondents (50%) reported violence in the household. Only around 3 in 5 (60%) felt somewhat or completely safe in their own homes, and nearly all participants (90%) feared for the safety of the children living with them, showing that even spaces that should offer protection are frequently experienced as unsafe.

The main reported perpetrators of direct personal violence were community members (42%), followed by mothers (15%), peers (14%), siblings (14%), robbers (14%), fathers (13%), criminals (3%), Israeli occupation soldiers (3%) and armed groups in Gaza (1%). This pattern points to a dual reality: while Israeli military action creates the conditions of pervasive insecurity, the violence young people encounter day to day most often comes from within their immediate surroundings.

During the in-depth interviews, adolescents describe a complete absence of safety: An 18-year-old young man stated that 'we weren't able to move freely. We could be killed at any time on the street. We used to risk our lives just to get wood and other things,' while a 16-year-old boy explained,

'there were no places that felt safe,' because of *'bombing and shelling.'* Children report violence both from the occupation and within their own communities: a 22-year-old married man recounted how *'they [local people] attacked us with knives... once I brought a 50 kilo sack and it was stolen from me. I managed to take two kilos from it after a fight,'* and a 17-year-old girl noted that *'there is no safety and security nowadays... there is no police so there is no security... unlike before.'* At the same time, they describe direct exposure to Israeli military violence and arrest: *'From the occupation. It destroyed, bombed, and killed children and innocent people... they arrest Palestinians, torture them, and deprive them of food and water,'* said a 16-year-old boy, who added that he was afraid *'for myself and my family.'* A 22-year-old married man reported direct encounters with Israeli soldiers and extreme coercion. He recalled being forced into a pit with others and interrogated, saying, *'I felt... I thought the army was about to bury me alive. We were reciting the Shahada [Quranic verse].'* Even during periods described as ceasefires, threats persist: a 16-year-old girl reported that *'our neighbour's son was killed less than 15 days ago,'* and another 16-year-old boy living near the border described how *'from here they fire shells, and at night there are quadcopters,'* with the constant buzzing of drones overhead. These testimonies mirror the quantitative findings and illustrate how the war has eroded any sense of protection, formal security, or safe refuge for young people.



Young boy in Gaza © GAGE 2026

Young people’s experiences of domestic violence

The war has placed enormous strain on family life. Nearly all participants (97%) agreed or partially agreed that the war had increased pressure on their families, and many reported witnessing or directly experiencing violence at home.

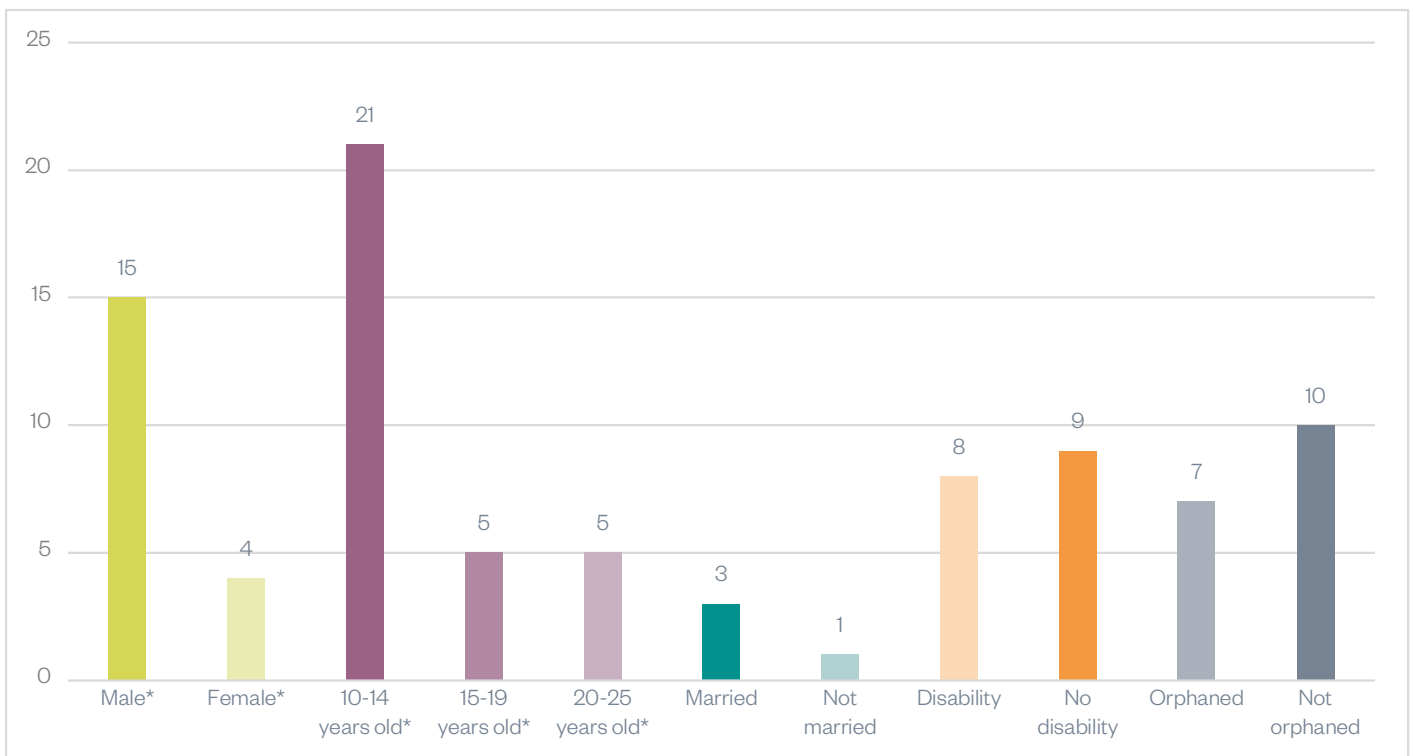
Just over 1 in 5 (22%) reported physical violence in the household. 15% said they had been pushed, beaten, or slapped by an adult family member in the past two weeks, and more than 1 in 4 (29%) had been called inappropriate nicknames in the same period. Younger adolescents bore a disproportionate share of this violence: 24% of those aged 10–14 reported physical violence from an adult family member, compared to 13% of those aged 15–19 and 10% of those aged 20–25.

Qualitative accounts echo the escalating domestic tension and violence. Confined living conditions intensified family stress: An 18-year-old young woman described feeling ‘*stuck in a very cramped space... there isn’t much privacy between us.*’ Physical violence from parents persisted or continued during the conflict, sometimes because of the additional stressors. A 16-year-old girl described her experiences:

‘I mean, now my family is under pressure. They were under pressure during the war; there was no money and no work, so they took out their anger on us... My dad smokes... on days he didn’t smoke... he yells and scolds, and sometimes he hits.’

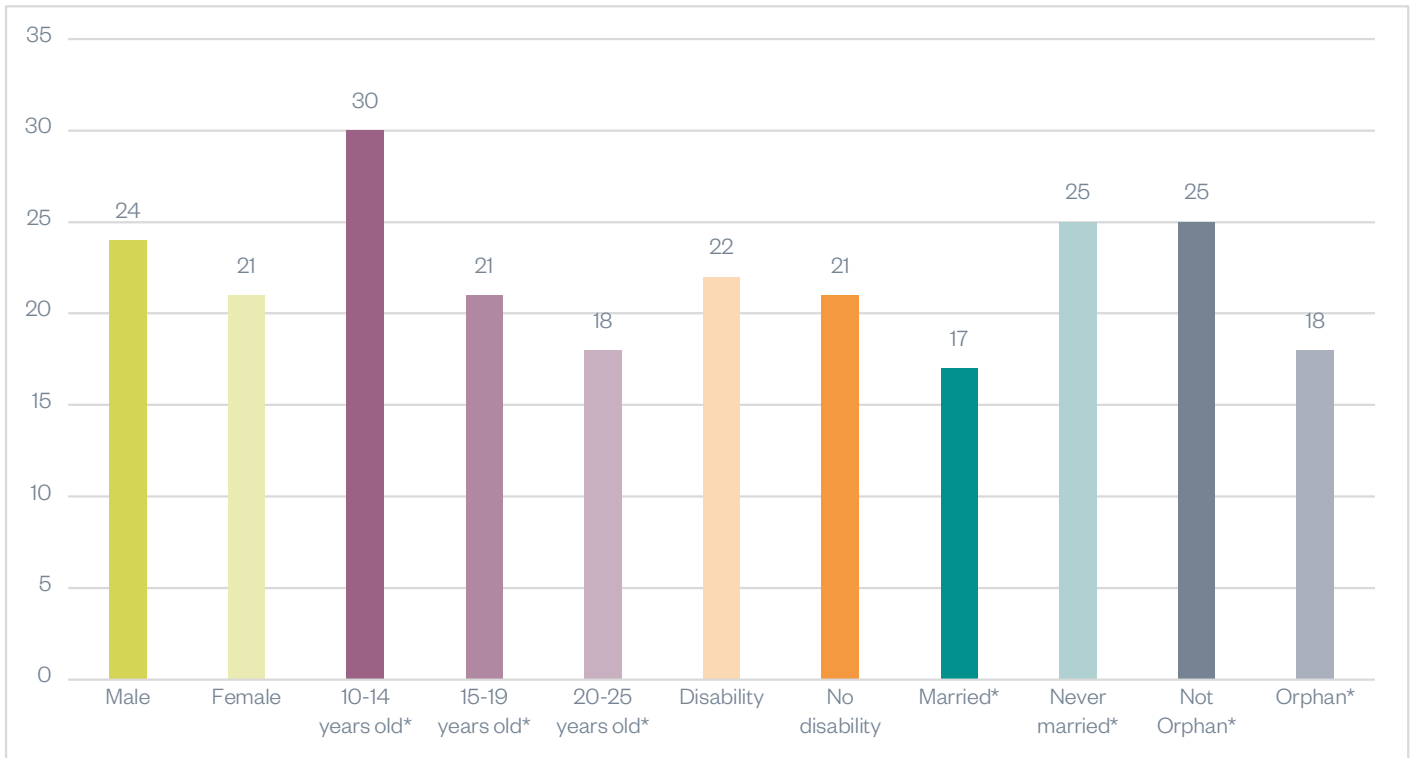
The same girl also reported increased sibling violence: ‘*During the war, I mean, he [her brother] used to hit us all the time.*’ These testimonies illustrate how wartime stress fractured family dynamics, with confined spaces, grief, and desperation creating conditions in which domestic violence increased.

Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents reported that anyone other than their family members has pushed, beaten or slapped them in the past two weeks



The percentages above are based on the full sample of young people (n=1,380); categories noted with an asterisk (*) demonstrate statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level.

Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents reported that an adult in the family has pushed, beaten or slapped them



The percentages above are based on the full sample of young people (n=1,011); categories noted with an asterisk (*) demonstrate statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level.



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Child marriage

The war has intensified pressure on underage girls (and to a lesser extent boys) to marry. 82% of respondents agreed or partially agreed that the war had increased pressure on girls to marry, and 72% said the same for boys. Respondents explained this primarily in economic terms: marriages have become cheaper, and marrying off a child can ease the financial burden on families.

The main reported drivers of this pressure were:

- reduced wedding costs (63%);
- reduced economic burden on families (48%);
- better living conditions (28%);
- ability to access more aid (27%);
- escapism (19%);
- lack of gender-segregated shelter (16%);
- family pressure (15%);
- childbearing as a form of resistance (12%).

A 15-year-old boy reported that men '*can just marry for 50 Dinar [52 GBP]*', to which another 18-year-old young man who got married during the war added: '*Before, you needed a hall, food, bring uncles and cousins. [During the war,] I found it cheaper and better*'. A key informant working to improve rights for women in Gaza describes the situation: '*they are marrying off the girl from 14 years old; they have started... The first reason is economic*.' Not having to pay for education and raising. Followed by: '*a religious or social motive, from the aspect of fear that someone might exploit her and this is honour... the important thing is to get rid of this responsibility*.' Our data contradicts the notion that marriage enhances access to nutritional support. Married girls and young women were, in fact, less likely to receive food aid, including canned food, flour, and fresh products.

Experiences of intimate partner violence

Among married respondents (n=407), notable shares reported experiencing physical, psychological and sexual violence from their partners. Respondents linked increases in such violence primarily to financial and psychological stress and deteriorating living conditions.

- 16% reported physical violence from their partner in the past year.

- 31% reported psychological violence, including humiliation and insults, sometimes in front of others.
- 5% reported sexual violence by their partner.

The main reported drivers of increased partner violence were:

- financial stress (77%)
- psychological stress (69%)
- poor living conditions (62%)
- using violence as a venting mechanism (28%)
- long periods spent at home (22%)
- crowded shelters (20%)
- lack of privacy (19%)
- pressure from extended family members (19%)
- struggle to secure livelihoods (16%)

One woman described her husband's psychological violence after the news of the death of her uncle. When he told her that her uncle had been killed, he '*showed me these things, pictures, pictures, pictures* [followed by a graphic description of what she saw in the picture of her killed uncle] ... *and he started laughing*.' Her distress was compounded by her inability to reach family members in the south, as '*the south was closed*.' She noted that even at home, '*I can't be comfortable*.' A 20-year-old woman describes how a discussion about an eggplant resulted in violence: '*I can't repeat the things he says to me... he said something wrong about my mother... Then he got up and started hitting me*.' Since the war, she described how violence became more systematic: '*Every now and then he hits me here, near my ribcage. He keeps hitting me until I feel like my bones are going to pop out of place from the pain*.' Wartime stress, but also being displaced and having both her and her husband's family far away, resulted in an increase in violence because the husband felt less restricted by family members: '*When I was with my family before the war, I never experienced violence from him. But because we're far apart, and because we're far from his family and mine, I experience violence*.' These accounts illustrate how wartime stress – financial strain, displacement, grief, and loss of family structures – strained intimate relationships, with some partners responding to crisis with psychological and physical violence.

Box 1: Changes over time

Using panel data involving 772 young people who were interviewed at both rounds, between Round 1 (August–September 2024) and Round 2 shortly after the October 2025 ceasefire (October–November 2025), changes over time show a modest but meaningful decline in domestic violence over time.

Witnessed or known physical violence by a family member in the past two weeks fell from 30% in Round 1 to 18% in Round 2, while psychological violence dropped from 53% to 34%.

Feelings of safety at home also improved considerably – 63% of respondents felt safe at home in Round 2, compared to just 29% in Round 1. This likely reflects the relative reduction in the intensity of Israeli bombardments compared to the early months of the war.

Policy and programming implications

Young people and their families have been subject to horrific violence as a result of the war on Gaza. The war has also simultaneously led to significantly heightened risks of all forms of age- and gender-based violence within their families, within marriage, among peer networks, within the community and as they seek to access public services and spaces. Ending the illegal occupation of Gaza and the blockade, and a complete withdrawal of Israeli soldiers, are essential so that young people and their families can start to feel safe and rebuild their lives. In order to fulfil SDG 5 and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence and SDG16 and eradicate all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence of children, and to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for all young people, the new administration of Gaza, humanitarian agencies and potential donors should prioritise the following:

Recommendations

Short-term

- **Strengthen protection and reporting initiatives for gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection violations:** Set up confidential reporting channels that are easy and quickly reachable (hotlines, WhatsApp numbers, community focal points) that include integrated safety, medical, psychosocial and legal support.
- **Train frontline community workers:** Especially those working in shelters, clinics and distribution sites in signalling cases of family and intimate partner violence.
- **Provide rapid psychosocial support:** Offer psychological first aid in shelters and community spaces, focusing on children, adolescents and survivors of violence. Train community workers to recognise mental health disorders linked to age- and gender-based violence to ensure severe cases are identified and responded to.
- **Address immediate risks of child marriage:** Train social workers to identify child marriage risks. Provide support to families considering child marriage (cash support, awareness) and provide safe, accessible activities for adolescent girls and boys as an alternative.
- **Improve educational and economic opportunities for girls and young women:** Robust evidence underscores that education retention is the single most important protective factor against child marriage. To facilitate this given dire levels of poverty and precarity, social protection, including cash for education transfers, should be prioritised, and with soft conditionalities related to child marriage prevention.

- **Improve safety and privacy in shelters:** Segregate sleeping areas by age and sex where possible. Introduce complaint mechanisms in shelters to report violence or exploitation.

Long-term

- **Rebuild Gaza's education system:** Provide young people, and especially adolescent girls, with educational opportunities and professional prospects to help reduce risks of child marriage.
- **Address child marriage structurally:** Work toward stronger legal protections for children, including a clear minimum age of marriage and enforcement mechanisms. Develop long-term programmes that keep girls and boys in education and offer real alternatives to child marriage (scholarships, safe learning spaces, life skills training).
- **Invest in livelihoods to reduce economic drivers of violence:** Support families at high risk of IPV and child marriage with social assistance and particularly focus on women's and youth economic initiatives to increase household resilience and bargaining power within the family.
- **Tackle gender-discriminatory social norms around violence, gender equality, and child marriage:** Engage religious leaders, community elders, women's and youth groups in long-term dialogue and campaigns against family violence, intimate partner violence, and child marriage.



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Annex: Further information on the research sample

Table 1: Round 1 and 2 participants survey

Round 1 (n=1,011)		
Variable	Number	Percentage
Age		
10–14 years	307	30
15–19 years	392	39
20–24 years	312	31
Mode 18 SD 4	Mean age 17	Median 17
Gender of participant		
Male	485	48
Female	526	52
Current place of living by governates		
North of Gaza	142	14
Gaza	225	23
Middle area	280	28
Khan Younis	213	21
Rafah	151	15
Current place of living (North or South of the Gaza Strip as divided by the Israeli occupation)		
North of Gaza (Gaza City and north)	367	36
South of Gaza (middle and south)	644	64
Refugee status		
Refugees	332	33
Non-refugees	679	67
Current marital status		
Married	181	18
Not married	830	82
Mean age at marriage	17 years	
Child marriage, among those ever-married (n=195)		
Yes	109	55.9
No	86	44.1
Having any sort of disability		
Yes	123	12
No	888	88

Round 2 (n=1,380)		
Age		
10–14 years	289	21
15–19 years	762	55
20–24 years	329	24
Mode 17 SD 3.527	Mean age 17	Median 17
Gender of participant		
Male	543	39
Female	837	61
Place of living (before the war)		
North of Gaza	361	26.2
Gaza	396	28.7
Middle area	191	13.8
Khan Younis	290	21.0
Rafah	142	10.3
Current place of living by governorate		
North of Gaza	45	3
Gaza	332	24
Middle area	514	37
Khan Younis	487	35
Rafah	2	0.1
Place of residence (North or South of the Gaza Strip as divided by the Israeli occupation)		
North of Gaza (Gaza City and north)	377	27
South of Gaza (middle and south)	1,003	73
Refugee status		
Non-refugees	390	28
Refugees	990	72
Orphan status		
Orphaned	214	16
Not orphaned	1,166	84
Current marital status		
Not married	929	67
Married	451	33
Mean age at marriage	17.02 years	
Having a disability		
Yes	209	15
No	1,171	85

Table 2: Panel data, participants

Panel data during Round 1 (N=772)		
Variable	Number	Percentage
Age		
10-14 years	176	23
15-19 years	334	43
20-24 years	262	34
Gender of participant		
Male	365	47
Female	407	53
Current marital status		
Not married	600	78
Married	172	22
Having any sort of disability		
Yes	114	15
No	658	85



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Table 3: In-depth interviews sample with young people and their caregivers from Round 1 and 2

Categories	Girls/ young women	Boys/ young men	Young people subtotal	Mothers of adolescents	Fathers of adolescents	Parent subtotals	Total individual interviews
ROUND 1							
Young people	32	24	56				56
Married young people	12	8	20				20
Young people with disabilities	12	12	24				24
Total	56	44	100				100
ROUND 2							
Young people	18	18	36	10	10	20	56
Married young people	8	8	16				16
Orphans	6	4	10				10
Young people with disabilities	12	12	24	10		10	34
Total	44	42	86	20	10	30	116