INTRODUCING THE ADOLESCENT DIGEST SERIES FROM INNOCENTI

We are pleased to introduce the Adolescence Research Digest, a new quarterly publication by UNICEF’s Office of Research-Innocenti. This synthesizes the latest research evidence, resources and news related to adolescent well-being in low- and middle-income countries. The Digest aims to promote awareness and uptake of new adolescent well-being research findings amongst UNICEF staff, practitioners, policymakers and academics in the development and humanitarian sectors.

Adolescence is a critically sensitive period in terms of growth and maturity with many rapid transitions about which too little is currently known. As part of Innocenti’s broader research programme on ‘The Social and Structural Determinants of Adolescent Well-being in Low- and Middle-Income Countries’, we hope that the Digest will become an essential service for those interested in this area, providing easy access to the latest and most relevant evidence.

The Digest is co-produced by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti in collaboration with Social Development Direct specialized in the provision of social development technical assistance and research services including research synthesis and research communication products.

For each edition, Social Development Direct authors will scan a broad range of existing literature on adolescent well-being published over the preceding quarter, including: international peer reviewed journals, evaluation reports, systematic reviews, as well as toolkits, resources, and conferences.

They will then independently select the most useful and interesting content according to set criteria. Particular attention will be paid to research that promotes effective interventions in improving adolescent outcomes in low- and middle-income countries, and that support safe transitions to adulthood. Studies with potential for impact, scaling-up and for generating new insights and understanding will be highlighted. Working alongside an in-house editor and review team, the suggested content will then be evaluated for its utility for UNICEF’s key audiences.

The Adolescence Digest team would like to encourage your active contribution with suggestions of new research, resources, events and conferences. We hope that this publication will promote knowledge exchange and use of research evidence amongst our readers and welcome your feedback on this first edition. Happy reading!

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NEWS

The United Nations Security Council has adopted resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. The resolution acknowledges the key role young people can play in securing sustainable peace, and has a specific focus on preventing and countering violent extremism.

In January 2016, Gambia’s parliament passed a bill banning Female Genital Mutilation and setting strict penalties for offenders. The new law states that a person who engages in female circumcision could face up to three years in prison or a fine of 50,000 delasi (US$1,250).

Zimbabwe banned child marriage, raising the minimum age at which both men and women can marry to 18. The landmark ruling made by a Zimbabwean court in January 2016 followed a challenge by two young brides to the government’s Marriage Act on the basis that it discriminated against girls by setting the minimum age to marry at 16 for women, but 18 for men.

UNICEF and UNFPA launched the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage – a multi-country initiative designed to protect millions of vulnerable girls from child marriage.

The UN launched the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth - a new initiative to tackle the youth employment crisis. It was unveiled at the UN’s Annual Youth Forum and is a unique global partnership aiming to lift the economic prospects of young people entering the workforce.

The first ever Youth Forum was held at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60) in New York in March 2016. The two-day event saw 300 young men and women join together as partners in achieving gender equality.

The London School of Economics (LSE) and UNICEF Innocenti held a Global Kids Online meeting. A network of 40 academics and UNICEF staff from 14 countries began drafting research and policy recommendations for the launch of a global toolkit to research children’s digital experiences in late 2016.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Lancet has announced that it will publish its forthcoming report: Our Future: A Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing, with a launch event in London on 10th May. The report will review the evidence base and consider the policy and legal frameworks for adolescent health and well-being.

Young people will play a key role in the Women Deliver conference to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark on 16-19 May 2016. The event will include a Youth Pre-Conference and a Youth Zone and will be the largest gathering on girls’ and women’s health and rights in the last decade.

The United Nations celebrates International Youth Day on August 12 to recognize efforts of the world’s youth in enhancing global society. For further updates about this year’s events and annual theme, visit the International Youth Day website.

A two-day international conference on Adolescence, Youth and Gender: Building Knowledge for Change will be held in Oxford, UK on 8-9 September 2016. The conference will address key questions relating to adolescence, youth and gender in global contexts.

New UNICEF Guidelines for Industry on Child Online Protection were launched to promote awareness of child safety in the online world and to develop practical tools to assist governments, industry and educators.

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) has created an online Youth Hub with resources on comprehensive sexuality education, service delivery, and advocacy.

A Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction for Children was developed to introduce children, aged 10-14 years, to the Sendai Framework and concepts of disasters, risks and hazards. The child-friendly document was developed by the Children in a Changing Climate coalition (ChildFund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF, and World Vision).

Sonke Gender Justice released the One Youth Can facilitator’s guide and accompanying participant workbook. The resources are aimed at practitioners working with youth on issues of citizenship, human rights, gender, health, sexuality and violence. The One Youth Can campaign aims to help youth “break the gender rules” and end violence.

The Working Group on Youth-Inclusive Governance Indicators, composed of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), youth NGOs and academics, has identified a list of national-level youth-inclusive indicators and methods for monitoring Sustainable Development Goal 16 Targets (16.6, 16.7 and 16.10 to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies).

The new Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health, 2016-2030 has been launched. This updated strategy was developed by a wide range of national, regional and global stakeholders under the umbrella of the Every Woman Every Child movement, led by the World Health Organization.

USAID’s YouthPower project has launched a new website YouthPower.org with useful resources for practitioners and researchers on what does and does not work in youth development.
LATEST RESEARCH

A selection of the latest research on adolescent well-being, released in the last few months.

Violence

Global prevalence of past-year violence against children: A systematic review and minimum estimates

Hillis, S. et al, Pediatrics, January 2016

Globally over half of all children – 1 billion children aged 2 to 17 – have experienced violence over the past year. This systematic review of population-based surveys in 96 countries finds that a minimum of 50 per cent of children in Asia, Africa, and North America have experienced past-year violence (physical, sexual, emotional, or multiple types). The study highlights a need for improved population-based surveillance, coupled with scaling-up interventions to prevent violence against children.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Sexual and reproductive health of young people in Asia and the Pacific: A review of issues, policies and programmes

UNFPA/UNESCO/WHO, December 2015

Of the almost one billion young people aged 10 to 24 years living in Asia and the Pacific, a significant proportion are sexually active. The report reviews young people’s sexual and reproductive health in 32 countries. It notes that most young people lack the knowledge and life-skills around negotiating safe relationships. One in three girls are married by the age of 18 and one in seven has given birth. Up to 63 per cent of adolescent pregnancies are unintended, often leading to unsafe abortions, which are mostly unreported. Less than a third of young people have comprehensive knowledge of HIV. High rates of coerced sex and sexual violence were also found. The report emphasises the need to increase the quality and coverage of comprehensive sexuality education and increase youth participation in policy and programming.

The role of material deprivation and consumerism in the decisions to engage in transactional sex among young people in the urban slums of Blantyre, Malawi


Transactional sex – the exchange of sex for goods or resources – can put young women at increased risk of HIV infection and unintended pregnancy. This qualitative study of 60 young people aged 18 to 23 from urban slums in Malawi explores the structural factors supporting transactional sex. The study concludes that the experience of transactional sex is different for young men and women. Factors influencing decisions to engage in transactional sex for both men and women include housing and food deprivation. However, young women also identify transactional sex as a solution to their family’s health needs, enabling them to meet the costs of private medical care. Consumerism and a ‘desire for fashionable goods’ are also important influencing factors for young women. The authors conclude that interventions that engage with acute economic pressure, quality health care and consumerism are essential to reducing the sexual and reproductive health risks for young people in urban slums.

Emerging evidence, lessons and practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)

UNESCO/UNFPA/UNAIDS Secretariat, December 2015

Young people are increasingly demanding their rights to sexuality education. This UNESCO report, produced with UNFPA and the UNAIDS Secretariat, examines CSE status in 48 countries. It notes that CSE is particularly critical during adolescence and has positive impacts on safe sexual behaviours, reducing HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, and gender inequality. The report finds that almost 80 per cent of assessed countries have policies or strategies in place to support CSE. However, it identifies a significant gap between global and regional policies and implementation. It concludes that effective delivery of high-quality CSE involves a sustained commitment to increased teacher training, as well as engaging parents and communities in implementation and scale-up.
Social Protection

**Effects of a large-scale unconditional cash transfer on mental health outcomes of young people in Kenya**


Cash transfer programmes targeted at reducing national poverty have the potential to improve the mental health of young people in low-income countries, according to a study of Kenya’s Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC). The programme provides an unconditional cash transfer of US$20 per month directly to the main caregiver in the household. Examining data on the psychosocial status of 1,960 youth aged 15–24 from households in intervention and control locations, the study finds that the odds of depressive symptoms reduce by 24 per cent among young persons living in households that receive cash transfers. The effects are only significant for young men and are greater among men aged 20–24 and orphans.

Education

**Factors affecting successful completion of secondary education in India**


This policy brief presents longitudinal analysis by Young Lives in Andhra Pradesh to explore factors which help or hinder children to successfully complete secondary education in India. Key determinants predicting whether children complete secondary school include: being a boy; higher literacy skills in the early primary grades; high self-efficacy (belief in their own capabilities); and non-participation in paid work or long hours of domestic chores before the age of 12. Other important factors include household wealth, family education, ethnic background, and birth order.

**Undermining learning: Multi-country longitudinal evidence on corporal punishment in schools**


Corporal punishment is highly prevalent, even when prohibited by law, according to a new Innocenti Research Brief. Using longitudinal data from Young Lives in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam, the study finds that corporal punishment is associated with poorer cognitive development outcomes. Young children are significantly more likely to experience corporal punishment, with the incidence at age 8 more than double the rate reported by 15-year-olds, in all four countries. Boys and advantaged children are also at a higher risk of experiencing corporal punishment.

Work and Employment

**Out of school and out of work: Risks and opportunities for Latin America’s ninis**

De Hoyos, R. et al, World Bank, January 2016

One in five young people aged 15-24 years are considered to be ‘ninis’ in Latin America. The term comes from “ni estudian ni trabajan” (neither study nor work) – known globally as NEETs (neither employed nor in education or training). Based on a three-year study of the factors keeping young people in school and helping them into employment, the report finds that most ninis in Latin America are typically young urban girls with incomplete secondary education. However, there is a growing ‘masculinisation’ of the nini profile, as men find it more difficult to secure jobs. Findings show that NEETs are a global concern, numbering 260 million worldwide. Effective interventions to reduce school dropout rates and improve the employability of young people include early warning systems to identify youth at risk, along with targeted socio-emotional interventions, tutoring and conditional cash transfers.

ICT and Youth

**Mobile phones and education in sub-Saharan Africa: From youth practice to public policy**


The significant growth of young people’s mobile phone usage in Africa presents both opportunities and risks, but what is the specific impact on education? This paper draws from an ongoing mixed-methods research study of young people’s mobile phone usage and its impacts across Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. It includes a questionnaire with approximately 4,500 young people aged 9-18. Findings emphasize that the positive direct value of
phone usage is currently limited to the ‘mundane’ involving activities such as calls between pupils about their homework. The authors conclude that there is a need for the education sector to promote responsible phone use, not only among pupils, but also among teachers and parents, in all three countries.

One in three: Internet governance and children’s rights

An estimated third of all Internet users globally – approximately 300 million – are below the age of 18, mostly living in developing nations. Internet governance has not sufficiently recognised young people’s specific rights and needs, both in terms of protection from harm as well as the right to access and use digital media. The paper sets out recommendations for embedding children’s rights in the activities and policies of international Internet governance institutions, including:

• focusing on the role of business alongside the state and public institutions in the creation of legislative and policy frameworks;
• including parents and children (and their representatives) as stakeholders;
• developing Internet governance mechanisms to represent and implement children’s rights online.

Access to Justice
Rights, remedies and representation: A global report on access to justice for children

MOBILE PHONES AND EDUCATION
Research from Ghana, Malawi and South Africa

Positive
In theory...
- Accessing educational information
- E-learning
- Exploring personal identity
But mainly calls...
- between pupils to clarify homework
- between pupils and educational staff about exam results
- from pupils asking for money for school fees, books, and uniform

Negative
- Class disrupted by phones
- Time on social network sites
- Disrupted sleep patterns from cheap night calls
- Bullying and harassment
- Pornography and sexting
- Wasted money

Child Rights International Network, February 2016

How effectively can children use the law to challenge violations of their rights? Developed by the Child Rights International Network, this report analyses data on the legal systems of 197 countries and presents a global ranking and interactive map, scoring countries against international standards for access to justice for children. It finds that just under half of countries allow the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to be directly enforced in courts, enabling children to challenge laws or practices that violate their rights. Just 3 per cent of the world's children are able to access the international complaints procedure under the CRC, introduced in 2014.

Adolescent Boys

Adolescent boys and young men: Engaging them as supporters of gender equality and health and understanding their vulnerabilities

Promundo/UNFPA, March 2015

Drawing on global research on adolescent boys aged 15-19, this paper highlights two connected objectives: (1) the need to engage adolescent boys/young men as allies to achieve gender equality, and (2) the importance of addressing their specific health and social development risks and needs. It highlights gendered vulnerabilities facing boys and girls throughout their lifespan from early years (0-9) through to early adulthood (20-24). Key findings for adolescent boys include:

- Boys are more likely to repeat a primary grade than girls in 90 of 113 countries where data is available.
- Poor mental health is among the leading causes of the global burden of disease for adolescents aged 10-19 and young men are less likely to seek out mental health support.
- It is estimated that one in seven boys experiences sexual violence as a child.

Key entry points for engaging boys include: sexual and reproductive health services; comprehensive sexuality education; fatherhood and caregiving; preventing violence against women, girls and boys; and reducing stigma around sexual orientation and gender identity.

Research

Investing when it counts: Reviewing the evidence and charting a course of research and action for very young adolescents


The years between ages 10 and 14 are a pivotal period for young people transitioning from childhood to adolescence. This Population Council report identifies actions for stakeholders involved in research and/or programmes for very young adolescents (VYA), including: testing methods of gathering information with girls versus boys, and younger versus older VYAs; establishing a data repository; conducting fresh analyses of existing data, disaggregated by gender and age in two- and three-year intervals; focusing on marginalised VYA populations, including young married girls, migrants, refugees, and other vulnerable populations; and embedding research in programming initiatives.

Participation in Peacebuilding

Young people’s participation in peacebuilding

Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, January 2016

More than 600 million young people live in fragile and conflict-affected contexts today. Young women and men often want to and have the capacities to play active roles in peacebuilding. Led by the IANYD Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding, this Practice Note explores research on youth and conflict, highlighting the growing body of evidence which suggests that engaging young people positively during the transition period after violent conflict is important for long-term peace and security. Examples of promising practice in policy and programming provide lessons on what can work in youth and peacebuilding.
ADDITIONAL READINGS

Selected by the Digest team (* = not open access).

Devries, K., *Violence against children and education*, International Health, February 2016


Elgar, F. et al, *Structural determinants of youth bullying and fighting in 79 countries*, Journal of Adolescent Health, December 2015*


The Lancet Psychiatry, series of papers on *Substance use in young people*, February 2016*


Murphy, L., *Improving access to health for women and girls in low-income urban settlements*, IDS Policy Briefing 110, February 2016


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To submit suggestions for new, relevant research, conferences and opportunities for the next edition please email the authors.

For more information and updates please sign up to our website www.unicef-irc.org.

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DISCLAIMER

The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this Digest are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF or DFID.

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