Literature review

The Transitions Adolescent Girls Face: Education in Conflict-Affected Settings

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Contents:

Introduction

This literature review approaches the field of *education in conflict-affected settings* to serve an important yet understudied area: the transitions and challenges facing adolescent girls. In this review, the term *conflict-affected settings* is used to describe three types of contexts. These include: settings where adolescent girls live in nations affected by direct conflict, contexts of displacement in refugee-hosting nations, and post-conflict settings. The distinct experiences and challenges of each are distinguished clearly within the review.

Data related to adolescent girls within conflict-affected settings and the distinct experiences and challenges they face is scarce. The interdisciplinary and sporadic nature of the available literature also undermines our understanding of the subject. This review therefore seeks to provide a more focused and comprehensive evaluation by bringing together literature from the field of education in emergencies, in addition to relevant studies in addition to relevant studies from other fields, such as health and development. For example, the review also includes challenges facing adolescent girls in development contexts not directly affected by conflict. The ways in which these challenges are further exacerbated by conflict and displacement are demonstrated and discussed. Lastly, while this review attempts to include empirical studies, much of the data is based on reports provided by practitioners and organisations such as the United Nations. Today, the majority of data and research in the field of emergency education are provided by these organisations working directly on the ground. The limited amount of empirical data available marks a prominent gap in the field (Burde et al., 2017). This review finds this rift in the field even more alarming with regards to adolescent girls' education.

The Transitions

The review comprises four transitions that girls in conflict zones may go through during their adolescent years. These transitions are based on a review of theory and literature in the field, categorised to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which each set of challenges may impact girls' prospects of educational attainment, well-being, and futures.

These transitions are:

- from one educational system to another
- from school to the workplace
- from and to school
- from child to wife and mother

Overview: Secondary Education in Conflict-Affected Zones

Education in emergencies was initially developed as a response to the rising number of conflicts and humanitarian crises. Studies and reports recognised the implications of conflict on the security of children more seriously. Additionally, the negative effects of conflict on educational attainment was identified as a major impediment to meeting the Education for All framework, which set out to provide basic education for all children by 2015.

The ground-breaking study by Graça Machel (1996) was the first of its kind to report the repercussions of armed conflict on the lives of children. As a result of increased awareness, the Dakar Framework for Action re-instated its commitment to the Education for All Framework in 2000, officially recognising the need to address conflict and emergency settings (Tawil & Harley, 2004). It was after this point that education in emergencies was defined as its own category and as an urgent part of humanitarian response agendas (Burde et al., 2017). Following this, education in emergencies was identified as activities that provide structured education for children who are unable to receive normal schooling due to conflict or natural disasters (Nicolai, 2003). However, this review focuses on education within settings affected by armed conflict only.

Recently, the destructive nature of civil wars have resulted in higher casualties, greater loss of infrastructure, and growing targeting and exploitation of vulnerable civilians than ever before (Mundy & Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2013). These developments have majorly contributed to increased awareness, making education in conflict-affected settings a key and urgent part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Gender, age, and the quality of education for children living in conflict-affected countries have also been recognised as important points of discussion.

Today, there is a pressing need to support adolescent girls living in conflict-affected zones to access and complete secondary education. Despite efforts to improve gender disparity at all levels of education, only two out of 130 countries have been able to achieve this (UN, 2015c). The issue of gender disparity at school is more prominent in secondary education. When girls complete primary education, they often have the same chances as boys in accessing secondary school. However, far fewer girls complete secondary education. In 2011, 69 million adolescents of lower secondary age were not in school. Over 20 million were living within conflict-affected zones, 55 per cent of whom were female. Despite these alarming numbers, the UNHCR only has one-third of the budget it spends on primary education dedicated to secondary education (UNHCR, 2016).

The impact of conflict on girls' educational attainment is alarming. Overall, young women living in conflict-affected areas are 90 per cent more likely to be out of secondary school than elsewhere (UNESCO, 2015). Living in conflict-affected zones halves the likelihood of adolescent children completing secondary school. For example, in 47 out of 54 African countries, girls have less than a 50 per cent chance of going to secondary school. In Pakistan, only 15 per cent of girls complete secondary education, in comparison with 23 per cent of boys (UNESCO, 2011). In Chad, there were twice as many boys in secondary school as girls (UNESCO, 2011).

The forthcoming sections provide a comprehensive review of the key factors which have contributed to adolescent girls' low educational attainment, reviewing the challenges which research and humanitarian assistance agendas must seek to address.
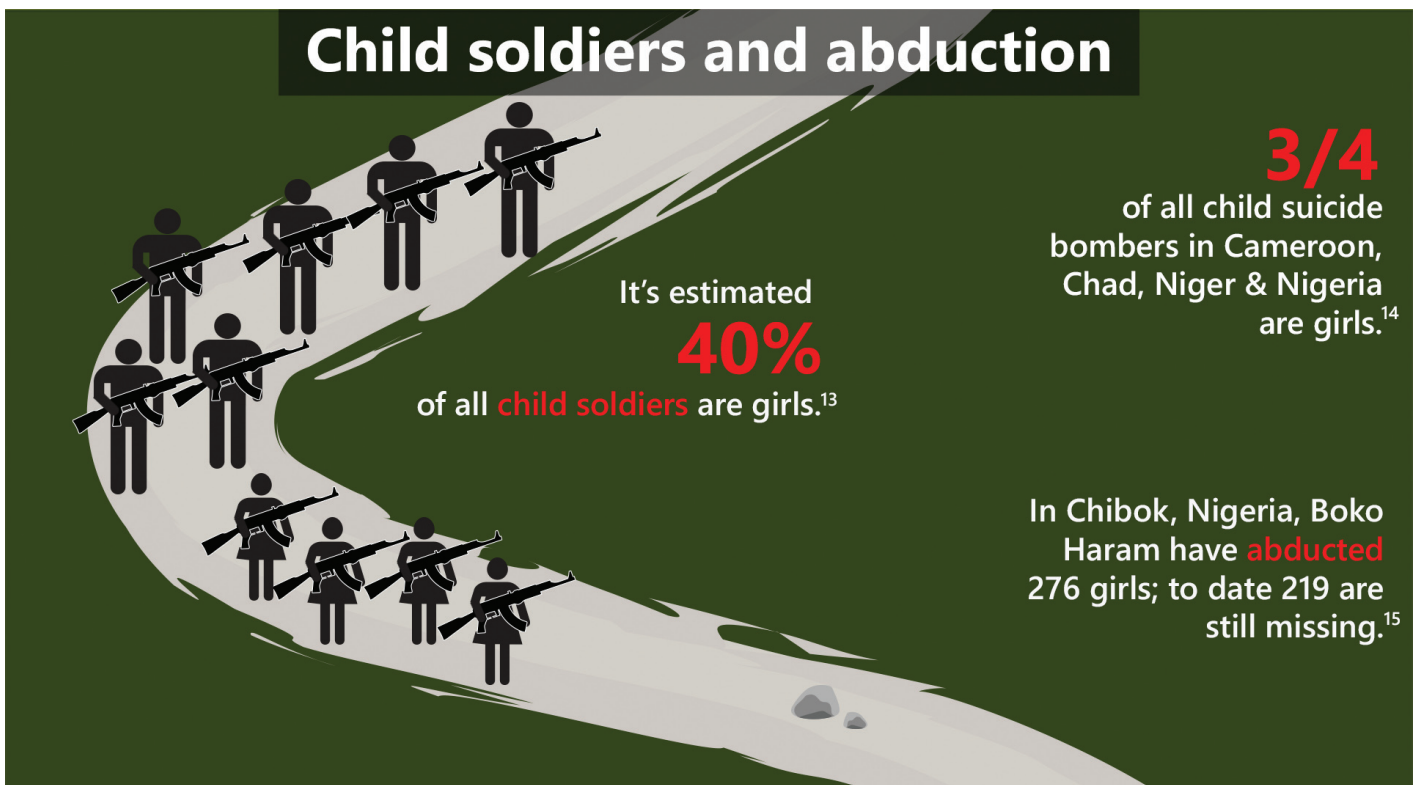
Transition 1: Moving Between Educational Systems

Children and adolescents affected by conflict may transition between education systems, including those within settings of conflict, displacement, and post-conflict. The transitions between these systems, and the distinct experiences and challenges of each, can directly impact students' likelihoods of continuing their education. Additionally, gender and its implications within societies and cultures also becomes prominent across these transitions. Current research demonstrates the importance of further exploring the needs of adolescent girls at these different stages. By assessing each of these stages individually, gender equality may be better supported by seeking to create opportunities for gender role protection and transformation (Gaag, 2013).

1.1 Amidst Conflict

Students living within conflict-affected countries may face limited and erratic access to education due to on-going violence and destruction. Inside Syria, over 2.2 million children did not attend the 2012-2013 school year due to dangerous roads, arrests and political unrest within classrooms, and overcrowded classrooms as a result of internal displacement and destroyed facilities (Human Rights Watch, 2011; UNICEF, 2013). Additionally, conflict leads to a high percentage of internal displacement where citizens are forced flee their homes but continue to live within the borders of their own country. Globally, there are over 33.2 million displaced persons, half of whom are women (Brookings Institution, 2014). Internally displaced girls and women may arguably be the most vulnerable groups of armed conflicts, excluded from assistance, lacking documentation, and susceptible to gender-based violence.

The challenges of completing education within conflict-affected zones stretch far beyond issues of access and facilities. The breakdown of social and political structures leaves both boys and girls vulnerable to exploitation and the effects of violence. The need to protect men continues to be urgent, with far too many at risk of being affected by direct violence and involvement in armed groups. However, the alarming and increasing number of attacks on girls and vulnerable women calls for additional measures of protection and assessment. Equally, further research is required to understand what best works within these contexts. For example, some studies have demonstrated that community-based education may have positive effects on girls' levels of educational attainment within settings where formal schools are inaccessible (Burde & Linden, 2013), but this must be assessed further.

Child soldiers and abduction

It's estimated **40%** of all child soldiers are girls.[13]

3/4 of all child suicide bombers in Cameroon, Chad, Niger & Nigeria are girls.[14]

In Chibok, Nigeria, Boko Haram have abducted 276 girls; to date 219 are still missing.[15]

The link between violence and education may be used as an opportunity or a threat. Research shows that youth without access to education may be more likely to engage in armed conflict (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008). Education can therefore be transformative, reducing conflict by providing youth with protection, stability, and opportunities (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2013). However, if conflict erupts, education is also likely to prevent educational attainment. For example, in recent conflicts, schools have become the targets of armed groups as they provide useful resources, such as housing and facilities (van Wessel & van Hirtum, 2013). The targeting of schools directly threatens girls' educations, as in the case of Nepal, where educational attainment and safety for girls were gravely impacted by child abduction (Valente, 2011).

In recent years alone, attacks on girls' schools have included: over 300 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria in 2014, multiple attacks on girls' schools in Pakistan preventing over 120,000 girls from attending school in 2007, several acid attacks on girls' schools in Afghanistan, and the abduction of schoolgirls in Somalia (Bader, Coursen-Neff, & Hassan, 2012; GCPEA, 2014; HRW, 2017). Girls and young women may be trafficked or abducted due to economic, sexual, or military involvement (UN, 2011). These crimes not only threaten gender equality and prevent equal access to education, but are commonly followed by further harm such as forcing girls and women to become the 'wives' of militant or armed men, be exploited into forced labour for armed groups, or to be exposed to sexual violence. Female soldiers may entertain troops, gather information from other villages or groups through sexual abuse, or be involved as fighters (Spellings, 2008). Today, up to 40 per cent of child soldiers are girls (UN, 2015a).

The experiences of adolescent girls living amid areas of armed conflict remains predominantly understudied. One study that provides insight into the experiences of female child soldiers is a review by Carolyn Spellings (2008) which examines 48 empirical studies published between 1999 – 2008. The study identifies adolescence as the primary age of girl soldiers (Spellings, 2008). Additionally, while abduction may be distinguished as the most common reason girls become affiliated with armed groups, poverty also increases the risks of trafficking. The need to find basic needs such as food and shelter may leave children with little choice but to join armed groups. Furthermore, other factors may influence a girl's decision to join, such as in Ethiopia where girls joined armed groups to avoid early marriage arrangements (Veale, 2003). However, this scarcity of data represents the silence and invisibility of their suffering despite increased attacks.

1.2 Displacement

Adolescent girls may be forced to flee their country as a result of conflict, accompanied by their families or on their own. The journey that begins after displacement is paved with challenges, risks, and a possible transition into an alternative educational system.

Journey to Displacement

Displacement is a journey shaped by numerous difficulties and threats, including unprotected travel, lack of documentation, separation from family, and lack of stability. On route, displaced adolescent girls may face heightened risks of sexual physical and assault as well as trafficking. As a result of recent illegal travel measures, girls and women may be threatened and exploited by smugglers, forced to travel alone, use single-sex latrine facilities, or sleep alone within the same camps or areas as hundreds of men (Weiss, 2016).

Upon arriving to the destination or the refugee-hosting nation, the asylum-seeking process begins. The length and ease of the procedures that follow vary according to the regulations of the refugee-hosting nation. Individuals seeking asylum may wait years for the receiving nation's decision, afforded only limited rights (Zetter, 2007). While all asylum-seeking children have the universal right to education, access to educational services is often unattainable until a legal decision regarding their refugee status has been made (Pinson et al., 2010). Adolescents are therefore unable to return to their education, vulnerable to their lawless and unprotected states. As migrants may also be forced to flee without their documentation, access to education also becomes more limited due to policy regulations. For adolescent girls, this disruption may lead to a permanent end to their education as alternate factors and prospects, including marriage, housework, and security may threaten their ability to return to school.

Education in Displacement: the Numbers

Educational efforts for refugees are often seen as a temporary response to emergencies. However, the average length of time a refugee is displaced for is now over 20 years (UNHCR, 2016). The number of displaced people has the highest level ever recorded, with over 59.5 million people displaced by the end of 2015 (The World Bank, 2014; UNHCR, 2015). Over 14 million refugees and internally displaced persons are children between the ages of 3 to 15, and only 1 in 4 is attending lower secondary education. Globally, for every ten refugee boys in secondary school, there are fewer than seven refugee girls (UNHCR, 2016).

These numbers are alarmingly low within certain contexts. In Pakistan, only 23 per cent of Afghan refugee girls attend primary school, in comparison to 47 per cent of Afghan boys. Around 90 per cent of Afghan refugee girls dropout in some areas, making it very unlikely that refugee girls continue into secondary education (UNHCR, 2016).

Today, 86 per cent of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries. More than half of the world's refugees are under the age of 18. Many of these countries already struggle to fully support their own citizens, making it difficult for new challenges to be met with long-term and sustainable solutions (UNHCR, 2015a). More than half of the world's out-of-school refugee children are located in seven countries: Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan and Turkey. These nations are burdened by a relentless demand for additional educational spaces and trained teachers to help accommodate for the diversity of students, who may speak different languages of instructions and have missed years of schooling (UNHCR, 2016). As a result, education for refugees is largely supported by emergencies funds and is therefore not approached with long-term planning (UNHCR, 2016). These limitations fall short in providing educational opportunities for refugees. Only 22 per cent of refugees attend secondary education in comparison to the global 84 percent of non-refugee adolescents attending secondary schools (UNHCR, 2016).

Challenges for Adolescent Girls

Refugees live within camp settings, hosting communities, or remain on-the-move due to financial and political instability. Within these settings, the educational experiences of adolescent refugee girls vary according to issues of accreditation, distance to schools, poverty, safety, and financial aid opportunities. As outlined in this literature review, poverty and distance to school may amplify negative coping strategies and cultural gender norms. Studies have provided strong evidence of the increased dropout rates, child marriage, and sexual exploitation among adolescent refugee girls.

Adolescent girls may have missed months or years of education during the asylum-seeking process, the legal permit to access school, and financial grants to help support families. This interruption has huge consequences on adolescent girls. In cases where this disruption results in different age groups attending one grade level, older boys in a classroom may raise concerns for girls and their parents (Burde et al., 2017). Other challenges also threaten girls' likelihood of continuing their education. Language barriers within the new educational system can be challenging. Education for refugees may also vary and can be formal, informal, or non-formal. Concerns over the quality and accreditation of these educational attainments, and whether they will translate to certified and transferable skills when returning to their country of origin, may limit parents' determination to send their girls to school as the return on investment may be perceived as low (UNHCR, 2016). These difficulties can discourage families and adolescent girls from returning to their education, especially when influenced by cultural norms.

1.3 Post-Conflict

The experiences of adolescent girls and women in post-conflict settings are overwhelmingly understudied. However, research suggests that education in post-conflict settings is essential to creating opportunities to advance women's rights. If these opportunities are not assessed, post-conflict settings can further discriminate against women.

Rejection and Discrimination Post-Conflict

This report has outlined the repercussions of conflict on adolescent girls, including sexual assault, pregnancy, and HIV. Girls may be trafficked, kidnapped, or forced into child marriage, which can lead to missed years of education, early motherhood, and ailment as a result of sexual assault. Psychosocial support services are essential to helping adolescent girls recover and improve their well-being. However, studies have revealed that in many post-conflict affected settings, girls who have been exposed to these crimes are often rejected by their societies. In post-war Sierra Leone, sexually assaulted girls were excluded, beaten, and marginalised (Buss, Lebert, Rutherford, Sharkey, & Aginam, 2014).

The kidnapping case in Nigeria is a prime example of the complexities and challenges adolescent girls my face in returning to their societies. In 2014, Boko Haram, an extremist militant group based in Nigeria, kidnapped 276 adolescent girls from their school in Borno State (Segun et al., 2014). Over the last months, a small portion of girls have managed to flee their abductors or have been released. Many of these adolescent girls faced rejection by society due to social and cultural norms related to sexual violence (International Alert & UNICEF, 2016). The need for specialised health treatment, post-trauma counselling, and non-discriminative educational access is therefore essential to helping victims reintegrate into society.

Long-Term Security

Education in post-conflict settings is viewed as an important opportunity to help overcome the consequences of armed conflict and help establish security (Buss et al., 2014). Post-conflict settings provide strategic opportunities for new legislative policies which reduce discrimination against women and provide equal opportunities of participation and decision-making (UN, 2013). Of the seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa which recently passed new rights to reduce discrimination and also increased women's representation in parliament, five were considered post-conflict settings (Ward & UN Women, 2013). The experiences of women and their participation in decision-making is essential to these procedures and transformations (Ward & UN Women, 2013). These settings may therefore further encourage the education and participation of young women.

Transition 2: Commuting and Unsafe Schools

School is a universal right essential to the well-being and livelihood of all children. However, within conflict-affected countries, commuting to school may pose dangers that threaten the safety of adolescent girls. During conflict, social and institutional structures are weakened, accountability is neglected, and gender-based violence is heightened (Greene et al., 2013). The consequences of violence are grave and affect dropout rates, physical harm, and psychological trauma. As limited law enforcements exist in emergencies, there are often no legal consequences or repercussions for gender-based violence (Save the Children, 2014a). These breakdowns of law and social norms also increase parents' concerns about a girl's safety on the way to school and within school (Kirk, 2011).

Unsafe schools

There were
17x
more attacks on schools in 2014 than 2000.[4]

There were
3x
more attacks on girls' schools in 2014 than boys' schools.[5]

1/4
of schools in Syria have been destroyed, damaged or are occupied.[6]

2.1 Commuting to Schools Amidst Conflict

The commute and distance taken to reach schools poses grave risks. Since 2009, schools in 30 countries have been directly attacked or used for military purposes amidst armed conflict. It is estimated that in 14 countries, these attacks were specific to girls (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). Distance to and from school therefore becomes one of the greatest barriers to girls' enrolment. In Afghanistan, for every extra mile of distance between home and school, girls' attendance decreases by 19 per cent (Burde & Linden, 2013). Similarly, in Pakistan, half a kilometre of distance between home and schools reduces a girl's likelihood of attending school by 20 per cent (UN Women, 2012)

As armed conflicts shape the new form of warfare, there is an evident rise in the targeting of schools. In Syria, at least 25 per cent of schools have been damaged, destroyed, or are occupied by armed groups (OCHA, 2015). While GBV is heightened in any conflict-affected setting, adolescent girls are at particularly high risk if their schools are either located around, or are being used by, armed forces or groups. Armed groups may also target girls' education, as in the case of Pakistan, where the Taliban banned female education and sought to force 900 schools from allowing female students to attend school (OCHA, 2015).

Within conflict-affected areas, studies have shown that additional schools in villages may have a significantly positive effect on girls' enrolments (Lloyd et al., 2005; Burde & Linden, 2013b). In Afghanistan, a study by Burde & Linden (2013) shows that a school placed in a village increases girls' enrolment rates by 52 per cent. This study was conducted in the Ghor Province of Afghanistan, which despite not being directly affected by the ongoing war, shared the same security challenges as rural areas in Afghanistan including lawlessness, tribal conflict, and limited support services (Burde & Linden, 2013).

Sexual Violence as a Response to Lawless Structures

Where schools are still be accessible, sexual violence and harassment on the way to school and within school may prevent adolescent girls from attending (Greene et al., 2013). Sexual abuse may also take place within school and may be perpetuated by classmates and educators (Buss et al., 2014). Within contexts of displacement, sexual abuse is heightened as a response to weakened protective regulations.

Due to these instabilities, girls are also at risk of being forced into child marriage. Data shows that one of the main reasons Syrian refugee parents choose arranged marriages for their daughters is to protect "their honour", a response to the fear and insecurities perpetuated by contexts of displacement (Save the Children, 2014b; Spencer, 2015).

Sexual Violence and Adolescence

Transitioning into adolescence entails physical and psychological changes and developments, emphasising the divide in gender at a time when adolescents begin to embrace gender norms within their society (Save the Children, 2015). This transition marks a time of physical change and a shift in familial and societal expectations. Without protective measures, adolescent girls may become vulnerable to social, physical, and economic exploitation. These threats are heightened in low-income and conflict-affected countries where resources and societal support are minimal.
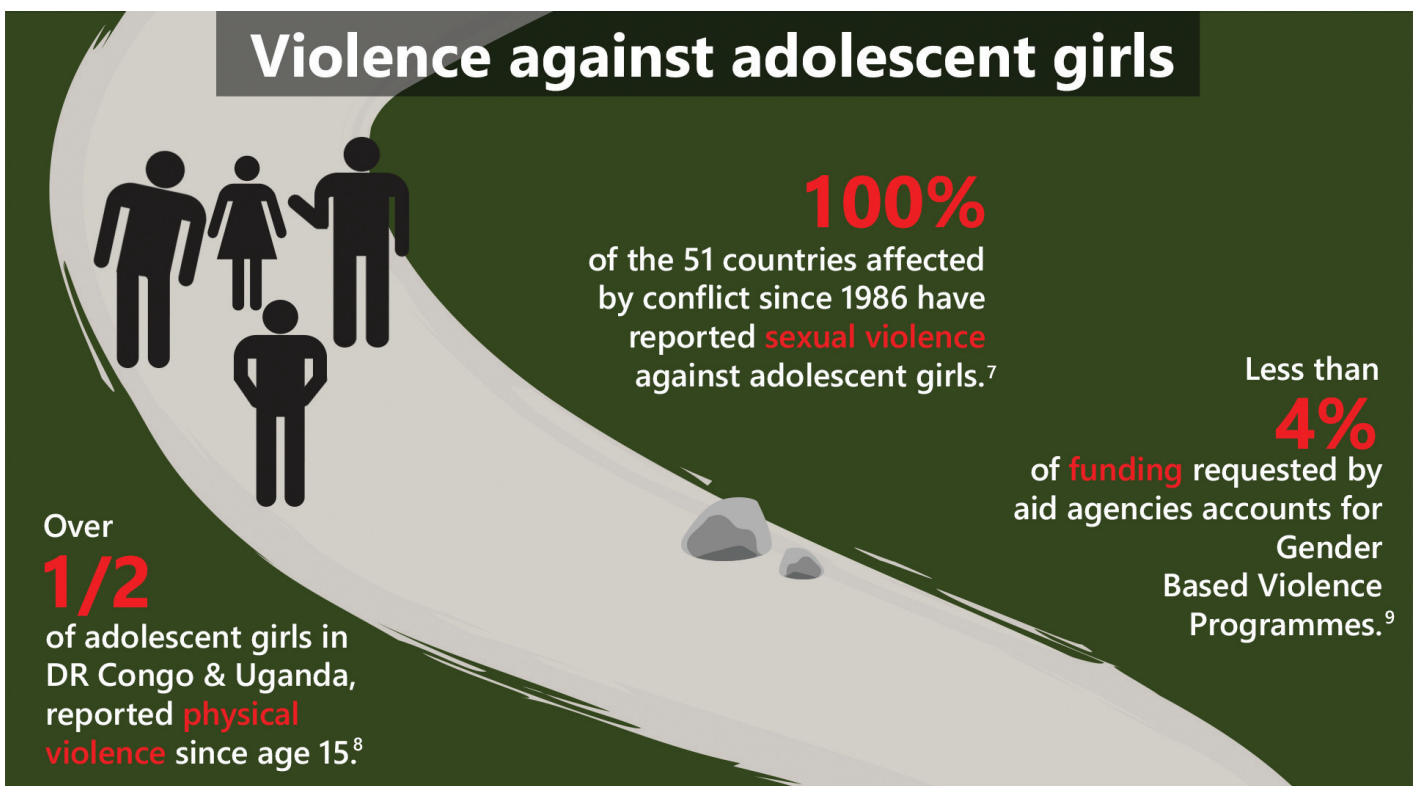
2.2 Menstruation Hygiene Management

Within many contexts, menstruation marks the turning point for girls and their school attendance, leading to a high level of absenteeism and dropout (Calder & Huda, 2013; (UNICEF, 2016b). Recently, and after decades of being overlooked, the global agenda has begun to highlight the importance of improving Menstruation Hygiene Management (MHM) for girls (Sommer & Sahin, 2013; UNICEF, 2016b).

MHM is particularly challenging in low-income and developing countries with poor sanitation facilities, pressing social pressures, and low resources prevent girls from continuing their education. These issues are magnified in conflict-affected zones where chaos, depleted resources, and exposure to violence further marginalise girls.

Sanitation Facilities, Water, and Safety

Proper sanitation facilities and private latrine facilities in schools are essential for girls transitioning into adolescence. In Burkina Faso, a study shows that improved WASH facilities for girls increased enrolment rate by 13 per cent (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). Poor facilities, including sanitary products and sufficient water supply, are often combined with social taboos surrounding menstruation to restrict girls and women from engaging in public activities. According to a report published by UNICEF (2012), over half the schools in developing and low-income countries lack sufficient access to water and sanitation facilities. One in every three women in the world lack access to basic sanitation (WaterAid, 2012).

Denied access to these basic rights has a detrimental knock-on effect on adolescent girls. Globally, it is estimated that women and girls without sanitary facilities spend 97 billion hours each year searching for appropriate latrine facilities (WaterAid, 2012). These conditions expose females to sexual harassment and abuse, diseases, shame, and an inability to continue engaging in daily public activities. Due to limited water facilities, girls are often burdened with the chore of fetching water and are therefore unable to commit to school attendance.

In Africa and Asia, girls walk an average of 3.7 miles a day (Wilbur et al., 2015). A 1993-2008 study shows that 15 minute reduction spent on fetching water may increase the proportion of girls attending school by 8 to 12 per cent (UNICEF, 2012). Additionally, the distance taken to fetch water or locate a latrine exposes adolescent girls to incidents of violence, sexual harassment and physical abuse. These risks are heightened within contexts of conflict and displacement wherein girls are often afraid to use latrines located in areas away from the camp due to fear of being raped (UNFPA, 2016b). Finally, insufficient access to water leads to high risks of disease. Insufficient access to water leads to numerous diseases and infections such as cholera, diarrhoea, worms, and tropical diseases (UNICEF, 2016b). The risk of disease is heightened for adolescent girls who have begun menstruation while lacking sufficient access to sanitation facilities. Without proper hygiene management, menstruation can result in varying infections such as yeast and urinary tract infections (Save the Children, 2015).

2.3 Education, Hygiene, and Dignity

Adolescent girls face increasingly challenging factors within their educational spaces. Privacy, sanitation facilities, and sanitary products become salient in preventing the marginalisation of girls. A study conducted in Nepal in 2009 reveals that more than 50 per cent of girls reported being absent from school some time during menstruation, 41 per cent of whom cited the main reason as the lack of privacy and appropriate latrines available in schools (UNICEF, 2012). Similarly, 51 per cent of girls missed between one and four days per month due to menstruation, 39 per cent of whom reported reduced performance (House et al., 2012). In Ghana, it is reported that 95 per cent of girls sometimes miss school (House et al., 2012). Regionally, reports from Africa estimate that within four years of high school each girl loses around 156 learning days, or a total of 24 weeks out of 144 weeks (Domestos, WaterAid, & WSSCC, 2014).

Where latrine facilities do exist in schools, hygiene and safety remain as major impediments to girls' school attendance and performance (Sommer & Sahin, 2013). For example, in Afghanistan, only 40% of schools have separate sanitation facilities (UNICEF, 2012). Reports have demonstrated the number of social issues unisex latrines may pose to adolescent girls. Due to the sexual dimensions that follow this transition, girls are more likely to be exposed to vulnerabilities and discriminations. Alarming rates have been reported in South Africa where girls continue to face sexual assault and harassment by male educators and learners (Prinsloo, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2011). Data also reveals that girls are at high risk of sexual assault when using latrine facilities situated in isolated areas within school or areas away from the protective school environment (UNICEF, 2012).

In addition to providing sanitary facilities, psychosocial support is a crucial element to addressing the social and physical vulnerabilities described above. Due to limited emotional support and guidance as well as access to resources, managing menstruation without anxieties and marginalisation is often very difficult within these contexts. In rural Ghana, over 90 per cent of girls interviewed in a study by Sarah House et al. (2012) said they experienced shame and embarrassment during their last period. Taboo and cultural practices surrounding menstruation may lead to a destructive silence, discouraging girls from voicing their problems. This silence is detrimental to policymaking discussions, as MHM solutions are more likely to be implemented in settings where communities are able to engage in these discussions.

Conflict and Instability

The challenges described above are further exacerbated by conflict (UNFPA, 2016b). The displacement and instability caused by conflict results in the severe depletion of resources and, consequently, sanitary products and water resources become scarcely available. Additionally, students are exposed to further vulnerabilities within schools occupied by armed groups, preventing girls from attending schools (GCPEA, 2015).

2.4 Sexual Violence: Causes and Impact

Sexual violence against civilians is recognised as a strategy and weapon of war used to threaten and humiliate the communities of those affected (Domingo et al., 2013). While both women and men may be victims of sexual violence, reports have shown that females, especially adolescent girls, are most vulnerable to violence during conflict (Iyakaremye & Mukagatare, 2016).

Sexual violence exposes girls and women to many forms of abuse including rape, forced impregnation, forced abortion, forced marriage, trafficking, sexual slavery, and sexually transmitted diseases (International Rescue Committee, 2012; Iyakaremye & Mukagatare, 2016). However, studies analysing the experiences of adolescent girls who have faced sexual abuse as they commute to school are very limited. Due to cultural norms surrounding sexual abuse and notions of "family honour", girls are less likely to report or discuss sexual abuse (Greene et al., 2013).

Transition 3: From School to the Workplace

Numerous factors benefit from and contribute to the transition made from primary to secondary education and the workplace. Globally, female labour participation remains low, with just over half of all women employed or searching for a job in comparison with 77 per cent of men (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). These numbers are far lower in communities where cultural norms may discourage females from economic engagement.

Little data is available on female labour participation in conflict-affected settings. However, completing secondary education allows adolescent girls to transition into a productive workplace where their decision-making abilities are enhanced, reducing domestic work and low wage jobs (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). As such, this remains one of the most salient issues in conflict-affected zones wherein adolescents are often unlikely to complete education (Herath, 2011).

3.1 Secondary Education and Links to the Workplace

Completing secondary education makes transitioning into the workplace possible. Additionally, prospective work opportunities may encourage families and society to ensure their girls complete school. Reports have shown that hiring more female teachers at school can increase girls' access to education, increasing enrolment and also encouraging students to view teaching as one of their career choices in the future (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015; Burde et al., 2017). In Afghanistan, data reveals that girls' enrolment rose by 30 per cent as the proportion of female teachers increased (Guimbert et al., 2008).

Work opportunities in the community may also further encourage families to send their girls to school. A study by Heath & Mushfiq Mobarak (2015) shows that the arrival of garment factories in Bangladesh may have likely had impact on women's education, marriage, and childbearing decisions. The garment sector provided employment opportunities on a large-scale (four million), requiring basic literacy and numeracy skills. The study argues that the rise of female educational attainment, lowered fertility, and delayed marriage in Bangladesh may likely be linked to the presence of these factories and the surge of new job opportunities. However, within conflict-affected countries, prospective employment opportunities and stability are reduced, making it more likely for families to accept negative coping strategies.

Interestingly, a shift in gender roles often emerges within conflict-affected zones, especially in contexts of displacement. Syrian men are more likely be affected by injuries and restrictions as a result of conflict. As a result, Syrian women across the region have become more involved in labour. In Syria, female labour participation pre-conflict was only 22 per cent due to sociocultural limitations (Buecher & Aniyamuzaala R, 2016). Today, 12–17 per cent of households in Syria are female-headed, as well as up to one-third of household in refugees-hosting countries. However, adolescent girls are also negatively affected by these changes. Adolescent girls have been forced to support or replace their absent mothers by taking care of siblings, household chores, or consider early marriage to reduce financial burdens. In Somaliland, mothers were often the ones to support the family because the men were killed or had fled, leaving girls with more household responsibilities (Burde et al., 2017). While this shift in gender roles can burden adolescent girls with additional chores, it can also create new opportunities for societal transformation by allowing families to recognise the importance of education and development of skills for girls.

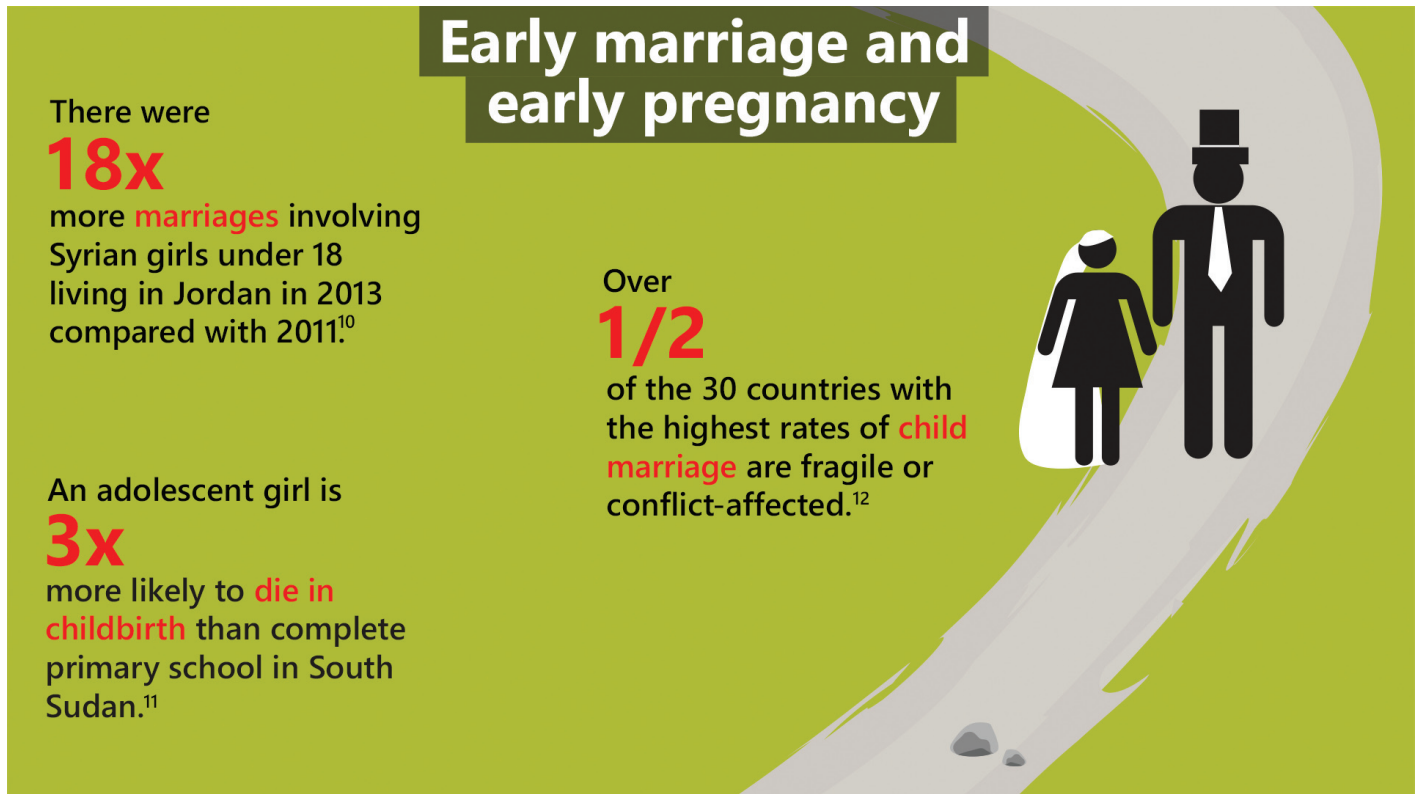### Importance and Benefits of Increased Female Labour

If girls complete education and then participate in the workforce, the benefits are endless. A transition into the workplace also protects women, boosting self-esteem, access to information and services, and economic independence. Employed women who are over the age of 16 reinvest 90 per cent of their income in their families compared to men who only reinvest 30 to 40 per cent (UN, 2015c).

Evidence strongly suggests that increased education and labour-force participation contributes to healthier, better educated, and better thriving families and societies.

Increasing women's education contributes to higher economic growth. In a study of 100 countries, every 1 per cent increase in the proportion of women with secondary education contributes to a country's annual per capita income growth rate by 0.8 percentage points (UN, 2015c). One extra year of secondary may lead to an eventual wage increase by 15 to 25 per cent. A transition into the workplace also protects women, boosting self-esteem, access to information and services, and economic independence.

Transition 4: From Child to Wife and Mother

Conflict speeds up the transition made from child to wife and mother. Child marriage, maternal deaths, and diseases are common consequences of conflict and low school attainment. These transitions, if unsupported by education, have huge implications on the safety and health of women, mortality rates, the economy of a community, and cultural norms conditioned in and by future generations.

Early marriage and early pregnancy

There were

18x

more marriages involving Syrian girls under 18 living in Jordan in 2013 compared with 2011.[10]

An adolescent girl is

3x

more likely to die in childbirth than complete primary school in South Sudan.[11]

Over

1/2

of the 30 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are fragile or conflict-affected.[12]

4.1 Child Marriage and the Role of Education

In low and middle income countries, 12 percent of girls are married before they turn 15, and 34 percent are married or in union before the age 18 (UNFPA, 2013). The link between education and child marriage is clear. Education helps prevent early marriage and this deterrence also reduces the risks of adolescent girls dropping out of secondary education (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015). Globally, girls who complete secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to be married as children compared to girls who have little or no education (World Bank, 2014). However, child marriage often leads to the abandonment of education (UNICEF, 2014a).

These numbers are much higher within conflict-affected zones. Half of the 30 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are fragile or conflict affected (UN, 2015b). Negative coping strategies and social norms often become more acceptable due to the instability, poverty, or fears that are a consequence of conflict, leading to alarming rates of adolescent girls being forced into early marriage. As a result, child marriage is regarded as one of the most salient issues for adolescent girls living in conflict-affected zones. The conflict in Syria has demonstrated these grave effects. In comparison to 2011, there were 18 times as many more marriages involving Syrian refugee girls in Jordan under the age of 18 in 2013 (UNICEF, 2014b). In Afghanistan, one in five women is married before the age 15, and around 46 per cent of girls are married by the time they are 18 (Madhok, 2013).

Education's Protective Role

Not only is access to education a child's right, studies have revealed the essential role education plays in protecting the future of women and their societies. Child marriage increases poverty, inequality and powerlessness, ill health, and illiteracy (Plan UK, 2011). These factors entrap young girls and her community into a dangerous and unbreakable cycle.

Completing secondary education is regarded as one of the key contributors to reducing child marriage. In Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, the likelihood of girls becoming pregnant falls by 59 per cent if girls complete secondary education (UNESCO, 2014). There would be 64 per cent fewer marriages. Similarly, a study by Sperling & Winthrop (2015) shows that every one in three young women with no education was married by the age of fifteen in Ethiopia, in comparison with only 9 per cent of women who attained secondary education. In Mozambique, over 60 per cent of girls without education are married by 18 compared to 10 per cent of girls with secondary education, and less than one per cent of girls with higher education (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015).

Choice and Agency

Education is strongly linked with a reduction of forced marriage and child marriage, empowering girls and young to make informed decisions. In Pakistan, girls with at least secondary education are 15 per cent more likely to be involved in their choice of spouse. In India, girls with at least a secondary education are 30 per cent more likely to have a choice (UNESCO, 2014). Child marriage is a breach of human rights as it denies the right to 'free and full' consent to marriage (Save the Children, 2014b).

Child marriage also increases the chance of domestic abuse due to the power and age differences. Children who are forced into early marriage are often removed from their protective environment, becoming isolated (Save the Children, 2014b). This isolation leaves adolescent girls who are often voiceless and vulnerable to negative social norms unprotected and unable to gain support by protection services. Additionally, child brides are more likely to believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife (Girls Not Brides, 2014). Based on a world estimate, a UNICEF report (UNICEF, 2014a) shows that nearly half of adolescent-aged girls worldwide believe that wife-beating may be justified. Additionally, girls who are forced into early marriage are likely to report their sexual experience as forced, or as agreeing to have sexual intercourse out of fear of what their partner may do (UNICEF, 2014a).

4.2 Motherhood

Child marriage also hastens the transition made from bride to mother. More than any other group of women, adolescent girls face high risks of complications and death. This is recognised as the leading cause of death in adolescent girls living in developing countries (WHO, 2016). Girls under the age of 16 are five times more likely to die of childbirth than women in their 20s, and teens twice as likely (UNFPA, 2004).

These risks are heightened within conflict-affected zones where health systems are disrupted. While 99 per cent of maternal deaths occur in developing countries, 56 per cent of maternal deaths occur in fragile and humanitarian settings (Save the Children, 2014a). Alarmingly, data shows that while the probability of a 15-year-old woman eventually dying of maternal causes is 1 in 4900 in developed countries, it is 1 in 180 in developing countries and as high as 1 in 54 in fragile states (WHO, 2016). Limited medical supplies, lack of safety, and risks of poor health greatly heighten the risk of maternal death in conflict-affected settings. For example, women face a 1 in 39 chance of dying in pregnancy or childbirth across sub-Saharan Africa, but the odds are considered to be 50 to 60 per cent higher in its areas of conflict (Save the Children, 2014a). In Sudan, it is estimated that an adolescent girls is three times more likely to die in childbirth than complete primary school (UNICEF, 2015).

Impact on Mother

Mothers who complete secondary school are more likely to have smaller, healthier and better educated families. In developing countries, a woman with seven years of education marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children (Levine et al., 2009). If girls complete secondary education, it is estimated that child marriage for girls could be reduced by two-thirds, and 59 per cent fewer girls would become pregnant in sub-Saharan Africa and south and west Asia (UNHCR, 2016).

Becoming a mother at adolescence increases the likelihood of having more children per lifetime. This contributes to population growth and economic pressure, increasing the poverty level of her household and impacting the health and well-being of children. Additionally, it impacts a mother's health and her ability to engage with activities outside the house. In Pakistan, compared to women with no education, women with primary schooling are 18 per cent more likely to voice their opinions on the number of children they wish to have (UNESCO, 2014).

Danger on Child

Becoming a mother at the age of adolescence is also dangerous for her children. Education is essential to the survival and well-being of children. If a mother is under the age of 18, her infant's risk of dying in their first year of life is 60 per cent greater than that of an infant born to a mother older than 19 (UNICEF, 2016a). Children born to mothers who can read have a 50 per cent greater chance of surviving past the age of five and there would be 49 per cent fewer child deaths (UNESCO, 2012). Educated mothers are better equipped to understand and respond to their children's needs, such as seeking help if their child is ill, protecting their child through vaccinations and clean water, and being more aware of surrounding threats (UNHCR, 2016). UNESCO estimates that if girls are educated to lower secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030, 3.5 million child deaths could be prevented between 2050 and 2060 (UNHCR, 2016).

Women who have completed secondary education are more likely to ensure their children also go to school (UNHCR, 2016). A study shows that children whose mothers have no education are twice as likely to be out of school as children whose mothers have some education (UNICEF, 2014c)

Society, Health, and Well-Being

The need for girls to complete secondary school is urgent. Becoming a mother at adolescence, especially within-conflicted affected zones, poses numerous repercussions for the mother's family and for society. Not only does early motherhood prevent girls from completing secondary education, an adolescent mother may not be prepared for the responsibilities and risks related to motherhood, contraception, and health-related matters. Additionally, adolescent brides are less likely to exercise agency and voice their opinions.

Contraception

Within conflict-affected and humanitarian settings, the lack of health systems leaves girls and women unable to access appropriate sexual and reproductive services. Adolescents who wish to terminate their pregnancies are much more likely to pursue unsafe abortions when compared with adults (UNFPA, 2016b). While early marriage and sexual abuse is a high risk of conflict, the availability and use of contraception is very low within these settings. Adolescent girls in these settings may also be marginalised and powerless, and may not have access to contraception. In Somalia, less than 3 per cent of couples use modern methods of contraception (UNFPA, 2016b).

Health and Well-Being

As a group, adolescents girls are most vulnerable to HIV infections. In 2013, two thirds of new HIV infections were among adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (UNFPA, 2016a). In some sub-Saharan African countries, adolescent girls are five times more likely to be infected than boys (UNFPA, 2016a). HIV prevalence is highest in married girls than any other group in the world. AIDS-related illnesses remain the leading cause of death among adolescent girls in these context, despite efforts to increase the availability of treatment (UNAIDS, 2015).

While HIV prevalence varies from 1.7 per cent to 7.6 per cent depending on the region, it is as high as 20 per cent among women who have suffered sexual violence as a result of armed conflict (Save the Children, 2014a). Women may not know how to protect themselves from HIV due to the lack of availability of condoms as well as informational services. Additionally, stigma may prevent marginalised groups of girls from accessing these services (UNAIDS, 2015). Lack of knowledge and access to treatment among adolescents is alarming (Save the Children, 2014a). Only 15 per cent of young women and adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa know of their HIV status (UNAIDS, 2015). For adolescent mothers, these challenges heighten the risk of mother-to-child transmission. In DR Congo, access to treatment is as low as 1 per cent for pregnant women who are HIV-positive (Save the Children, 2014a).

Education is greatly responsible for the reduction of preventable diseases as it may better inform adolescents on the availability of treatment and the risks of pregnancy and transmission. Additionally, agency, empowerment, and delays in marriage allow young women to be more involved in decisions relating to sexual contraception.

Conclusion

Four key themes, defined in this review as transitions, emerged through a comprehensive literature review exploring the challenges facing adolescent girls in conflict-affected zones. The review discussed the impact of these transitions on adolescent girls' likelihoods of beginning and completing secondary education within conflict-affected zones. These transitions entail issues of accessibility and security when transitioning between alternative education systems, issues of safety when commuting to and from school, barriers of transitioning from school to the workplace, and the issues and risks of transitions made too early from child to wife and mother.

The barriers facing adolescent girls in conflict-affected zones threaten their educational prospects, futures, and well-being. This review discussed the ways in which these transitions also have impact beyond the individual: a girl's education and well-being affects her future family and society. The repercussions of missed educational opportunities are grave, and equally, education may be transformative for girls and societies. However, research in the field is scarce and undermines the dire and imperative nature of these challenges. While international agendas have begun to pay greater attention to secondary education and specific gender needs, there is an urgent need to support current data with further research.

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