ALL IN SCHOOL

Out-of-School Children Initiative

UNICEF AND UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS

OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN: WHY GENDER MATTERS?

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Gender is a deeply ingrained set of beliefs and practices that permeate all of society—individuals, groups, and institutions. It influences what governments are willing to provide as well as what families and communities demand from government. State and civil society interact and render gender asymmetries as "natural," thus rendering some education gaps difficult to correct.

8.   Who are the girls out of school?

Out-of-school girls comprise a diverse group, held back by single or compound constraints of cultural norms, poverty, early and forced marriage, early pregnancy, rural residence, refugee conditions, and others. While global statistics indicate slight difference in the proportion of OOS girls and boys, there are significant differences in some countries and pockets of OOS girls in many countries, especially in rural areas. Half of OOS girls reside in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF/UIS, 2012); for instance, the OOSCI study in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2013) found that over 60% OOSC in ages 12-17 were girls. Globally, OOS girls are more likely not to have entered school than to have entered and later dropped out (UNICEF/UIS, 2012). For those who enter, their rates of enrollment diminish at lower secondary school age (when they reach puberty) and diminish even more at upper secondary school age. Few girls return to school at later dates given their overage and the accumulation of disadvantage through their early lives.

In poor countries, many children fail to enter secondary school. While both boys and girls are affected at this critical level of schooling, reasons vary depending on gender ideologies of femininity and masculinity. Boys have greater dropout rates in some commerce, agriculturalist and pastoralist societies, where their external labor is required for family livelihood (Gustafsson-Wright and Pyne, 2002. See also OOSCI studies for Nigeria, 2012; Bolivia, 2011; Pakistan, 2013a). Where households encounter limited access to potable water, fuel, and electricity, and strict norms about women's domestic roles, girls conduct these domestic tasks, which affects their attendance and ability to concentrate in school and complete homework, thus resulting in underachievement and eventual dropout (OOSCI study, Ghana, 2012).

9.   Cultural norms affecting the schooling of girls

In patrilineal societies, in which sons inherit from their fathers, boys are expected to become the future family leaders. Lower values are assigned to girls, who are seen as temporary persons soon to be "given out" in marriage to other families (OOSCI study, Ghana, 2012). Early marriage practices are one of the most powerful causes of the low educational attainment of girls in Asian and African countries, it is more prevalent in rural areas (UNFPA, 2013a), and may account in part for the persistent high levels of illiteracy among women. Since many girls are married with little decision of their own, those marriages can be properly termed "forced." More girls are at risk of child marriage in India than in most other countries combined (UNICEF, 2012). Forty-six percent of girls in South Asia, 41% in West/Central Africa, and 34% in East and South Africa marry before the age of 18, often to older men seeking an additional wife (UNFPA, 2013a; UNFPA, 2013b). For these girls, the problem is not only the predictable withdrawal from their primary and secondary school studies but the beginning of a life of subordination to their husband and poor health when they have early pregnancies (Equality Now, 2014). Some traditional families see early marriage as a way to protect girls from premarital sex and pregnancy outside marriage, and encourage their daughters to marry as soon as they reach puberty, as is the case in Nigeria's northern areas (OOSCI study, Nigeria, 2012). Poverty also plays a critical role as girls are twice as likely to be married before the age of 18 if they are poor than if they come from higher income households. A related practice, call "child betrothal," in

effect in South Asia, though usually with the girl remaining at her family home until a certain age, produces a vulnerable education position for her as she can be called any time by her spouse (Edmeades and Hayes, 2014). This practice interrupts girls' schooling at upper primary or junior high school levels. Poverty also leads girls to prostitute themselves and abandon school; it is estimated that about 500,000 girls are engaged in prostitution in large cities and migrant settlements in the Brazilian Amazonia (Gustafsson-Wright and Pyne, 2002). Additional cultural values affect girls in less perceptible ways. In many communities in India, for instance, menstruation is associated with being "unclean," so girls are subjected to social restrictions, one of which is not being allowed to attend school during their periods (Thakbe et al., 2011). Often absences make girls fall behind their studies and leads to dropping out.

Early sexual debut increases the risk of pregnancy, and when the mother is of school age she tends to abandon schooling (Chae, 2013). More than 90% of births by adolescent girls (ages 15-19) take place in developing countries. In Brazil, over 70% of girls 10-17 years of age with children do not attend school (OOSCI study, Brazil, 2012). Early pregnancy leads to school dropout as well as decreased social opportunities, which translate into reduced lifetime earnings and thus the reproduction of female poverty (Chandra, Camacho, Camacho, 2014).

Many religions, including Islam and Judaism, practice sex segregation, which reaffirms the belief that men and women should occupy different places in society and thus women do not need much education. Islamic interpretations in several countries support policies that enable men to have several wives, which perpetuates early marriage. Data from various African countries indicate a tendency among areas with high Muslim population to have a larger number of out of school girls than other areas. In Nigeria, the majority of OOSC girls are Muslim (Duronsinmi, 2010).

10.   The impact of poverty

Globally, most OOSC live in the poorest households and with illiterate parents. In terms of working activities, boys outnumber girls in all occupational sectors, except domestic work. The majority (68%) of child labour for ages 5-17 is unpaid family work. Child labour has been identified as having the most significant impact on the withdrawal of students from secondary education (OOSCI, Latin American regional study, 2012a). Poor rural parents often send their children (particularly girls) to relatives or acquaintances in urban areas with the hope that the host family will enroll them in school in exchange for domestic work (Gustafsson-Wright and Payne, 2002). This practice—widespread in several African countries (through the *fosterage* or *confiage* system) as noted in the OOSCI studies in Ghana and Congo, in Haiti (*restavek*), as well as in other countries—results in intense domestic work for the children and their concomitant absenteeism and dropping out of school. In Haiti, one of every 10 children is subject to this practice, and three-fourths of those are girls (Smith, 2014).

11.   Gender and ethnicity

In many countries, poverty combines with rural residence and indigenous identity. Girl-boy schooling disparities within socially excluded groups are much larger than in the majority population (Glick, 2008), revealing the strong intersection between gender and socioeconomic conditions. Because rural populations tend to be scattered and governments do not always supply schools in remote areas, children—particularly girls—tend to enter the school system usually about two years overage and thus have a greater probability of leaving school and seldom move beyond primary. Rural areas in Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia have lower enrollment and attendance of girls than boys in secondary school, a reflection of multiple

factors: the scarcity of schools in rural settings (and thus the challenge of distance to school), the heavy toll of domestic work girls face in the countryside, and the restrictive conditions of and discrimination against women within several ethnic groups (Glick, 2008).

In India, education gender gaps are severe among scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (OOSCI, South Asian regional study, 2014). Among the Roma, a transnational minority, many children 7-13 years of age do not complete primary and a substantial group never enroll in school. Within this ethnic group, however, dropouts from lower secondary or in the transition from lower to upper secondary do not show significant difference by sex (OOSCI study, Romania, 2012b), which suggests that strong cultural traditions regarding schooling may in some cases affect boys as much as girls.

12. Children in orphan situations

Orphan girls living in poverty are particularly vulnerable to being out of school. Girls orphaned due to AIDS drop out of school to take care of younger siblings; further, they are encouraged to marry early (OOSCI study, Ghana, 2012). In some Asian countries, cultural norms, gender inequalities, and stigma drive the epidemic underground and make it poorly treated (The White House, 1999). Although more children have lost their fathers than mothers in Zimbabwe, chances of completing primary school are much more reduced by maternal death (Nyamukapa and Gregson, 2005). Findings from 244 studies in developing countries indicate that orphanhood is a high risk factor for early sexual practices (Mmari and Sabherwal, 2014). Orphaned girls are vulnerable to be sexually abused and often forced into prostitution, which precludes their chances of participating in education. They also bear the brunt for taking care of ill parents and siblings (OOSCI study, Ghana, 2012).

13. The challenges of living in conflict and post-conflict countries

About 50% of OOSC today live in conflict-affected countries. Adolescent girls comprise 54% of such children (Right to Education Project, n.d.). In refugee camps, many of the girls are not allowed to go to school because of fear of rape and other forms of violence (UNHCR, 2013). The considerable lack of sanitary facilities and materials in those schools further deters girls in particular from attending (Crisp, Talbot, Cippolone, 2001). In post-conflict situations, many of these children evince either late entrance to schooling or fail to enroll altogether. In general, children who are older than expected for a given grade tend to leave early; this seems to affect girls and boys equally.

14. Street children

Because gender norms involve male assertiveness and greater use of the public sphere, the majority of street children are boys. Girls are more submissive and respond less to abuse and neglect. Estimates of street children in 75 Brazilian cities indicate that 28% were girls (Consortium for Street Children, 2012). Data for out-of-school children from the OOSCI study for the Democratic Republic of Congo (2013) also indicate a lower percentage of girls out of school (18%), with no difference in the schooling levels between OOS girls and boys—most have either dropped out of school early or never attended. Many of the street children in African cities are orphans by AIDS, and thus comprise both sexes.

11.   Disability and school participation

Low-income children with disabilities are one of the most excluded groups and little attention has been paid to gender analysis of this population. A large-scale survey in India found that about 70% of boys and 66% of girls aged 5-18 with disabilities are not enrolled in school; the reasons for the slight gender differences are unclear (World Bank, 2009).

12.   School climate and proximity

While schools are usually considered safe havens, intimidation by teachers and peers is common in many countries and sexual harassment is an important reason that girls drop out of school. According to the OOSCI Tajikistan study (2013b), for example, 15% of the out-of-school girls report that their father, mother, or relatives had prevented them from going to school because of unsafe school environments. In some school environments, girls face considerable peer pressure to experiment sexually, usually with very little understanding of the consequences. High dropout levels have been detected among girls in the Bolivian Amazon region, where 27% of adolescents leave school due to pregnancy (OOSCI study, Bolivia, 2011). Other causes for girls leaving school, across many countries, have been associated with abusive practices by teachers and hostile attitudes by peers. Adding to the inhospitable environment for girls in poorer schools is the lack of latrines and water, which affects the attendance of menstruating girls, a fact persistently documented in qualitative studies in both African and Asian countries.

Distance to school poses much greater problems for girls than for boys, due to fears that girls risk being assaulted while on their way to school. These fears also explain why girls in rural areas tend more than boys to attend school at a later age, when they are considered more able to protect themselves. Distance to school is a factor that cuts across nations—India, Tajikistan, Togo, and Bolivia, for example. Distance affects students' punctuality, attendance, and their own learning, all precursors of school withdrawal.

13.   Recommendations

What is being done and what can be done? A number of recommendations derive from multiple studies and experiences as well as from the national and regional studies on OOSC sponsored by UIS and UNICEF. These recommendations seek to expand and improve the provision of schooling as well as to create enabling environments among households and communities.

- Alter the political economy of the household in countries with high levels of poverty so that parents need to rely less on girls' domestic labour. Providing conditional cash transfers (CCTs), which grant stipends to households on condition that the children attend school, has been found to result in greater enrollment and attendance of both girls and boys. This program is now being tried in more than 30 countries, particularly in Latin America and Asia. The model provided by the Female Secondary School Stipend Programs in Bangladesh has demonstrated success in increasing girls' school enrollment and delaying marriage. Pakistan has a National Plan for the Development and Empowerment of Women that is being supplemented by a CCT program. In an improved economic context, increase the provision of nonformal education programmes for parents, youths, and communities so that deeply rooted cultural beliefs about femininity and masculinity, which affect especially low-income households, are modified and values about human rights promoted.

- Work with civil society organizations to strengthen the capacity to engage in altering cultural norms regarding gender. The UNICEF model of partnering government and civil society has proved successful. This will be particularly pertinent in efforts to enforce compulsory education laws and to raise and enforce the legal minimum age for marriage. Tajikistan has passed a Law on Education that establishes parents' responsibilities regarding greater equality for girls and children with disabilities, which introduces greater pressure for parents to comply with educational regulations.

- Improve the availability and infrastructure of schools, particularly those in rural areas, so that girls may have access to them within reasonable distance and the schools offer essential facilities such as access to water and latrines.

- Provide complementary support such as childcare and counseling for pregnant girls to return to school. Changes in school policy alone to enable pregnant girls to continue their studies have resulted in very low rates of return. Multisectoral approaches are needed for health, child protection, and financing to complement education policies. In particular, enable better access to health services so that sexuality education and birth control methods are available to young girls. Pakistan has a National Plan for the Development and Empowerment of Women that is being supplemented by a CCT program.

- Require child-friendly and gender-sensitive teacher certification, such as those introduced by the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan in 2013 (UNICEF, 2013). The establishment in Tajikistan of a Center for Gender Pedagogies within the Ministry of Education to conduct gender audits in the areas of curriculum, textbooks, and teacher training programs is a promising innovation. In that context, the provision of sex education courses at primary and secondary school levels, including reproductive health and rights, must be intensified. Studies across a wide range of cultures indicate that parents' fears that such courses promote premature sexual activity are unfounded (UNICEF, c2000). In The Netherlands questions about sexuality education are being included in national comprehensive assessments, so that students take this knowledge seriously (Moore, 2000). Greater efforts to link sexuality education to reproductive health services and contraceptive provision are needed in countries that exhibit high rates of adolescent pregnancy.

- Provide scholarships to women seeking to become teachers. In developing regions, particularly Africa, the presence of women teachers leads to higher enrollment and retention rates for girls. Substantial support should be given to rural schools to improve their infrastructure and to teacher housing to make it more appealing for women teachers to serve in rural areas. A related policy should be to promote gender-responsive budget allocations and devise funding formulas for specific regions so that a higher allocation per child (including girls) is provided in areas with deficient infrastructure, as is done in India (Mukherjee, 2013).

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