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Editorial

Findings From the Global Early Adolescent Study



The *Journal of Adolescent Health* is fortunate to be publishing its second supplement on the Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS) with the findings from the second phase of this study. The GEAS focuses on developmental issues among adolescents aged 10–14 years in 15 high-, middle-, and low-income countries throughout the world. The first GEAS supplement, published in 2017, provided important insights into how gender norms, enforced and reenforced during adolescence, pave the way for inequities that impose long-term effects on young people's health and well-being [1]. As Dr. Saewyc [2] highlights in her editorial accompanying this second GEAS supplement, this latest cohort of articles from the study moves beyond “the theoretical and empirical literature on gender socialization and gender norms in adolescence that have been developed in high-income countries in the Global North.” As Moreau et al. [3] point out in their commentary accompanying this supplement, we have “moved from a biomedical conceptualization of gender (often conflated with sex) toward a biosocial understanding of gender as a sociocultural process that interacts with and regulates the bodies through differential patterns of exposures and practices.”

Like Saewyc's editorial and the commentary by Moreau et al., the eight original articles in this supplement (4–11) have used the first GEAS supplement to guide their thinking and elucidate a better understanding of the profound ways in which gender norms evolve during adolescence, are similar and different across cultural contexts, and contribute differentially to health and well-being based on the intensity of the patterns of norms.

The first article, by Mmari et al. [4], provides a descriptive reference point for the remaining seven articles by outlining the similarities and differences in the family and social environments for girls and boys across diverse cultural settings in seven countries spanning four continents. With this contextual background established, Moreau et al. outline the three gender norm scales that were developed from the first phase of the GEAS: Sexual Double Standard, Gender Stereotypical Traits, and Gender Stereotypical Roles. Using these scales in countries within Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America, the authors identified the coexistence of multiple gender worldviews rooted in adolescents' experiences and social context [5]. These measures provide the foundation for the remaining six articles in the supplement, which use them to identify how gender norms are shaped by the social environment, puberty, the changing perceptions of young people, their own behaviors and those of others, the perceptions of their peers, and their own well-being.

Using these measures, Cislighi et al. [6] explored factors that contributed to changes in perceptions of sexual double standards: pubertal onset and progression, family interactions, peer interactions, and the media. The sexual double standard was high among boys and higher for girls, with stage of puberty, parental monitoring, and social media influencing the impact of the double standard. Yu et al. [7] studied the prevalence of pornography use among adolescents in four countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Their findings confirmed that pornography was strongly gendered, with boys more likely to report pornography exposure. However, there were major differences in viewing pornography across countries, ranging from 14% in Ecuador to 33% in Belgium. Greater perceptions of permissiveness and sexual activity among their peers were correlated with greater pornography exposure. Blum et al. [8] explored body satisfaction among early adolescents across seven cities in four different countries, documenting a number of associations between body satisfaction and gender norms. Those young people who hold less gender equitable views report greater body satisfaction. Koenig et al. [9], using two of the gender norm scales (the Gender Stereotypical Traits and the Sexual Double Standard), explored how gender norms were associated with depressive symptomatology. More equal gender norms were associated with lower depressive symptoms among both boys and girls. Ramaiya et al. [10] confined their exploration to three urban-poor communities in Indonesia, where they assessed the role of gender norms on the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences and peer-violence perpetration among 10- to 14-year-old individuals. Gender norms had a markedly differential impact on boys and girls, where the sexual double standards were linked to violence among girls, but not boys. The final article, by Zimmerman et al. [11], examines perceptions of gender norms and empowerment, as measured by the three gender scales, among boys and girls growing up in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unequal gender norms were associated with increased agency for boys and less agency for girls.

These studies from throughout the world further advance our understanding of the role that gender plays for boys and girls during early adolescence, and how social and country contexts support gender inequalities in different ways during early adolescence. If not addressed before or during adolescence, when gender may be more fluid, these inequalities will only increase gender-based health disparities throughout the lifespan. Another concern raised by Saewyc [2] is the way that gender has been constructed and reinforced as binary, which is a challenge for the 2% or larger portion adolescents who are gender-diverse,

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transgender, nonbinary, or intersex adolescents and who have not been included in the present studies. Even with these limitations, the articles in this supplement on the GEAS provide evidence that gender norms can be measured, that adolescents and communities from around the world can be engaged in critically important investigative studies, and that now is the critical time to move forward with preventive interventions aimed at gender norms before and during adolescence.

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