

Learned in Phase 1

The grandmother of an 11-year-old girl said: "Girls should not rely on a man; they should be economically independent. You can't just do nothing after getting married to a rich man. He will divorce you if you don't do housework; the probability of getting divorced is high." This observation depicts how urban Chinese women face a new dilemma and bear double pressure from both career development and family responsibility, and they have to put in more effort just to get a similar return on their career compared with men. Although women have acquired the rights of education and job opportunity, the traditional gender norms engrained by Confucianism are still stringent in family arena. **-Shanghai**

Young adolescents are at cross-roads. Beyond involving them as research participants, there is need to engage them further or to provide them with sufficient information that will answer 'the burning questions' they have during interviews and equip them with much needed life skills. **-Nairobi**

There is a clear disconnect between girls physical and socio-emotional development. At a very young age, their bodies are well developed and men are approaching them but they are unprepared to address the unwanted sexual advances. **-Baltimore**

Challenges are faced not only by adolescents but also by parents. Context matters. We hear, "She can't go to a cyber café." Why? "Because she is a girl." "A girl has to stay at home..." A boy can have any job." Why? "Because he is a boy." Voices of boys and girls. Gender norms put boys and girls at different risks. The context in which young people grow is a determining factor of their healthy development that needs to be taken into account. For example, when people are very poor and they have to send their boys at a very early age to work to support the family, how does that affect their development compared to girls? **-Assiut**

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especially the school-based Mother Groups, what are potential implementation issues for the intervention in Blantyre, and whether the intervention should have a booster or second round in year two. From these detailed discussions an intervention program of work began to develop with the preliminary plans of engaging 500 school-going young people 11-14 years of age each year for two years with 1,000 young people in the comparison group. The plan will be to follow young people across 5 years exploring the short and medium range impacts of the intervention. Simply stated, Dr. Aung's March comment "that this is just what we need" was reiterated multiple times by others on the second visit.

The plan is now to finalize a concept note, to detail the scope of work and terms of reference and to lay the ground work to collect the baseline data for longitudinal study shortly after the start of the new year. The interventions will be planned with school, community, UNICEF and Health Ministry partners during 2017 with the first wave of intervention work to start the subsequent year.

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Questions? Email the study coordinator, Lydia, at lanimosa@jhu.edu



the Global Early Adolescent Study news

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The GEAS is a 15-country study exploring the factors in early adolescence that promote healthy sexuality and, conversely, predispose youth to sexual health risks. The GEAS is a partnership between the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, and research institutions in 15 countries.



"Exactly what we need in Malawi"

Bob Blum, Primary Investigator

Blantyre, Malawi has been a core GEAS site having joined at the suggestion of colleagues from St Andrews University in Scotland (which is also a collaborating site). GEAS leadership in Blantyre is through the University of Malawi College of Medicine, headed up by site-PI Will Stones and a collaborative team including Gertrude Chapotera, Trinitas Mhango, and Effie Chipeta. With Phase 1 piloting work completed, attention now turns to laying the foundation for the longitudinal second phase to be coupled with an intervention developed by Promundo. In March, I had the pleasure of joining their team for an exciting and intense series of meetings with funding agencies, intervention implementation agencies, and other adolescent health stakeholders. Recently, I returned for a second visit at the invitation of UNICEF.

At the initial visit perhaps the most auspicious meeting was with Kyaw Myint Anug, Chief of Health at UNICEF, Malawi. He greeted us warmly as he had been a student in my department at Hopkins a few years back. After reviewing the specifics of the project he indicated that the GEAS was "exactly what we need in Malawi," and would fill a sizable gap in knowledge that local intervention teams are eager to better understand and address

using a scientific, evidence-based approach.

In March we met with a representative of the Ministry of Health; the dean and faculty and students of the Malawi College of Medicine; members of UNFPA, USAID, WHO, and Save the Children; as well as with Julianna Lunguzi, an opposition-party Parliamentarian passionate about adolescent health. In August we continued with extensive consultations in Lilongwe with UNFPA colleagues, as well as the chief of the Reproductive Health Unit of the Ministry of Health. In Blantyre we met with the District Director of Education as well as with leadership of two schools. Ruti Levtoy joined me from Promundo for this visit.

Our March discussions were broad and far reaching on lessons learned, size and scope of the Phase 1 work, the populations engaged with the study but attention was not focused on interventions and details.

Thus, when I returned in August to continue the conversation, we addressed such details as whether to work in one or multiple schools, how best to engage parents—

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IN THE FIELD

3 Sites, 3 Stories

Adolescents are individuals: Data collection in Nairobi

Lucy Wairimu Zakayo, Nairobi data collector

I am a political scientist by profession and have extensive field experience working with young people. In one of them, I worked with young people in a remand home or juvenile detention center. Their vulnerability shaped my desire to work more with young people in marginalized communities.

So, in 2014, when I heard about the GEAS project and that the project was being implemented in Korogocho, one of the informal settlements in Nairobi, I knew it will be an enriching experience and I applied for a position as a data collector. My experience in the GEAS project surpassed my expectations. The way GEAS activities (interviews, timeline activities, Venn diagrams, role-plays, games, etc.) were structured helped us to progressively engage the adolescents while moving from one activity to the next and continuously building trust with each other. **One of the observations that struck me was that adolescents had considerable differences in their gender beliefs, behaviors,**



and their general perceptions in life despite living in the same environment. To me, these differences suggest that there might be other factors influencing their way of thinking.

The experience I have gained in the GEAS is invaluable and is already shaping the way I relate with adolescents, especially those in vulnerable environments. I hope to continue working with adolescents in future.

Adolescent boys in Shanghai demonstrate acceptance of homosexuality

Zuo Xiayun, Shanghai field coordinator

Adolescents can be unpredictable, but while facilitating the vignettes development workshop with 12 young adolescents, I witnessed something very unexpected. In the icebreaker activity, a group of boys were asked to think about common events in the lives of young adolescents and draw a timeline of a boy's life from birth to adulthood. Surprisingly, these boys illustrated major events that happened in the life of a gay man... he fell in puppy love with a boy when he was in junior middle school; he was often bullied by classmates and fought back against them; he gradually confirmed his homosexual orientation during high



school and quarreled with his parents about his sexual orientation, but went on to get a master's degree and a good job, and got married to a male partner.

Until recently, homosexuality has seemed mysterious in the eyes of common people in China. Now, a few scholars and activists have devoted continuous effort to the legalization of homosexual marriage. Public discussion about homosexuality is increasing, but homophobia and discrimination against LGBT people remain persistent and pervasive. Through this activity, **some young adolescent boys demonstrated a rational understanding of homosexuality, including inner conflicts and discrimination gay youth may face.** There is a comforting message here, that young adolescents show permissive attitudes to homosexuality and optimistic expectations for the future of homosexual people in China.

A voice for children: A Baltimore data collector's perspective

Aamna Kabani, Baltimore data collector

Recently I had the opportunity to perform data collection for the first time at an elementary-middle school in Baltimore. I can still recall prepping these students to complete a lengthy survey on a sleek tablet. There were about ten or



so kids and a mix of ages. Some were tired and sleepy after what must've felt like a long day at school; others were laughing with their friends. A few were giddy and hyper, others were nervous and confused by the idea of a research study taking place around the world. Once each student started their survey, I began to make rounds throughout the room. I found myself bouncing from child to child as hands shot up in the sky. As I answered questions about different topics, I also learned little details about each student—something about family life or friend circle, even details about crushes.

I couldn't help but notice how strikingly unique each child was. Each child questioned the survey in a different way, and had experiences that completely changed the way they answered a question compared with their peers. **That's when I came to realize that the GEAS serves as a voice for these children.** It captures the experiences and stories of each child to draw out trends and issues faced by this population, information that will be critical to improving sexual and reproductive health for adolescents.

Cross-cultural & collaborative qualitative analyses submitted for Special Supplement

Seven teams of researchers representing collaboration between sites recently worked to analyze data from narrative interviews with parent-adolescent dyads. With the guidance of Kristin Mmari, six papers, each focusing on a unique aspect of the intersection of gender norms and early adolescence, plus one methodology paper, have been submitted to the *Journal of Adolescent Health* for a Special Supplement. We look forward to sharing these findings with the wider research and practice communities and contributing to this important conversation about gender norms and early adolescence.

Submitted for publication:

Exploration of Gender Norms and Socialization among Early Adolescents: The Use of Qualitative Methods for the Global Early Adolescent Study

Kristin Mmari, Robert Wm. Blum, Rebekha Atnafou, Elisa Chilet, Sara De Meyer, Omaira El-Gibaly, Sharmistha Basu, Bamidele Bello, Beatrice Maina, and Xiayun Zuo

Marching to a Different Drummer: A cross-cultural comparison of young adolescents who challenge gender norms

Chunyan Yu, Xiayun Zuo, Robert W. Blum, Deborah L. Tolman, Anna Kågesten, Kristin Mmari, Sara De Meyer, Kristien Michielsen, Sharmistha Basu, Rajib Acharya, Qiguo Lian, and Chaohua Lou

Adolescent and Parent Reactions to Puberty in Nigeria and Kenya: A Cross-cultural and Intergenerational Comparison

Bamidele M. Bello, Adesegun O. Fatusi, Oluwatomi E. Adepoju, Beatrice W. Maina, Caroline W. Kabiru, Marni Sommer, and Kristin Mmari

Interpreting Narratives within a Cross National Interdisciplinary Study: A Process of Collaboration

Deborah L. Tolman, Chunyan Yu, and Kristin Mmari

Learning to be gendered: Gender socialization process and forces in early adolescence in Delhi, India and Shanghai, China

Sharmistha Basu, Xiayun Zuo, Chaohua Lou, Rajib Acharya, and Rebecka Lundgren

"Boys should have the courage to ask a girl out": Gender norms in early adolescent romantic relationships

Sara De Meyer, Anna Kågesten, Kristin Mmari, Juliet McEachran, Elisa Chilet, Caroline W Kabiru, Beatrice Maina, Elena M. Jerves, Candace Currie, and Kristien Michielsen

"A boy would be friends with boys ... and a girl ... with girls": Gender norms in early adolescent friendships on Egypt and Belgium

Ghada Al-Attar, Sara De Meyer, Omaira El-Gibaly, Kristien Michielsen, Lydia H. Animososa, and Kristin Mmari

GEAS & Save the Children prepare for Phase 2 in Kinshasa



The GEAS team is working toward implementation of the longitudinal second phase of the study in Kinshasa, DRC. Under the leadership of Passages, a USAID-funded project of the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University, our colleagues at the Kinshasa School of Public Health will build on their experience gained through their work on Phase 1 while working with our intervention partner, Save the Children, to evaluate a promising intervention that uses education about pubertal changes as an opportunity to challenge harmful gender norms. The intervention, Growing Up GREAT, uses an ecological framework and targets both adolescents and parents. While most participants will be recruited from schools, additional support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will allow for an out-of-school sample to be included, as well. We are thrilled to be working with a team of dedicated and passionate thinkers with a variety of skills and experience as part of Passages.

"Social norms shape behaviors related to sexual debut, intimate partner and sexual violence and early marriage, as well as access to education and the services and information they need to protect their health. Research has shown that investing in social norm change at the community (rather than individual) level, while ensuring supportive policies and access to good quality services, can bring about significant improvements in sexual and reproductive health. Passages aims to address a broad range of social norms, at scale, to achieve sustained improvements in family planning and reproductive health." **Sign up for the Passages newsletter by sending an email to info@passagesproject.org.**

Online Feature

Study coordinator Lydia Animososa and first author Anna Kågesten discuss the making of the recently published *Understanding Factors that Shape Gender Attitudes in Early Adolescence Globally: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review*.

Read the interview, and find a link to the paper, at:

<http://bit.ly/2gdZCuf>