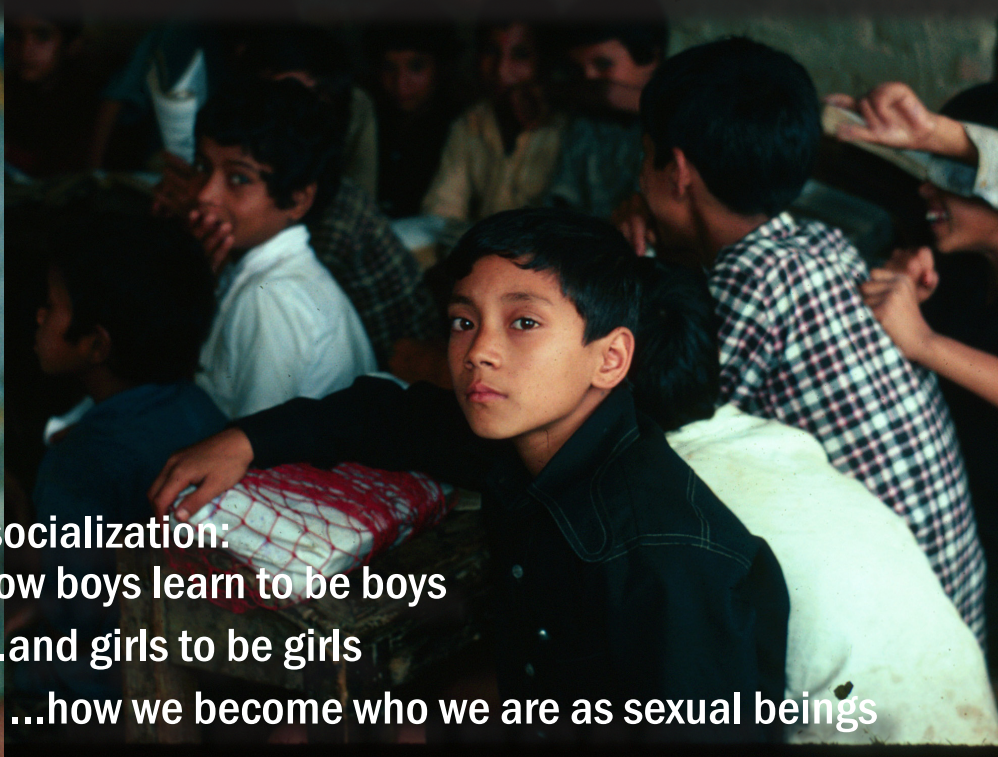




# The Global Early Adolescent Study: an exploration of the evolving nature of gender norms and social relations

10-14 years: a critical age



Gender socialization:  
...how boys learn to be boys  
...and girls to be girls  
...how we become who we are as sexual beings

## A Time of Transition

The ages 10-14 years are among the most critical for human development, yet one of the most poorly understood. While the biological processes are universal, the social contexts within which they occur vary considerably. It is during this age that gendered norms and beliefs are solidified and young people are expected to assume socially defined gender roles that shape their sexual and reproductive health future.

## Multi-City Study in Poor Urban Environments

A multi-national longitudinal comparison offers a unique perspective on the commonalities and differences of the social processes shaping young people's health with particular attention to the ways gender norms inform adolescent sexual health and behaviors. Additionally, such a study affords the opportunity to identify the relationships

between gender norms and educational attainment, mental health, physical health and healthy sexuality.

The focus is on urban poor adolescents, a vulnerable and fast-growing population worldwide. Focusing on poor urban adolescents will generate information for policy makers, program planners, parents, teachers, health and social service providers, and adolescents themselves that will inform programs, policies and services.

## Study Goals

The goal of the Global Early Adolescent Study is to understand the development of gender norms in early adolescence that predispose young people to subsequent sexual health risks and conversely that contribute to healthy sexuality so as to provide the knowledge base for adult caregivers and young people themselves to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

## Study Sites

**Assiut, Egypt** Assiut University

**Baltimore, USA** Johns Hopkins University

**Blantyre, Malawi** University of Malawi

**Cape Town, South Africa** University of the Western Cape

**Cuenca, Ecuador** University of Cuenca

**Cochabamba, Bolivia** Institute for Human Development

**Edinburgh, Scotland, UK** University of St Andrews

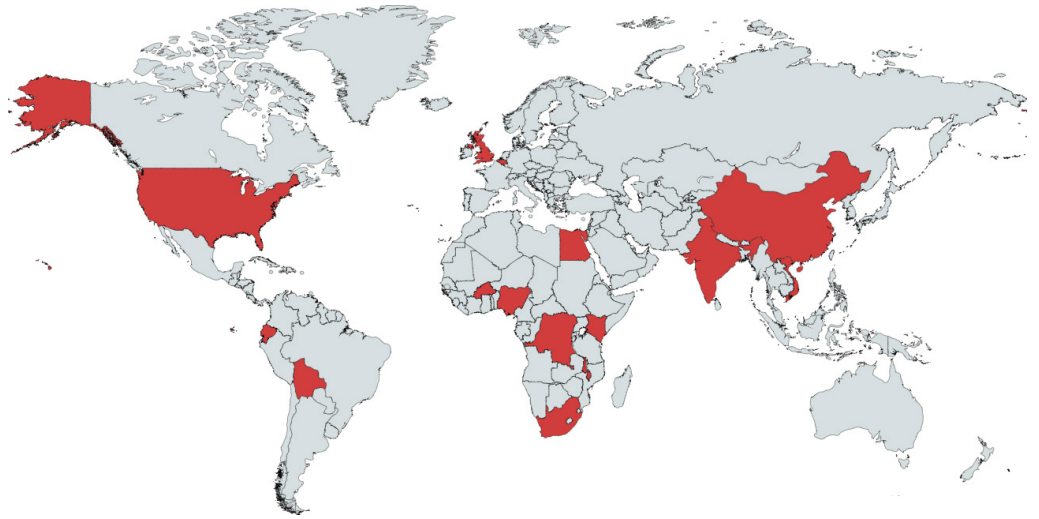
**Ghent, Belgium** Ghent University

**Hanoi, Vietnam** Academy of Social Sciences, Institute for Sociology

**Ile-Ife, Nigeria** Obafemi Awolowo University

**Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of**

**Congo** University of Kinshasa



**Nairobi, Kenya** African Population and Health Research Center

**New Delhi, India** Population Council

**Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso** University of Ouagadougou

**Shanghai, China** Shanghai Institute of Planned Parenthood Research



*"You will see a very small girl and she has a boyfriend ... but during our time, at that age, I didn't have a boyfriend, I was still too naïve. I may have started seeing changes on my body but not having a boyfriend."*

Mother, Kenya

*"...they tell us that if we start dating boys at childhood, we won't be able to achieve our life goals... They also tell us that the female life is so delicate that the chances of making it is so narrow for any female... so they advise us not to have male friends."*

Female adolescent, Nigeria

## Study Design and Objectives

The Global Early Adolescent Study is planned for two phases. The formative research of Phase I has been completed in most sites, informing the development of a practical toolkit to be piloted and validated in the latter half of Phase I and used in a 5-year longitudinal study in Phase II.

### PHASE I

Phase I employs a mixed-methods approach for the creation of a toolkit that includes 4 new instruments assessing gender norms and sexuality specifically for use among early adolescents worldwide.

#### Formative Research

- A systematic review of factors that influence attitudes and beliefs about gender norms in early adolescence.
- In-depth narrative interviews with early adolescents and primary caregivers to develop a narrative on transitions into adolescence, revealing the ways young people navigate the social boundaries of gender norms and how these norms influence their emerging sexuality.
- Workshops with groups of youth to determine overarching themes and suitable stems for vignette instrument development.

#### Toolkit Development

1. *The Gender Norms Scales*, to assess beliefs about normative expressions of what it means to be a young adolescent boy or girl.
2. *The Gender Equitability in Relationships Instrument*, to assess gender biases in relationships.
3. *The Health Instrument*, consisting of 10 modules, to assess physical and mental health, healthy sexuality and sexual health, empowerment and related factors.
4. *The Context Measure*, to measure social cohesion, safety and security, risk and protective factors in the neighborhood from the perspective of the adolescent.

Finally, a special supplement of the *Journal of Adolescent Health* will be published in the fall of 2016 summarizing key findings from the over 900 narrative interviews that have been translated, transcribed, coded, analyzed and synthesized into 8 core themes and manuscripts.

### **Instruments are Based on Innovations**

#### *Gender Norms Scales*

Narrative interviews with young adolescents and their primary caregiver from each site have provided rich data and culminated in the creation of over 3,000 gender codes that were subsequently analyzed for content.

These analyses formed the basis of the Gender Norms Scales that is thus grounded in the lens and voice of young adolescents worldwide.

#### *Gender Equitability in Relationships Instrument*

Three-day focus groups with 11-13 year-olds in each collaborating site form the basis for vignette creation. From discussions and role plays a set of vignettes about typical relationships in early adolescence are developed in each site.

Subsequently content analysis is done to identify what is emerging as the 6 universally applicable vignettes. When finalized there will be two versions of each vignette the first with a female protagonist and the second— an identical version— with a male protagonist. Each respondent will answer questions related to an equal number of male and female version vignettes.

Using this methodology we will be able to assess how young people think about situations differently if it is a boy or girl in the lead.

*“Yes, now I really have to be more polite than when I was younger. Now I have to sit up straight and dignified, be a bit more polite, not yelling anymore.”*

Female adolescent, Belgium



*At that age [10 years old] relatives or at school talked with her about circumcision and said now you will go to a doctor to circumcise you. She asked them ‘How?’ They told her ‘that is done’ and ‘don’t ask how’. Then she came to ask me? ...I told her I am not going to do that, it’s enough that I did that to both of your sisters. Why do you want to go to the doctor to do that to you? When I explained to her what the operation is? She said I am not going to go.”*

Mother, Egypt



*“Now that I am older we got to deal with what you wear, where you go, who you with, if you are by yourself or not because if you wear certain stuff a thug or man looks at your face or asks you out. ... I can’t go everywhere by myself because a lot of men like find me attractive, so my mother tells me I can’t really go places by myself.”*

Female adolescent, USA

## **PHASE II**

Using the globally validated toolkit to pursue the following objectives through a 5-year longitudinal study of 10-14 year-olds in each site, Phase II will:

- Describe gender socialization as an evolving process in different cultural settings from early to later adolescence.
- Investigate parental/caregiver and peer influences on gender socialization of young adolescents.
- Understand how the contexts (schools, neighborhoods, media, culturally-diverse settings) within which a young person develops moderate parental/caregiver influences on gender socialization.
- Understand how gender norms in early adolescence are related to sexuality and subsequent sexual behaviors throughout the adolescent years.
- Understand how gender norms in early adolescence are related to other health outcomes, including mental health and physical health throughout the adolescent years.

The survey will be administered using a mobile data collection platform employing both computer-assisted and audio-computer-assisted self-interview (A-CASI) techniques.





[www.geastudy.org](http://www.geastudy.org)

## LEAD COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

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- University of Malawi, Blantyre, Malawi
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- University of the Western Cape, South Africa

### Photos credits

Page 1: Young girl and Boys in school (Robert Wm. Blum)  
Page 3: Second photo, Egyptian kids (Katie Aune)  
Page 4: Boys (Tamara Kushch) – Girl in classroom (Zurijeta)

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