

Young people's bodily integrity and freedom from violence: findings from GAGE multi-country longitudinal evidence

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Table of contents

Introduction	2
GAGE focus and conceptual framing	3
GAGE sample and methodology	4
Findings	7
Intra-household violence	7
Teacher violence	10
Peer violence	12
Sexual violence	15
Online violence	17
Female genital mutilation	19
Child marriage	22
Intimate partner violence	24
Support seeking	27
Conclusions and implications for policy and programming	30

Figures

Figure 1: GAGE conceptual framework	3
Figure 2: GAGE research locations	5
Figure 3: GAGE timeline	6
Figure 4: Proportion of young people who have experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver (or other adult in the home) in the past year (or other adult in the home) in the past year	8
Figure 5: Proportion of adolescent students who have experienced violence at the hands of a teacher in the past year	11
Figure 6: Proportion of young people who have experienced peer violence in the past year	13
Figure 7: Disability and the risk of violence in Jordan	14
Figure 8: Proportion of young women who report having ever experienced sexual violence	16
Figure 9: Young people's experiences with online violence in the past year	18
Figure 10: Young people's experiences with and beliefs about FGM	21
Figure 11: Young people's experiences with and beliefs about child marriage	23
Figure 12: Young people's beliefs about marital violence	25
Figure 13: Young people's awareness and use of violence-support services	28
Figure 14: Proportion of young brides reporting physical violence at the hands of their husband	29

Boxes

Box 1: Conflict amplifies violence in the home	9
Box 2: Disability shapes the risk of violence	14
Box 3: Young brides are reticent to admit to marital violence until they feel safe	29

Key messages:

1. **Home is not a haven from violence;** although violence declines as young people grow up, even in late adolescence and early adulthood, violence at the hands of caregivers and brothers is not uncommon.
2. **Fewer young people face violence from teachers as they get older, but some** – especially boys, are still at risk.
3. **Bullying becomes less common as young people grow up, but the youth violence that replaces it is more dangerous,** because it often involves gangs and weapons.
4. **Sexual violence is not uncommon, but it is under-reported** – because it is normalised and because of victim blaming.
5. **Online violence is a growing threat to young people,** especially with the rise of disinformation in politically volatile contexts.
6. **Girls and young women are increasingly at risk of online sexual violence** (including blackmail), which has knock-on implications for their physical safety from family members.
7. **Child marriage remains common among some groups of adolescent girls** and is driven by the interaction between poverty (which takes away other options, especially for education) and social norms (which primarily value girls for their roles as wives and mothers).
8. **Although most child marriages are arranged by adults, some are initiated by adolescents,** who see marriage as the only achievable way to prove that they are becoming adults. These require tailored interventions.
9. **Most young people do not believe that marital relationships should be equitable,** and many believe that marital violence is acceptable and best kept private.
10. **Although marital violence is common, few young brides seek help,** because they are blamed for ‘failing’ at marriage and because marriage is the only route – in most contexts – to ensuring that they (and their children) are housed and fed.
11. **Most young people know where they could seek support services** if they experience violence, but help seeking is very rare, especially among young females.
12. **Disability amplifies young people’s risk of physical, emotional and sexual violence** – from family, teachers, peers and adults in the community.
13. **Conflict increases young people’s risk of all forms of violence** – including not only that related to conflict, but also in the home and community, as stress levels rise.

Introduction

Bodily integrity and freedom from violence is recognised as a fundamental human right, yet the violence most commonly experienced by young people – in their homes, schools, and within relationships – is also the least likely to be counted. Because it often occurs behind closed doors, is usually perpetrated by those meant to provide care, and because shame (and fear) limit reporting, violence against young people is both pervasive and systematically underestimated. The consequences of violence extend far beyond immediate physical harm: violence disrupts education, damages mental health, narrows space for meaningful agency, and limits economic empowerment. For those already facing disadvantage – including young people with disabilities, those in conflict-affected settings, and girls and young women who married in childhood – the risks are greater and the pathways to safety and support are fewer.

The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme, funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), has generated longitudinal, mixed-methods evidence on bodily integrity and experiences of age- and gender-based violence among adolescents and young adults across Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Nepal and Palestine (Gaza). By combining surveys with qualitative research, GAGE captures not just the prevalence of violence and how it changes over time, but the gender norms and structural conditions through which it is produced and sustained.

This product primarily draws on GAGE's endline data, collected in 2024 and 2025, to examine young people's bodily integrity and freedom from violence across the programme's six research contexts. To identify trends over time, it also includes some data from earlier data collection rounds. We begin by introducing GAGE's conceptual framework, and sample and methodology. We then turn to carefully disaggregated research findings on violence in the home, violence at the hands of teachers, peer violence, online violence, sexual violence, child marriage, marital violence, and young people's support-seeking in the face of violence. In Ethiopia, we also explore young people's experiences with and beliefs about female genital mutilation (FGM). We conclude with cross-cutting recommendations aimed at helping more young people grow up safe – and helping more survivors to know how they might seek help.



Adolescent girls in a school in Nepal © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

GAGE focus and conceptual framing

The GAGE research programme has generated mixed-methods, longitudinal evidence about the diverse experiences of adolescents and young adults living in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Paying careful attention to the interconnectedness of what we call the ‘3 Cs’ – capabilities, change strategies and contexts (see Figure 1) – GAGE has explored the opportunities and challenges facing young people as they transition through adolescence and into young adulthood. The programme has endeavoured to identify what works to support young

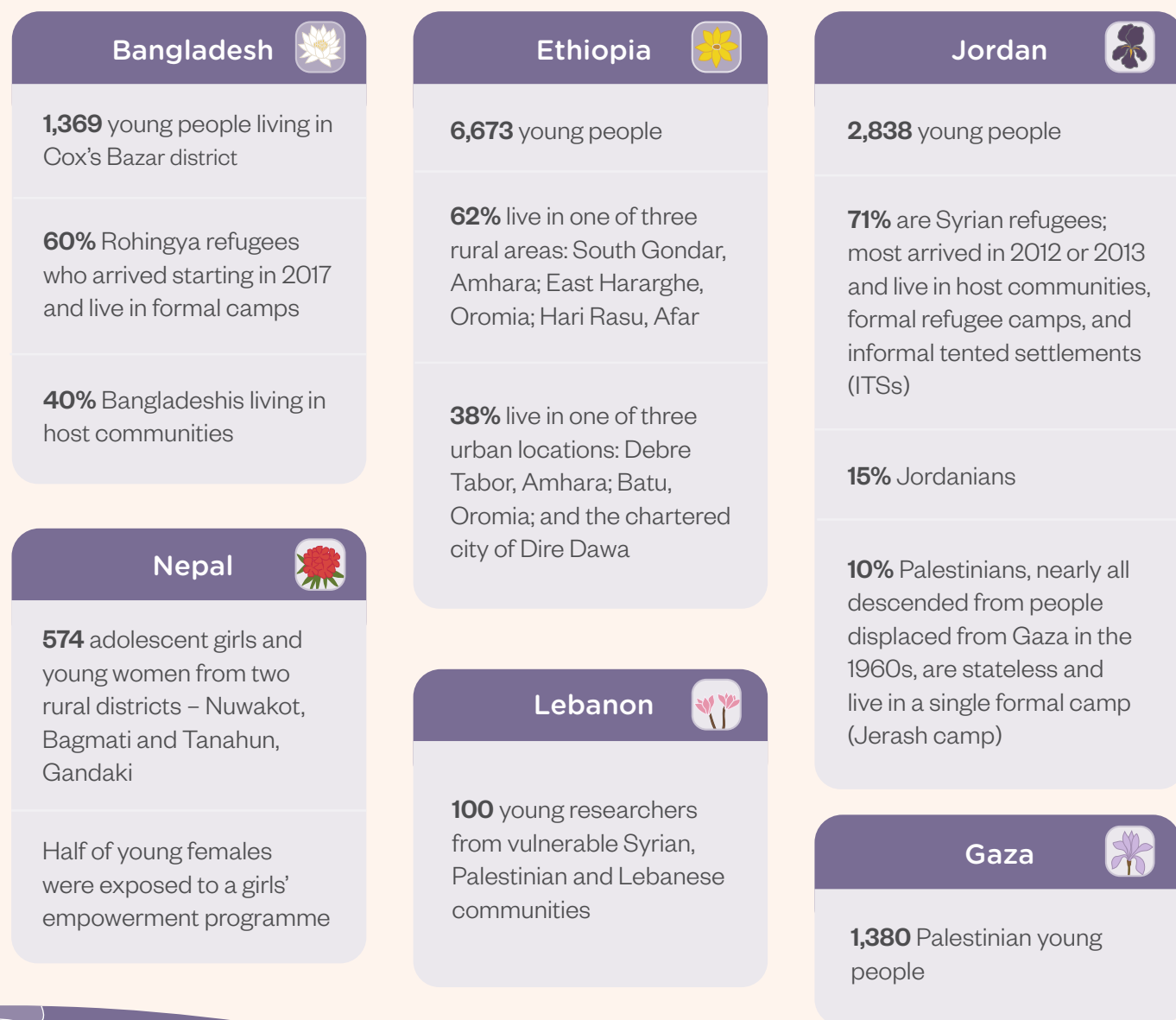
people to develop their full capabilities for education, physical health, bodily integrity and freedom from violence, psychosocial well-being, voice and agency and economic empowerment. Critically, GAGE research has included those young people who are most at risk of being left behind, including girls who are (or have been) married, young people who have been forcibly displaced by conflict, and young people with disabilities.

Figure 1: GAGE conceptual framework



GAGE sample and methodology

This brief primarily draws on endline data collected in 2024 and 2025, and highlights similarities and differences in findings across six countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Nepal and Palestine (Gaza) (see Figure 2).

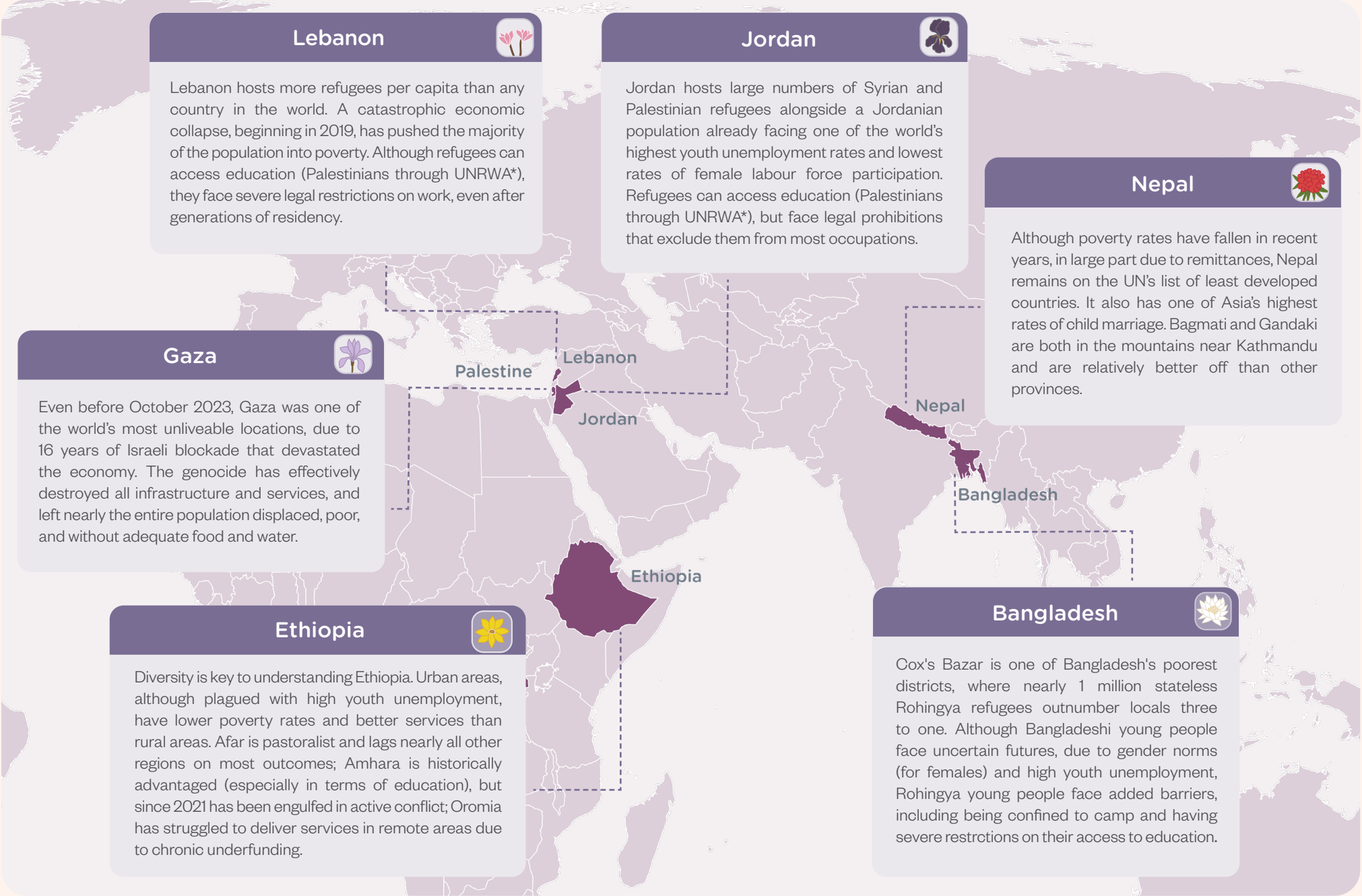


Data from Bangladesh,² Ethiopia and Jordan is roughly analogous. Samples are large, include both females and males and two cohorts (a very young adolescent cohort aged 10–12 years at baseline, and called 'adolescents' in this product; and an older adolescent cohort aged 15–17 years at baseline and called 'young adults'), and used similar mixed-methods tools. In the three other contexts, the samples are differently shaped and the approach was tailored to understand specific aspects of adolescent well-being and empowerment programming. In Nepal, the sample is smaller and includes only females who were (mostly³) enrolled in grade 6 at baseline; in addition, the research was primarily focused on girls' education. In Lebanon, the sample is small and includes a single cohort (aged 15–19 at baseline) of vulnerable young people. Research was participatory, focused on experiences of forced displacement, and used photography and interview tools that young researchers helped develop. In Gaza, the sample includes three age cohorts (aged 10–14, 15–19, and 20–24 at baseline, in 2024) and tools were adapted to reflect experiences of active conflict.

² GAGE has a second Bangladesh sample, in Chittagong and Sylhet Divisions, not used in this product. See: <https://gage.odi.org/growth-mindset-bangladesh/>

³ Some girls, mostly in the control sample, were enrolled in grades other than grade 6.

Figure 2: GAGE research locations



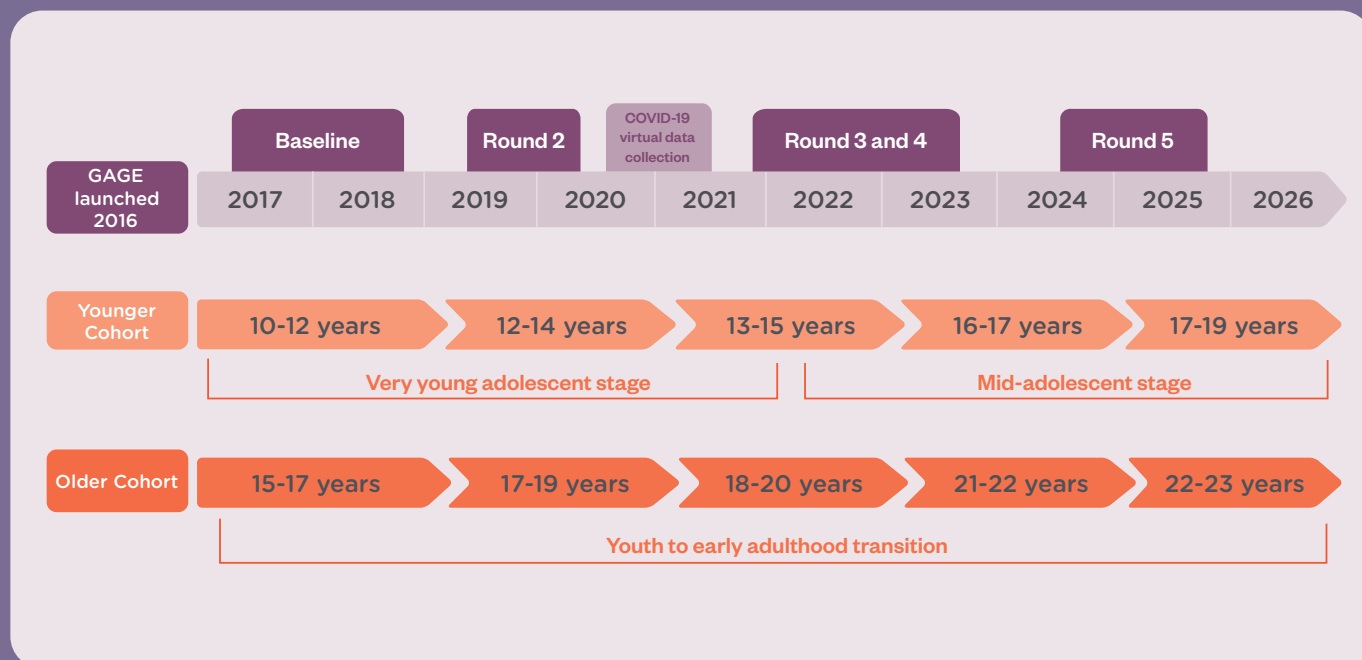
*The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

To capture change in young people's lives over time, this brief also includes some longitudinal data⁴ (see Figure 3). For Bangladesh (2019), Gaza (2024), and Jordan (2018–2019), comparisons are made to baseline.⁵ For Ethiopia, they are made to Round 2 (2019–2020).⁶ Where longitudinal data is presented, it includes only the young people who were sampled in both rounds – which, across contexts, is approximately 83% of the full baseline sample.

As noted, the GAGE programme uses mixed-methods research, predominantly face-to-face, but via phone if necessary.⁷ With the caveat that surveys were tailored to context, all include attention to age-based violence at home, at school, in the community, and on-line, as well as gender-based violence including sexual harassment, child marriage, and marital violence.⁸ In Ethiopia, surveys also explored Female Genital Mutilation. A subset of young people were selected to take part in individual and group interviews, during which we used a variety of interactive tools⁹ to explore young people's experiences with and beliefs about these same topics. Surveys and interviews were also conducted with young people's caregivers, and interviews were conducted with key informants at local and national levels.

The GAGE research design and tools were approved by ethics committees at ODI Global, George Washington University, and country-level bodies. Consent (written or verbal as appropriate) was obtained from caregivers, young people over 18 and married adolescents; written or verbal assent was obtained for all unmarried adolescents under the age of 18. There was also a robust protocol for referral to services, tailored to the different realities of the diverse research sites.

Figure 3: GAGE timeline



⁴ Longitudinal data is not presented for Nepal, because most of the girls and young women who dropped out of school were lost to follow-up.

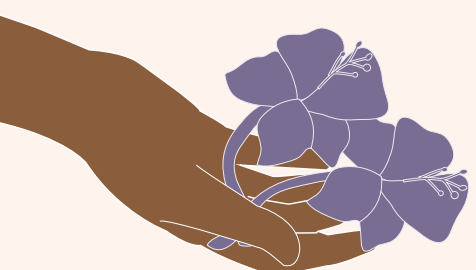
⁵ For a few indicators, baseline data is not available for Bangladesh and Jordan, and comparisons are instead made to midline data, which was collected after the Covid-19 pandemic ended, in 2022–2023.

⁶ We use Round 2 rather than baseline data because we added hundreds of new young people to the Ethiopia sample between baseline and Round 2.

⁷ Phone interviews were used in the early phases of the Covid-19 pandemic, when young people had migrated or been forcibly displaced, and when active conflict compromised the safety of researchers.

⁸ Surveys can be found here: <https://gage.odi.org/publications/?publication=knowledge-products&knowledge-products=survey-instruments>

⁹ Toolkits can be found here: <https://gage.odi.org/publications/?publication=knowledge-products&knowledge-products=methodological-toolkits>



Findings

Home is not a haven; violence remains common

Although violence has declined as young people have moved through adolescence, the endline survey found that a large minority of young people – one-quarter in Bangladesh (24%) and Ethiopia (25%) – had experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver (or another adult in the home) in the past year (see Figure 4). In Ethiopia, Gaza (where conflict has increased young people's risk of violence at home, see Box 1), and Jordan, age shapes young people's odds of violence. Adolescents are more at risk than young adults, largely because caregivers believe that violence will encourage adolescents to behave. In Jordan, gender also shapes violence: young women are more at risk than young men, primarily because caregivers police young women's behaviour assiduously (particularly in regard to gender norms) but largely leave young men to do as they please.

'Unless beaten and reprimanded, it is difficult to correct children, they do not get corrected otherwise.'
(Mother, Debre Tabor, Ethiopia)

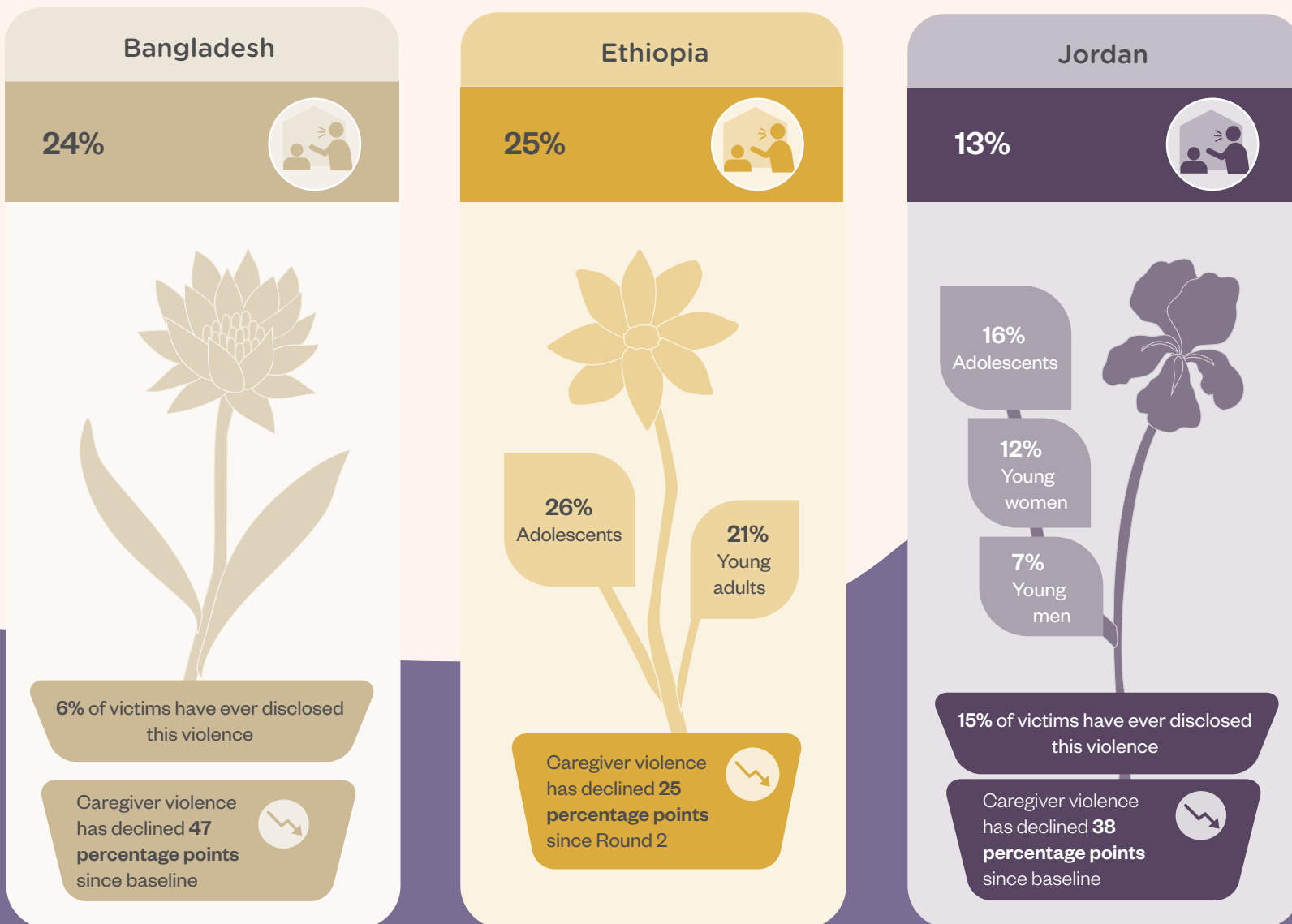
'Those who don't listen to elders get beaten... They beat us for our welfare.'
(17-year-old Bangladeshi boy)

'My son always has problems with his sister. If she goes out of the house, he hits her, if she wears short clothes, he hits her, if he sees her wearing a robe when she comes out of the bathroom, he hits her, if she wears revealing clothes at home, he hits her, if she goes to the store, he hits her.'
(Palestinian mother, Jordan)

Qualitative research found that sibling violence is also common. Perpetrators are almost always brothers, and victims are almost always sisters, with explanations almost always revolving around brothers' efforts to police their sisters' behaviour to protect the family reputation. Notably, while this is usually older brothers and younger sisters, adolescent boys (especially in Jordan) do try to control the behaviour of their unmarried young adult sisters.

It is rare for young people who experience violence at home to disclose it to service providers or authorities, as to do so would bring shame to the family.

Figure 4: Proportion of young people who have experienced violence at the hands of a caregiver (or other adult in the home) in the past year



Box 1: Conflict amplifies violence in the home

Young people in Gaza and rural Amhara (Ethiopia) have been exposed to years of conflict-related violence. In Gaza, 80% have lost a family member to the war and 20% have been personally injured. In rural Amhara, 40% have witnessed violence with weapons. Conflict-related violence also shapes young people's risk of violence in the home, as family members' frustration spills out. In Gaza, 97% of young people report that the war has increased tension in the home and nearly as many report that it has increased caregiver violence against boys (90%) and girls (86%). Young brides also reported that the war has left them more at risk.

'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.'
(16-year-old girl, Gaza)



Adolescent boys in Amhara, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

Violence from teachers declines as young people grow up, but some adolescents (especially boys) are still at risk

Despite declines over time, largely shaped by adolescents' physical and psycho-emotional development, many students are still at risk of corporal punishment at the hands of their teachers. Aggregate rates were highest in Bangladesh (30%) and lowest in Jordan (6%) (see Figure 5). In all contexts, boys were far more at risk of teacher violence than girls, partly because they tend to be more poorly behaved and partly because violence against boys is seen as more acceptable than violence against girls. In Ethiopia, rural students were more at risk than urban students, primarily because most were still enrolled (despite their age) in primary school.

'They are boys who mostly violate school rules and are violated by teachers. Girls mostly do not disturb in the classroom.'

(15-year-old boy, Amhara, Ethiopia)

Teachers widely use corporal punishment to control their classrooms. They also use it to punish students for being late, for not doing their homework, and for making academic mistakes. Overall, girls were disproportionately likely to be punished for events beyond their control (such as being late to school because they were collecting water). Boys, on the other hand, were disproportionately likely to be beaten so severely that they drop out of school.

It is uncommon, especially in Bangladesh and Nepal, for young people to disclose teacher violence. This is primarily because violence is normalised and expected.

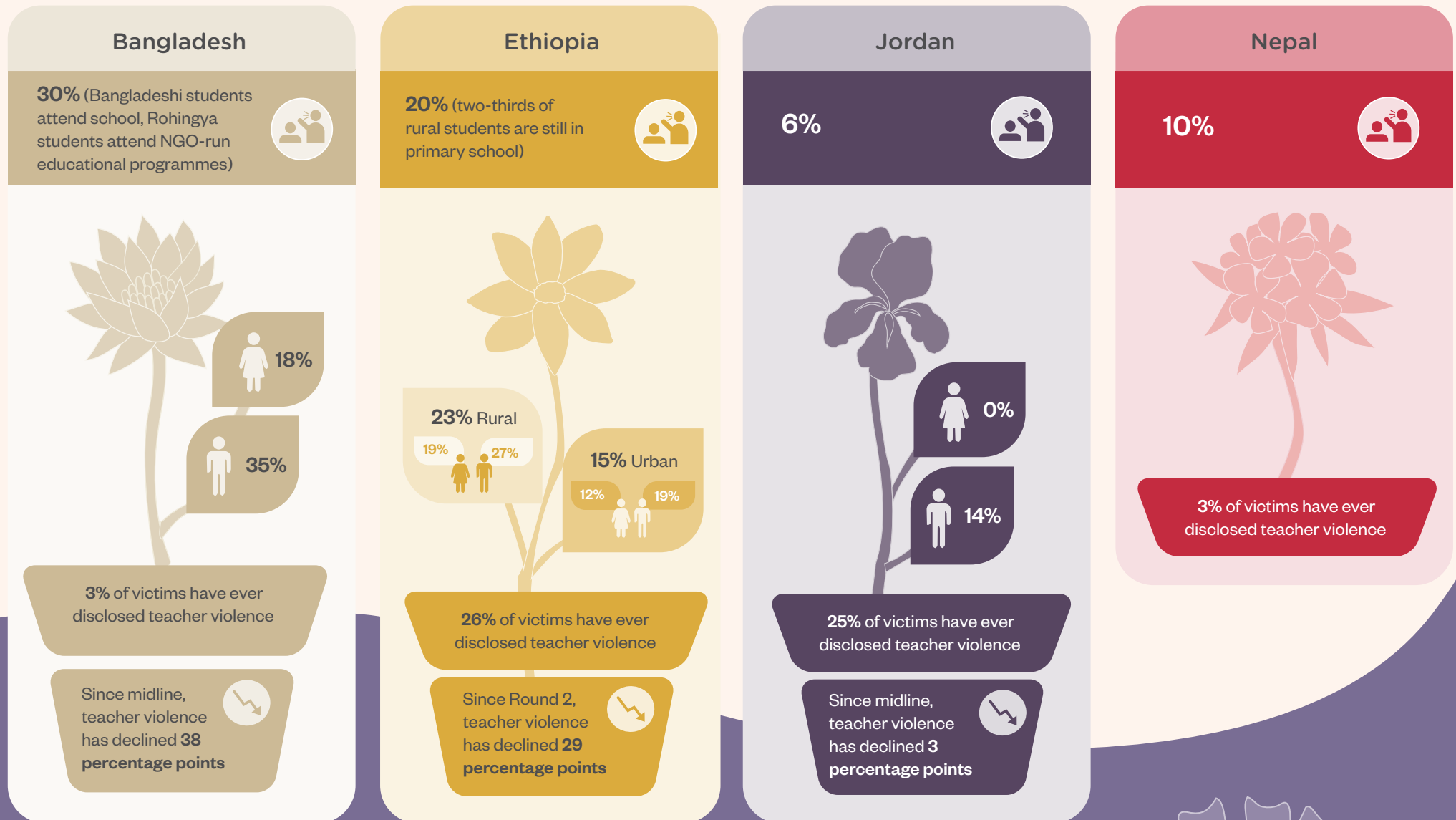
'The teacher beats the student who does not do his homework. The teacher also beats the student if he is a minute or two late for school in the morning. The teacher also beats the student if he talks to his classmate. And if he asks his classmate for a pencil or eraser, the teacher beats him with a hose.'
(15-year-old Syrian boy, Jordan)

'They beat us a lot. Why would it upset me?'

(19-year-old Rohingya young man, talking about his teachers)



Figure 5: Proportion of adolescent students who have experienced violence at the hands of a teacher in the past year



Peer violence is becoming less common over time, but the youth violence that has replaced it is more dangerous

Across all contexts, fewer than one-fifth of young people reported having experienced peer violence in the past year. Rates were slightly higher in Ethiopia and Nepal (17%) than in Jordan (14%) and Bangladesh (13%). In all contexts, boys and young men – who are often taught to see violence as a way to demonstrate their masculinity – were more at risk than girls and young women. Young people with disabilities were also at elevated risk (see Box 2).

Crucial for understanding young people's experiences with peer violence at endline is that although bullying (teasing and hitting perpetrated by known peers at school and in the community) has become far less

common over time, youth violence (perpetrated by unknown peers in the community) has become more common. In all locations, young people reported that gangs of older boys and young men commit acts of violence (some egregious) against community members, often in tandem with robbery. This is regularly associated with young males' substance use and, more importantly, with rising rates of youth unemployment that have left a generation of young males unable to successfully transition to productive adulthood.

'Gang violence has increased. Many gangs are formed by Rohingya and Bangladeshi people in them.'
(24-year-old Bangladeshi young man)

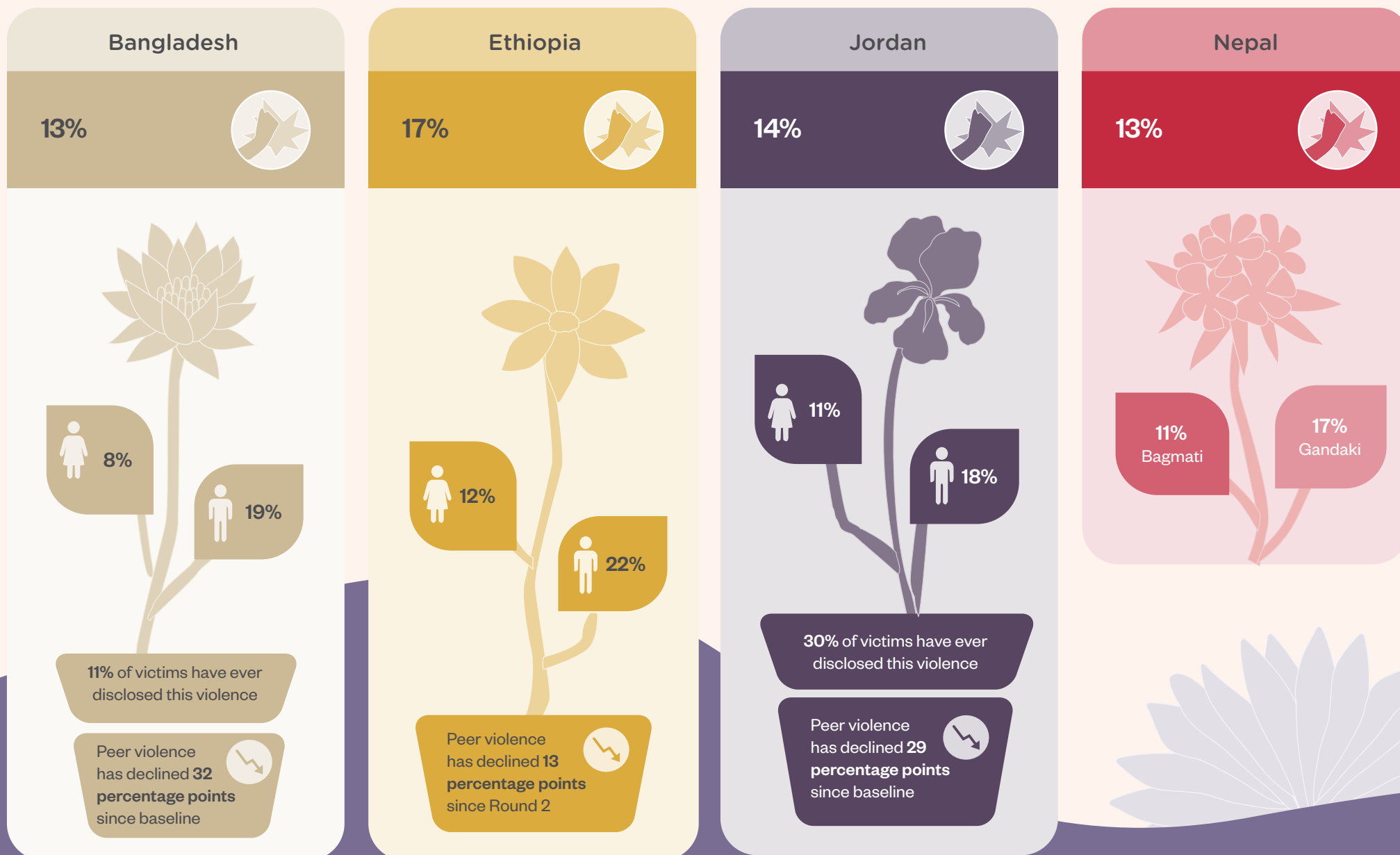
'One of my friends was murdered recently. Murder cases have been increasing... There have been three to four murder cases this year. My friend's murder was the third one... There were two killed with each other.'

(21-year-old Palestinian young man, Jordan)



Young men in Bangladesh © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

Figure 6: Proportion of young people who have experienced peer violence in the past year

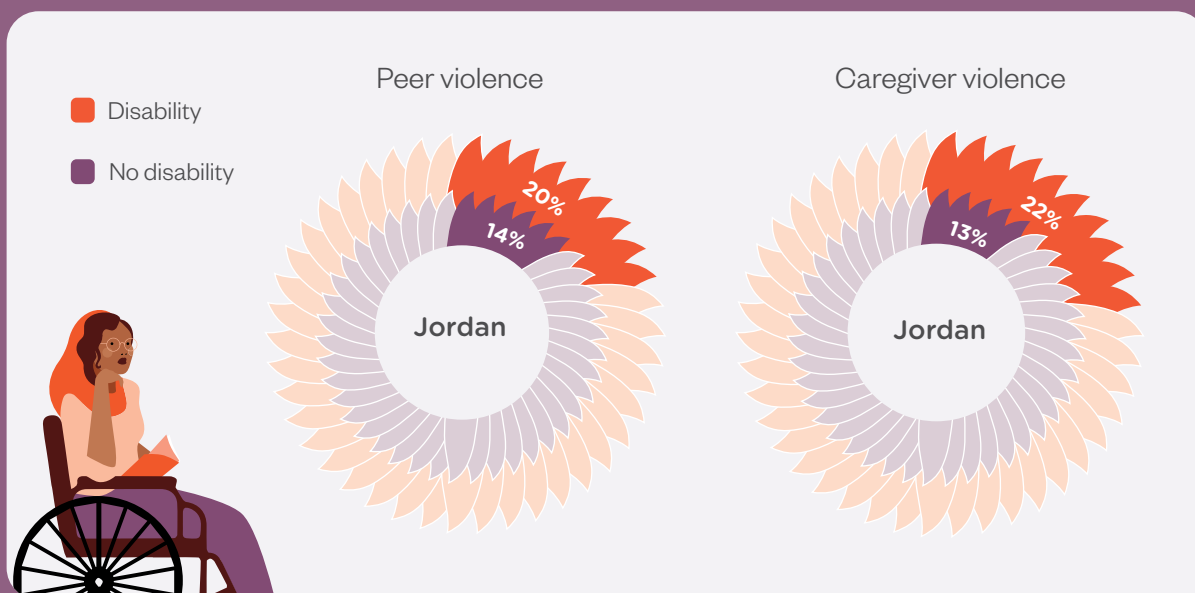


Box 2: Disability shapes the risk of violence

In Jordan (and only in Jordan), the endline survey found that young people with disabilities were more likely to experience violence at the hands of peers (20% versus 14%) and caregivers (22% versus 13%) than their peers without disabilities (see Figure 7). Qualitative research, however, found

that disability increases young people's risk of violence in all contexts, but that young people are often ashamed or embarrassed to tell the stories that paint them as incapable or unwanted. The strongest voices were usually those of young people's mothers.

Figure 7: Disability and the risk of violence in Jordan



'The boys would lock him in the classroom, and he would be on his chair, and then try to reach the door crawling, and they would laugh at him, trying to get out of the classroom crawling.'

(Syrian mother whose son has a mobility impairment, Jordan)

'Even though my father used to love me a lot, my mother had a different view of me... because I was visually impaired... She was telling me that she would dump me in town and leave me there to beg... She was not allowing me to wear shoes my father bought for me, saying that my younger brother would wear them later.'

(28-year-old young man with a vision impairment, Amhara, Ethiopia)

Sexual violence is not uncommon, but is under-reported – because it is normalised and because of victim blaming

Girls and young women were asked on the endline survey if they had ever experienced sexual violence. Because survivors are often blamed for violence – and then either ostracised or further victimised – young females were also given a way to silently report experiences with sexual violence, by placing a card in an envelope not to be opened until the end of the day. The patterning of responses speaks volumes. In Bangladesh, where most Rohingya girls and young women have severe restrictions on their mobility but do have some access to safe space programming aimed at reducing gender-based violence, 9% of

Rohingya and 2% of Bangladeshi young women admitted to having experienced sexual violence (see Figure 8). In Ethiopia, reported rates are much higher in Amhara and urban areas, where awareness is better, than in Afar or Oromia, where sexual violence is not recognised as violence because it is usually perpetrated by peers. In Jordan, Jordanian young women – whose families tend to be relatively less conservative – were twice as likely as their Syrian peers and three times as likely as their Palestinian peers to admit to having experienced sexual violence. Just as notably, more young women in Jordan refused to answer the question about sexual violence than answered affirmatively (likely due to risks related to honour crimes¹⁰); and adolescent girls, an average of four years younger than young women, were almost twice as likely to report having ever experienced sexual violence.

'We never consider unwanted touching, teasing and others as sexual violence... We consider these things as normal... Mostly they are unmarried girls.'
(23-year-old young man, Afar, Ethiopia)

'Mostly they target unmarried girls. There are bad people around.'
(22-year-old Rohingya young woman)

'We fear rape as a concept, but our greatest fear is our families.'
(17-year-old Palestinian girl, Jordan)

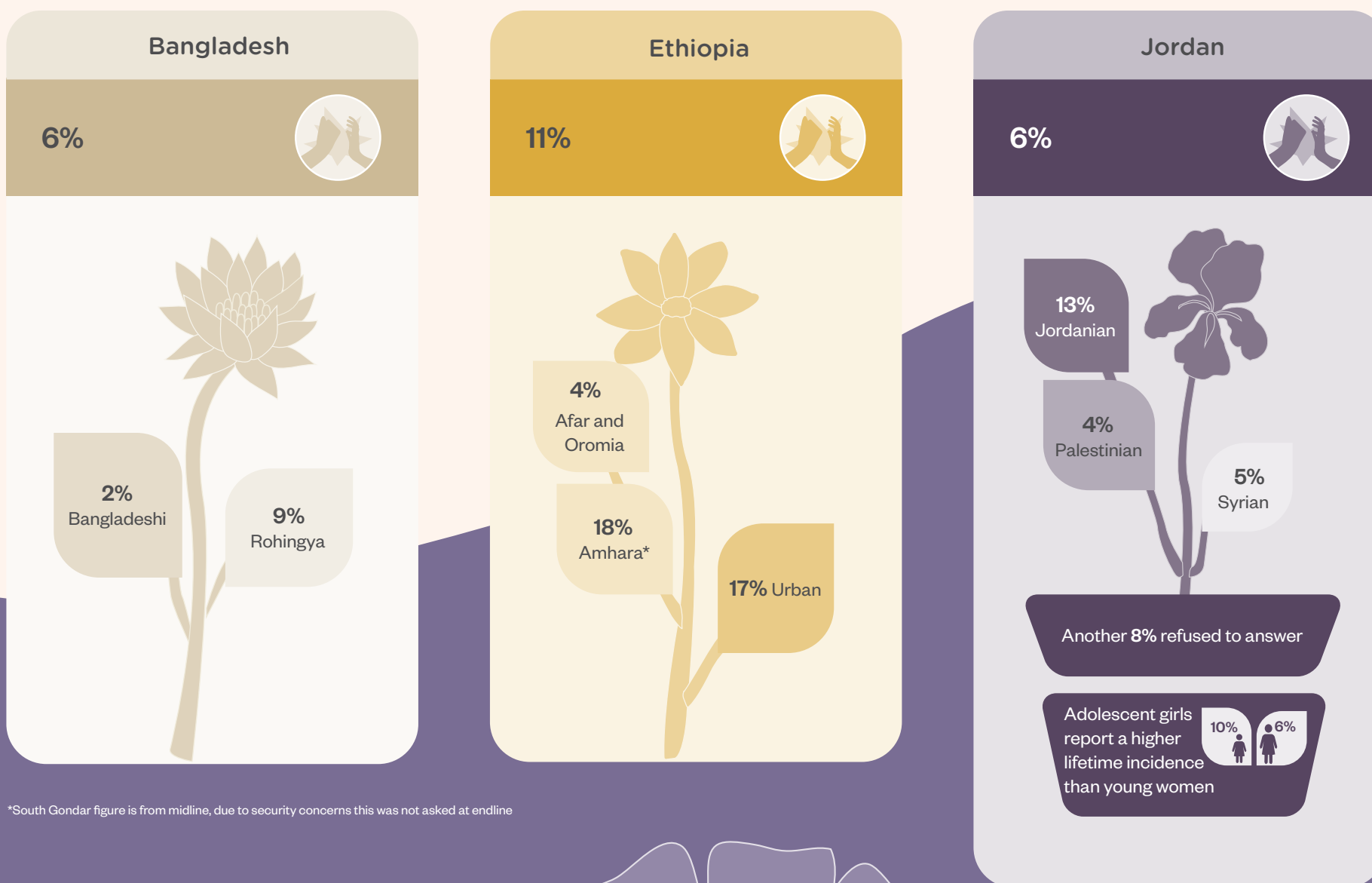


In all locations, the costs that survivors of sexual violence are made to bear are extreme. In Ethiopia, girls and young women are often made to marry their rapist. In Jordan and Lebanon, and especially among Palestinian communities, survivors are at risk of being killed by their own family, to safeguard family honour.

Sexual harassment – which is not, in any of the six contexts, considered a form of sexual violence – is rampant across contexts. Many girls and young women report unwanted sexual attention nearly every time they leave home, and especially when they are travelling to and from school, which is a major cause of dropout. Many boys and young men admit to leering at and teasing their female peers. Nearly everyone agrees that unmarried girls are never safe.

¹⁰ See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/27/recorded-honor-killings-rise-jordan>

Figure 8: Proportion of young women who report having ever experienced sexual violence



Online violence is a growing threat to young people

Across contexts, a large minority of young people have been exposed to online violence. Looking only at the young people who are online, rates are highest in Jordan, where 37% of young people have seen violent imagery, and in Ethiopia, where 21% of young people have seen hate messages directed at particular groups of people (see Figure 9).

Exposure to online sexual violence, while not as common as exposure to other forms of online violence, is a real and growing threat, especially for girls and young women. Young females are sent lewd messages, have their accounts hacked and their photos digitally altered in ways that leave them at risk at home and in their community, and are then blackmailed into sending sexual pictures.

In Jordan, young males are at greater risk of online violence than young females, primarily because they not only have more access to online spaces, but have more unfettered access (due to parents' and brothers' concerns for daughters' 'honour'). In Ethiopia, urban young people are at greater risk than their rural peers, because they spend far more time online (as the internet is difficult and expensive to access in most rural areas). In Bangladesh, gender differences are shaped by young females' much higher risk of sexual violence.

'I am telling you that the internet is full of violence.'

(21-year-old Syrian young man, Jordan)

'A few months ago, my best friend told me to get into a relationship with him. I said I wouldn't get into a relationship with him. He had some personal photos of me that he was trying to blackmail me with. He told me many things and said many things but I didn't agree with him. He told me that if you don't get into a relationship with me, I will post all your pictures on the internet.'
(19-year-old Bangladeshi young woman)

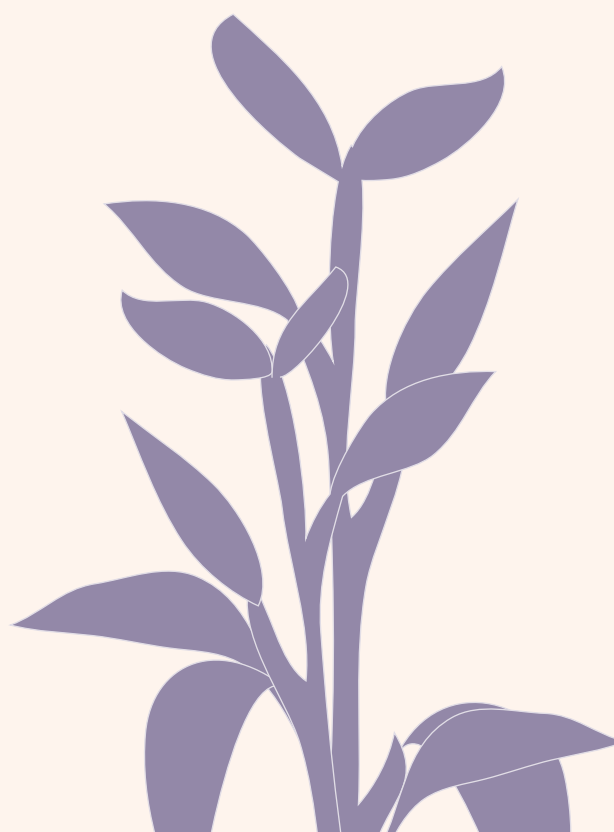
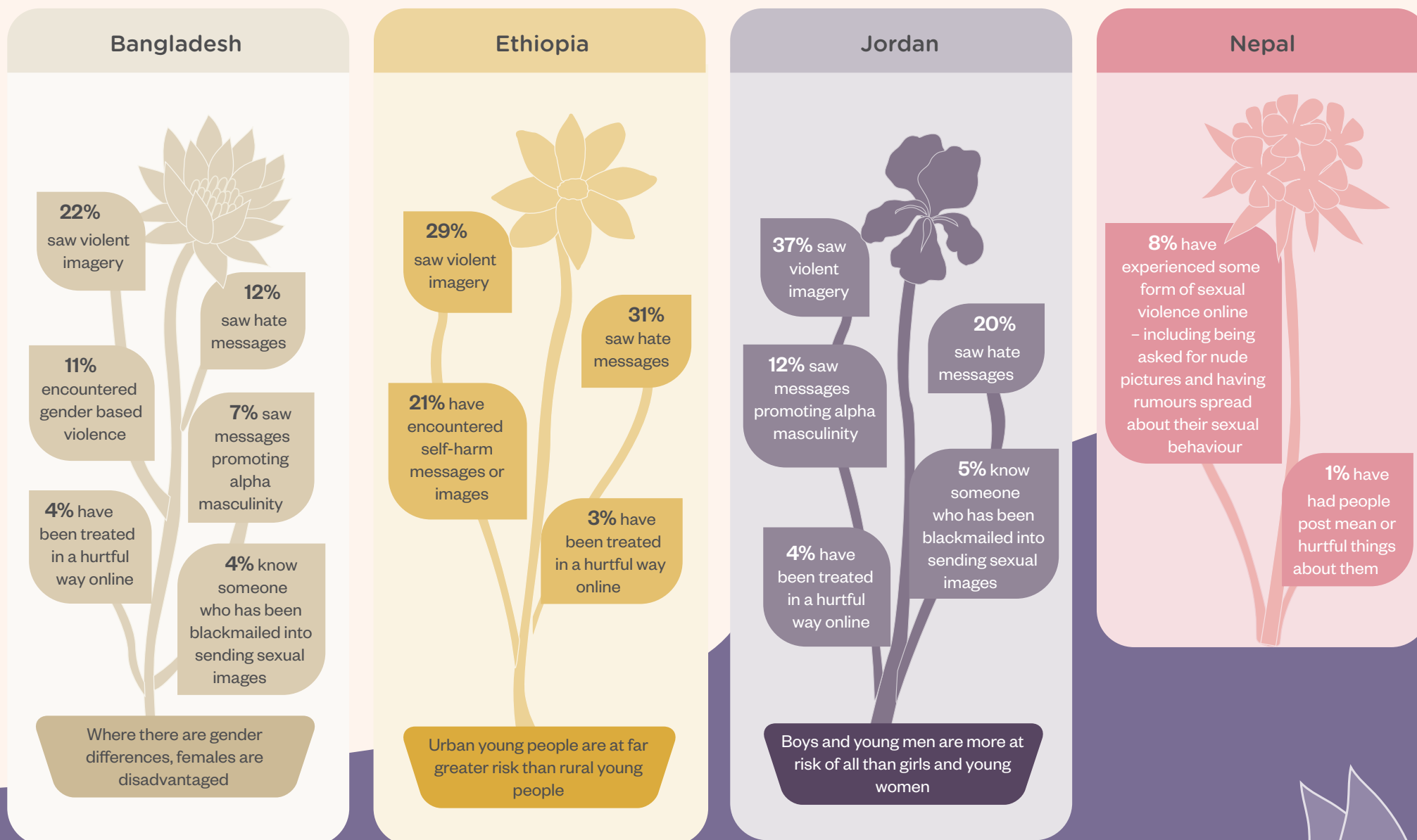


Figure 9: Young people's experiences with online violence in the past year



In Ethiopia, there are large regional differences in female genital mutilation practices and beliefs

Despite progress that is ranked among the world's strongest, girls in Ethiopia remain at high risk of FGM.¹¹ This risk is not equally distributed, and reflects Ethiopia's diversity. With the caveat that recent progress is not necessarily reflected in the GAGE sample, given that young females are an average age of 19, young females in Afar (98%) and Oromia (92%), both of which are primarily Muslim, are more likely to have undergone FGM than their peers in Amhara (61%), which is primarily Ethiopian Orthodox Christian, and in urban areas (31%), which are religiously mixed (see Figure 10).

The age at which girls underwent FGM, and the type of FGM they underwent, also varies. In Afar, most girls in the GAGE sample underwent Type 3/infibulation in infancy (with severe consequences that will last a lifetime); in Amhara, most girls underwent Type 1/clitorectomy in infancy; in Oromia, most girls underwent Type 2/excision in early adolescence; and in urban areas, practices reflect populations' diversity.

'Unless girls are circumcised, they will become rude, disobedient and will have high sexual desire, so they will engage in sexual intercourse before marriage or will not live with one husband.'
(17-year-old boy, Afar)

'Cutting is still practised, but sewing is no longer done.'
(Key informant, Dire Dawa)

Beliefs about FGM are as varied as practices and reflect not only dominant religious and cultural traditions, but also recent efforts to shift attitudes and eliminate FGM. Young people in Oromia, where few religious leaders have preached against the practice, are more likely to believe that it is required by religion than their peers in Afar. The impacts of health messaging are evident in Amhara, where most young people believe that FGM is risky, despite local practices having fewer detrimental health risks than those prevailing in other regions.

¹¹ See UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (2025) Accelerating action: 2024 report (https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2024%20FGM%20Annual%20Report_%20SEP%202025_Final.pdf)

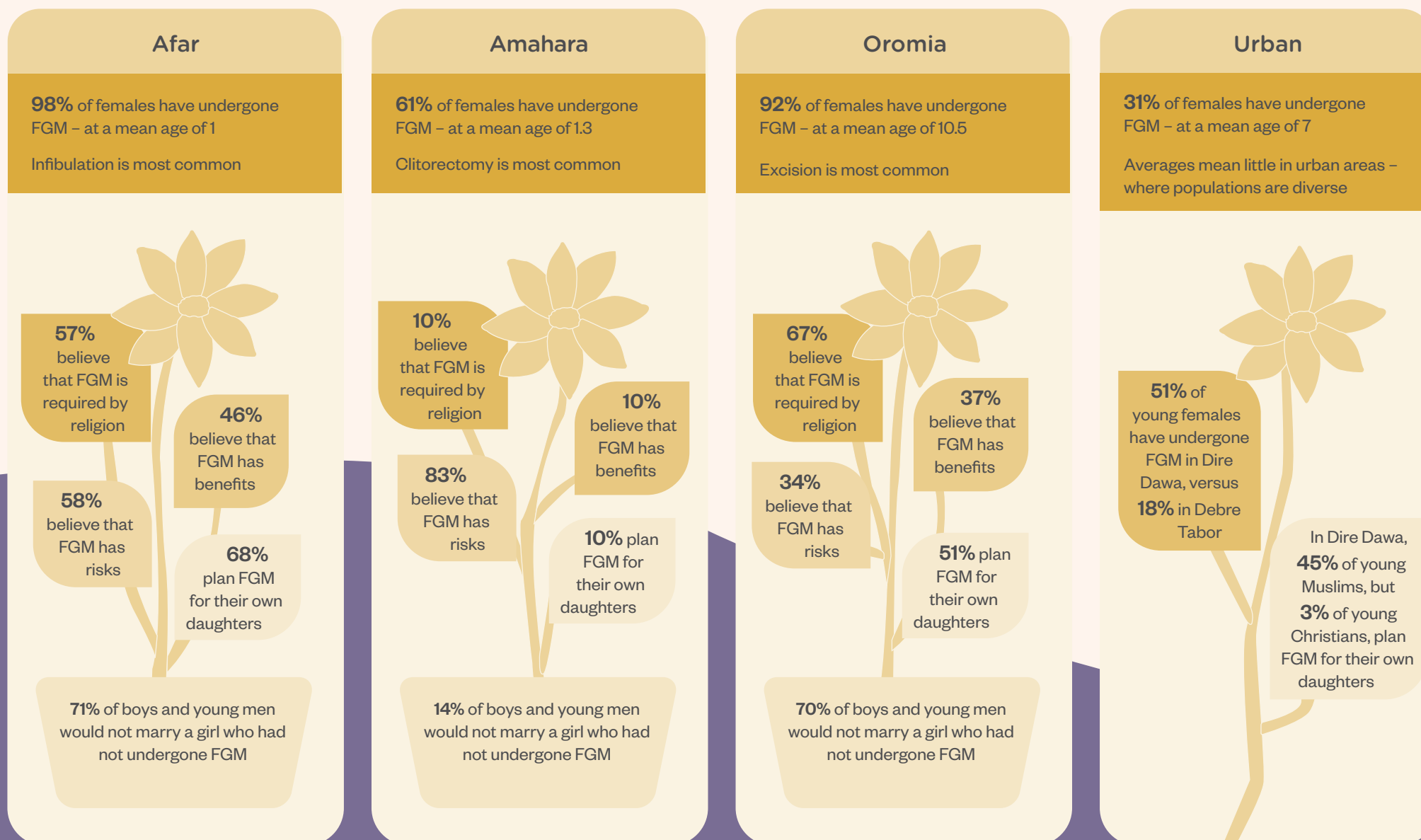
Though specific narratives vary across locations, FGM is, in all instances, primarily driven by beliefs about female sexuality. It is seen as necessary to reduce female sex drive – and to prevent girls and women from engaging in premarital and extramarital relationships. Both females and males are complicit in perpetuating FGM. Because girls who have not undergone FGM are excluded by their peers and widely seen as ineligible for marriage, mothers – and girls themselves in Oromia – are committed to FGM as a way of fostering belonging and securing girls' longer-term social and economic security. Males, and especially young males, are committed as a way to ensure their wife's fidelity.

Broader narratives suggest that there has been substantial change in some locations in recent years: in Amhara and urban areas, FGM is becoming less common; and in Afar and among urban populations, it is becoming less severe, with girls previously at risk of Type 3 more likely to undergo Type 2 and those previously at risk of Type 2 more likely to undergo Type 1.



Young women in Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026

Figure 10: Young people's experiences with and beliefs about FGM



Child marriage remains common among some groups of adolescent girls

With the caveat that not all adolescent girls had reached legal adulthood by the time of the endline survey, so rates of child marriage will continue to rise, child marriage remains common across GAGE contexts. Rates are highest in Ethiopia, where the legal age of marriage is 18 and 31% of adolescent girls had married prior to age 18 (see Figure 11). In Bangladesh and Jordan, where the legal age of marriage is 18 but there are enshrined 'legal loopholes', 28% and 11% of adolescent girls respectively had married by age 18.

In Bangladesh, Jordan and Lebanon, nearly all child marriages are arranged (often to cousins, in the case of Jordan and Lebanon). In these cases, differences between refugees' and nationals' rates of marriage are shaped by cultural preferences, especially for protecting girls' (and by extension) family honour, and by variations in economic precarity, with poorer households often choosing child marriage to reduce the number of mouths that must be fed.



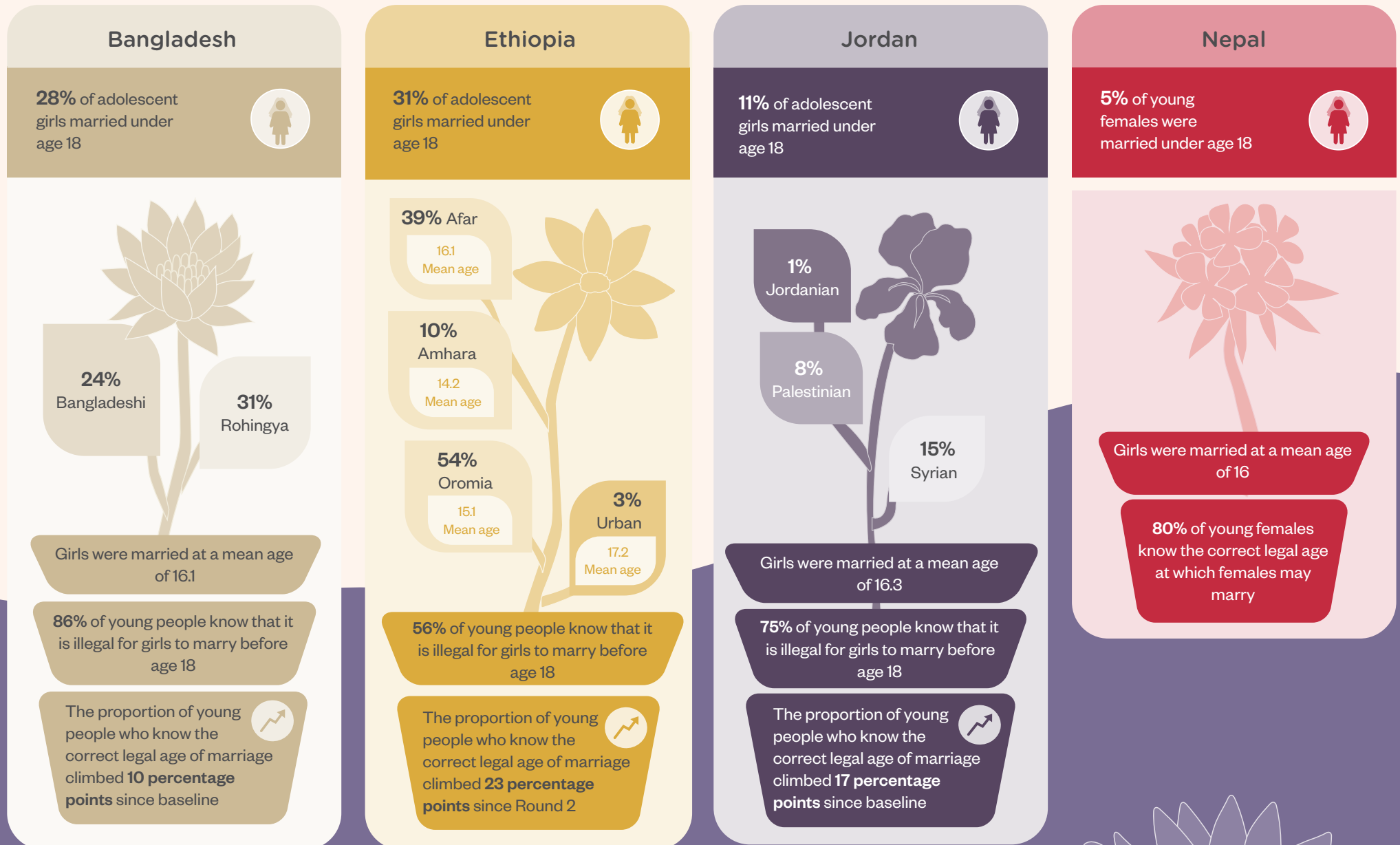
'Among the Rohingya, girls are forced to marry off when they start menstruating at the age of 12–13 because people around them spread bad rumours... When a girl grows up, her parents have to hear a lot of bad things, which is why girls are married off early.'
(21-year-old Rohingya young woman, Bangladesh)

In Ethiopia, location and gender shape attainment. In Ethiopia, child marriage rates and practices vary by location and underscore how important it is to tailor programming to local realities. Rates are lowest in urban areas, where many girls' and families have access to (and are committed to staying in) secondary and post-secondary education. They are also low in Amhara, where girls were historically married during early and middle childhood (albeit not expected to live with their husband and assume sexual relationships until after menarche) but today have better access to education and more agency to delay marriages that are still mostly arranged by their parents. Child marriage is far more common in Afar, where girls are expected to marry a maternal cousin. Oromia has the highest rate of child marriage of all GAGE study sites. It is also the sole location

where nearly all child marriages are adolescent-initiated. Starting before puberty, frequently as young as 12 or 13, girls are propositioned by boys three to four years older and who work together with male and female peers to convince girls that if they do not agree to marriage then they will be 'left on the shelf'. Girls who do not agree are often forcibly abducted, after which their parents usually refuse to allow them to come home because it is assumed that that they are no longer sexually 'pure'.

Although child marriage is common in Nepal,¹² girls and young women in the GAGE sample were unlikely to have married prior to age 18 (5%), largely because young females who married had left school and were lost to follow-up.

Figure 11: Young people's experiences with and beliefs about child marriage



Most young people do not believe that marital relationships should be equitable, and many believe that marital violence is acceptable and best kept private

Across all contexts, most young people agreed that a wife owes her husband total obedience. Rates were highest in Bangladesh (85%) and Ethiopia (84%), and (with the caveat that the sample is quite different because it is entirely female, most of whom are still enrolled in school) lowest in Nepal (62%) (see Figure 16). In Ethiopia (34%) and Bangladesh (30%), and with substantial intra-location variation shaped by culture, a large minority of young people also agreed that it is acceptable for a man to control his wife by beating her. Many young people, especially in Bangladesh (79%), also agreed that marital violence should be kept private.

'Insulting and undermining are common in this community. However, these practices are not considered as violence by most of the community. However, wife-beating or flogging is also a common form of intimate partner violence.'
(Key informant, Amhara, Ethiopia)

'It's between husband and wife. If there's no reason, then it's abuse. But if the wife makes a mistake, then she can be beaten.'
(16-year-old Rohingya boy, Bangladesh)



In Bangladesh and Jordan, beliefs about marital violence were significantly shaped by gender. In Jordan, the gender gap always leaned the same way: young males hold more inequitable beliefs than young females. In Bangladesh, this was not the case. Bangladeshi males were more likely than Bangladeshi females to believe that wife beating is acceptable. However, with the caveat that differences may reflect reporting rather than actual beliefs, Rohingya girls and young women were more likely than their male peers to support wife beating and non-disclosure, underscoring how normalised the practice is.

Figure 12: Young people's beliefs about marital violence

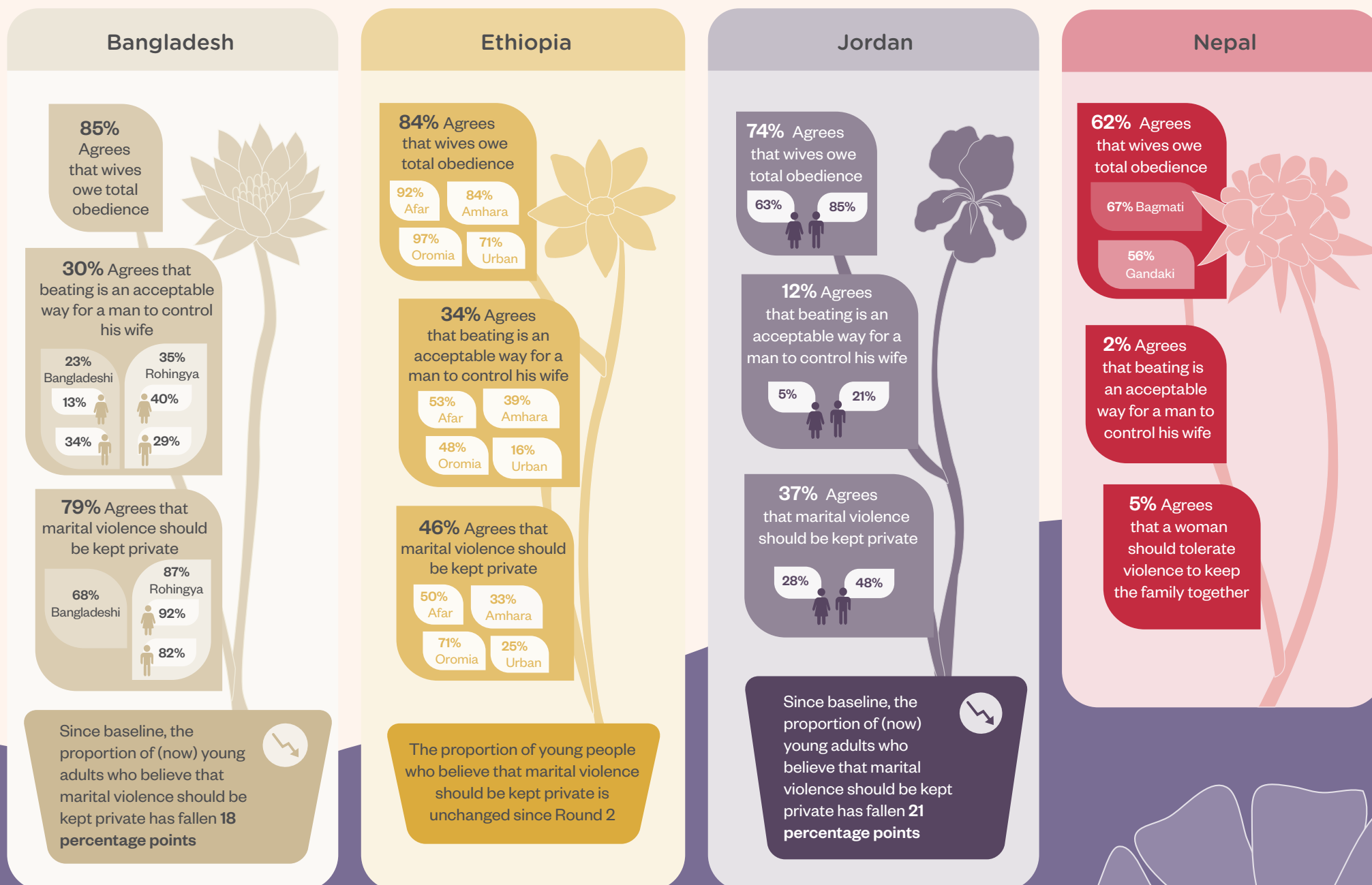
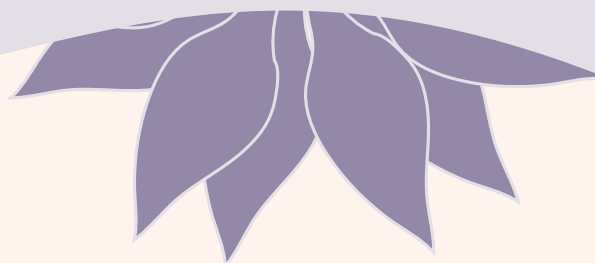


Photo story: 'Girls are always beaten'



Marital violence is very common in all marriages. Girls are always beaten, especially at their wedding day if they refuse to have sex with their husband. Husbands force their wives to sleep with them and beat her if she refuses. Insults and ignoring the woman are sometimes worse than beating. Husbands verbally and physically violate their wives over anything – if they did not like the meal, if the house is dirty, if he is angry at his work, he finds any reason to do so. Syrian girls are too weak, they are always subject to verbal and physical violence from their husband, and her family does not support her and stands with her husband. The mother is the one who pressures the girl the most and always blames her and tells her to obey her husband. Husbands are violent with the girls because they know that her family will not support and protect her.

(Photo and narrative by Jamila, an 18-year-old Syrian mother)



Most young people know where they could seek support services if experiencing violence, but few (especially young females) have done so

Approximately three-quarters of young people are aware of where they might seek help if they were to experience violence. Rates are highest in urban Ethiopia (87%), and lowest among Bangladeshi males (55%) (see Figure 13). It is rare, however, for young people to have ever sought out support services. The high (of 11%) was in Jordan. In Ethiopia and Jordan, boys and young men were three times more likely to have sought help for violence than girls and young women.

Respondents agreed that there are two primary reasons why young people stay silent and tolerate violence, even when they know where to get help: first, disclosure, which risks being subject to even more violence (this is especially the case regarding marital violence) (see Box 3); and second, shame (young people do not want to attract negative attention to their family).

'Some teachers threaten students that if they complain about him, they will send him back to Syria... The child is very afraid.'

(Teacher in a boys' school, Jordan)

'Issues related to violence are not openly reported because it is considered as shameful.'

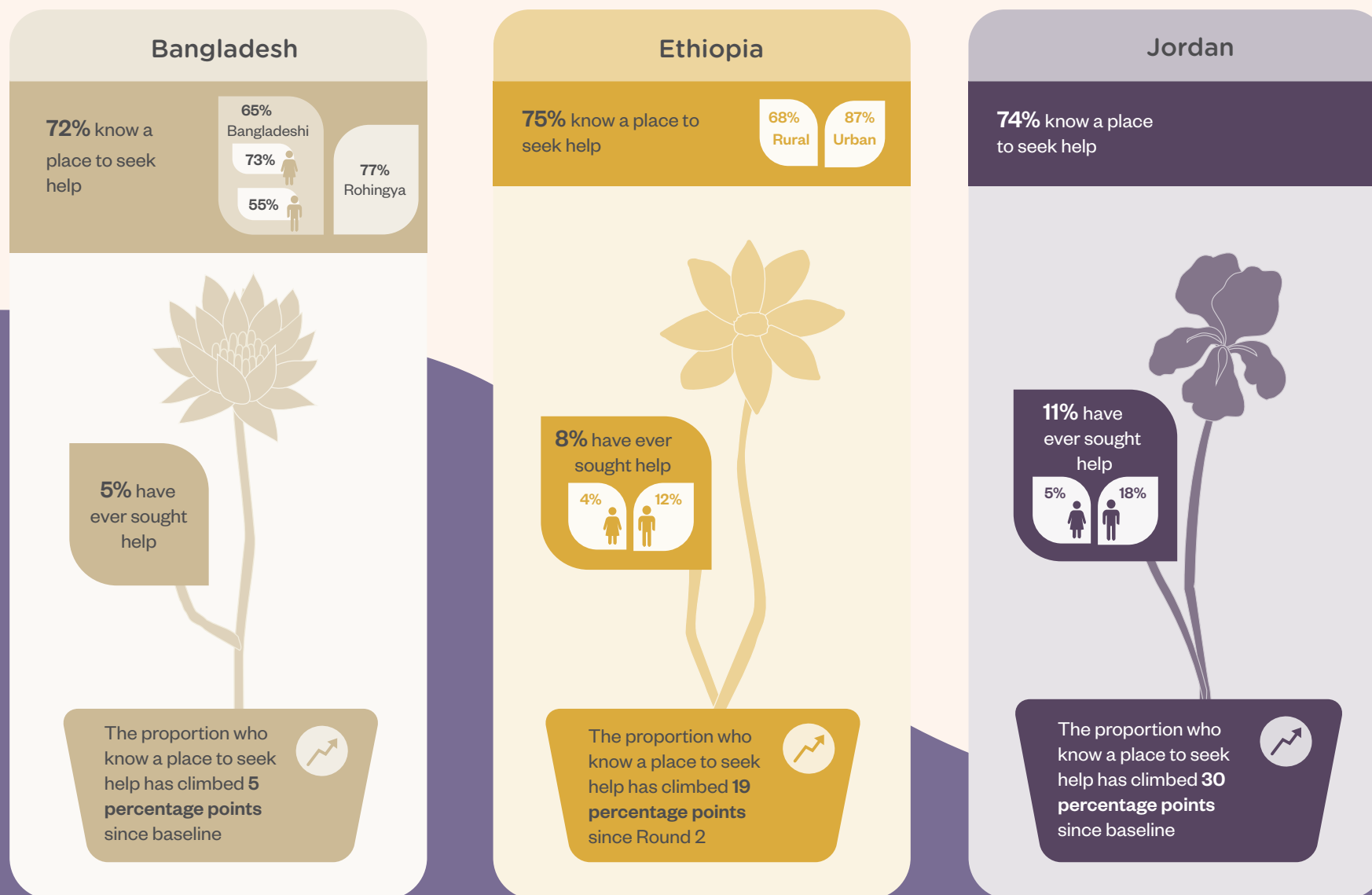
(17-year-old girl, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia)



Adolescents in Afar, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2026



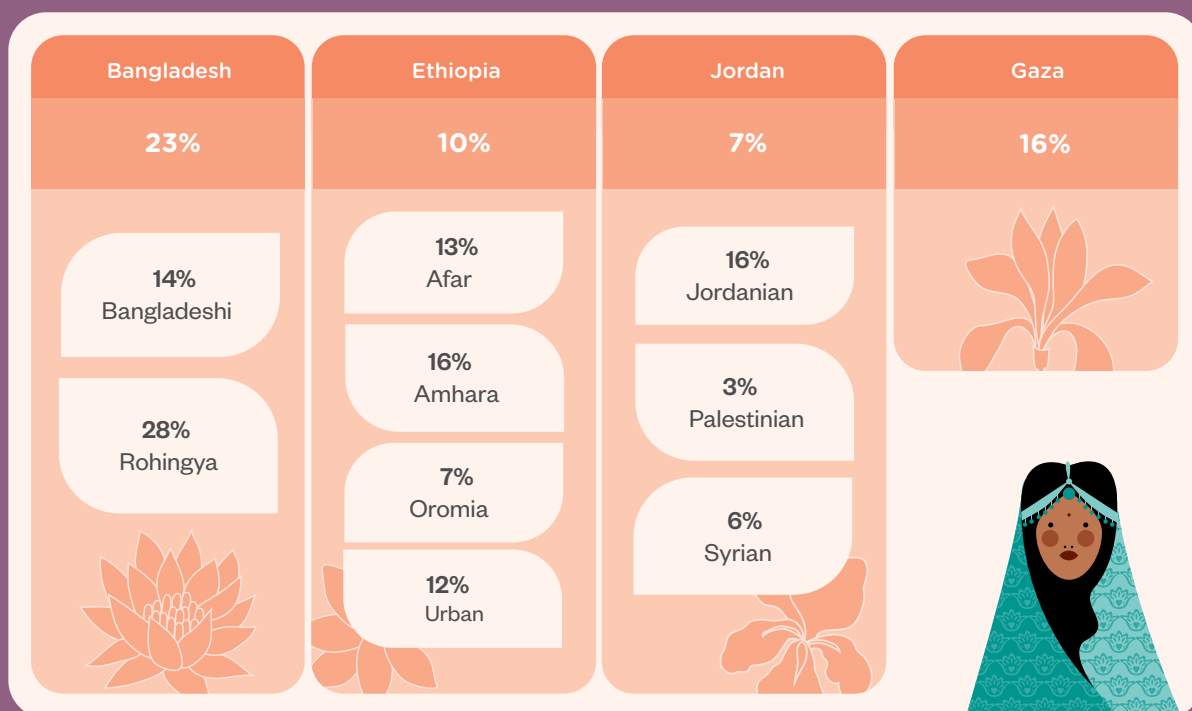
Figure 13: Young people's awareness and use of violence-support services



Box 3: Young brides are reticent to admit to marital violence until they feel safe

With the exception of young Rohingya wives (28%), many of whom have been exposed to programming designed to reduce gender-based violence (programming is provided in female-only safe spaces), it was unusual for young brides to report on the survey having ever experienced physical violence at the hands of their husband. This was not, however, the case in qualitative interviews, where, over time, disclosure of marital violence became common. Young wives agreed that violence is meted out for myriad reasons, can be severe, and is usually kept private, because disclosure risks escalation – especially in contexts where natal families are not supportive due to parents' efforts to protect their own reputation in the community, and where informal justice is the norm.

Figure 14: Proportion of young brides reporting physical violence at the hands of their husband

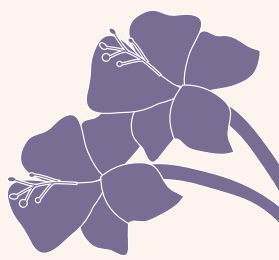


'There is a community office [to report violence], but if we drag it there, I fear our respect will get lessened in society. My husband will also be shamed, and I'd feel bad... Because I didn't have a father while growing up, I know the importance of a father. I can't let the kids suffer the same fate. That's why I bottle up my issues, problems, or suffering within me. I want all our well-being.'

(20-year-old Rohingya mother, Bangladesh)



Conclusions and implications for policy and programming



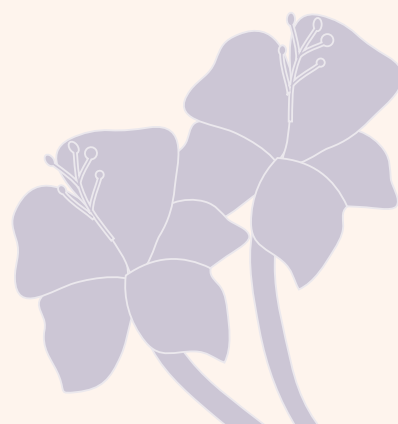
Across contexts, GAGE's endline research finds that violence against young people is both pervasive and under-reported. Many young people continue to experience violence at home, with young females at risk from both caregivers and brothers; corporal punishment by teachers remains common, particularly for boys; and although bullying has declined over time, it has been replaced by more dangerous gang-related youth violence, driven by high unemployment rates that are preventing young males from assuming adult roles. Sexual violence is under-reported everywhere – because it is normalised, because survivors are blamed, and (in some contexts) because disclosure risks honour killings. Online violence is a growing threat, particularly sexual harassment targeting girls and young women. Child marriage remains common, is shaped by both poverty and social norms (because girls' sexual purity is seen as important to family 'honour'), and is not always adult-driven. Despite evidence that FGM is becoming 'less severe' over time, in Muslim areas of Ethiopia, the practice remains the norm due to social and religious norms about female sexuality. Most young people believe that a wife owes her husband total obedience, a large minority consider that marital violence is acceptable, and most believe it should be kept private – which means that marital violence is among the least likely forms of violence to be disclosed. Young people with disabilities face elevated risk across all forms of violence and are less likely to know where to seek help. Conflict adds further risk, increasing stress on households, disrupting access to services, and discouraging reporting,



To prevent and redress young people's exposure to violence, GAGE research suggests the following:

- ✱ **Raise young people's awareness of their right to bodily integrity and how and where to seek help should they need it**, using school- and community based venues, including mass and social media campaigns. Campaigns should directly address the shame that breeds silence.
- ✱ **Develop parenting education courses for parents of adolescent-aged children that teach alternative discipline strategies**, and address gender norms and how these impact expectations (including about young females' behaviour) and violence over the life course. Courses should also address sibling violence and how caregivers can reduce this, and also emphasise that parents' obligations to their daughters do not end at marriage.
- ✱ **Provide young people with school- and community-based programming aimed at reducing peer violence, sexual and gender-based violence (including marital violence)**, and online violence, while exposing young males to positive masculinities and empowering young females to recognise and protect themselves from myriad forms of violence.

- ✱ **Provide teachers, school counsellors, and health care providers with training on how to recognise and respond to the signs of violence**, including on when and how they should refer young people to protection services.
- ✱ **Reduce violence at school** by educating teachers on non-violent discipline strategies, ensuring that students and parents have a way to (anonymously) report violators, and seeing that repeat offenders are fired. Pair this with stepped-up training on how to prevent and respond to bullying.
- ✱ **Engage with communities, parents and young people to raise awareness that sexual violence – regardless of whether it is in person or online – is not the fault of victims** and should be reported.
- ✱ **In Ethiopia, work to reduce FGM** by engaging with religious and traditional leaders to develop messages and programming tailored to local norms, and by engaging with health professionals to ensure that the growing trend of medicalised FGM is halted.
- ✱ **Step up efforts to prevent child marriage**, raising awareness of its harms, working to keep girls in school as long as possible, and closing legal loopholes and/or prosecuting the adults involved, depending on context.
- ✱ **Reduce marital violence by providing engaged and newly married couples with programming** aimed at teaching communication skills and raising awareness about gender norms and how these impact relationships.
- ✱ **Scale up medical, legal and psychosocial survivor services.**
- ✱ **Engage with communities to reduce the stigma that surrounds disability.** Pair this with psychosocial support for the parents of young people with disabilities, to reduce their stress levels.
- ✱ **In conflict-affected contexts, step up the provision of psychosocial support services** aimed at reducing stress and processing trauma.





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About GAGE

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a decade-long (2016-2026) longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit www.gage.odi.org for more information.

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