



Middle East Regional Report

MERCY CORPS, MIDDLE
EAST
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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adolescence and early adulthood are critical phases in human development. Recent studies have reframed previous understanding of the adolescent brain to show that this phase of life lays the foundation for core personality traits and is identified as the most creative time in life. For migrants and refugee youth and their families, the immediate impact of a conflict is not only the inability to meet basic needs; there is also a huge emotional and psychological upheaval from witnessing acts of violence, resulting displacement and the loss of familiar social support networks.¹

The mental health and wellbeing of those experiencing conflict and displacement can directly affect their ability to meet their own basic needs and that of their family.² The psychological effects of conflict cut across all age groups and demographics. For adolescents and youth, however, a failure to address persistent levels of toxic stress from prolonged exposure to trauma, insecurity, and lack of protective relationships, can have long-term physical, emotional and cognitive effects.³

Recognizing this, humanitarian actors have advocated for, and successfully integrated, psychosocial support services (PSS) into multi-sectoral interventions ranging from basic needs to education to economic opportunities. Yet resources and funding for PSS interventions continues to remain scarce, partly from the lack of rigorous evidence on these types of interventions. Building this evidence can be daunting given the challenges of conducting rigorous experiments in a humanitarian and conflict context.

This report presents the results of a quasi-experimental, mixed methods study of Mercy Corps' three-year multi-country program targeting conflict-affected and displaced adolescents and youth to help improve their psychosocial wellbeing and prepare them with key 'employability' skills for future employment. Findings from this report contribute to a growing body of evidence on the effectiveness of an integrated psychosocial support and livelihood intervention for young people, to shape forward looking programs and policies in this field.

1.1 The Advancing Adolescents Program

Mercy Corps' Advancing Adolescents program operated in Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. The program used a Profound Stress and Attunement model (PSA) to improve the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of conflict-affected refugees, internally displaced and host community adolescents and youth in these three countries. Based on evidence from a previous randomized control trial in Jordan,⁴ the program expanded to include a specific livelihoods component (in Jordan and in Lebanon) that prepares youth for the workplace through a focus on building "employability" skills.

The impact evaluation uses a quasi-experimental mixed methods design to survey 1,607 adolescents. In parallel, key informant interviews (36) and focus group discussions (32) were conducted to understand how processes and context affected implementation and outcomes.

1 M. Claire Greene et al., "Improving Humanitarian Assistance across Sectors through Mental Health and Psychosocial Support," Humanitarian Exchange, July 2018.

2 Greene et al.

3 UNESCO, "Education as Healing: Addressing the Trauma of Displacement through Social and Emotional Learning," Global education monitoring report: Policy Paper, 38, 2019, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000367812>.

4 Catherine Panter-Brick et al., "Insecurity, Distress and Mental Health: Experimental and Randomized Controlled Trials of a Psychosocial Intervention for Youth Affected by the Syrian Crisis," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 59, no. 5 (2018): 523–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12832>.

1.2 Key Findings by Research Question

Impacts on psychosocial wellbeing

- Young people who participate in the Intensive PSS Sessions (“Intensive Sessions”) **and** the Intensive Sessions with the add-on livelihood component show significant improvements in human security, report that they are more satisfied with life (subjective wellbeing), and also show improvements on their ability to reach out to people from other communities or groups (‘bridging’ social capital). For this pooled group, there are **no** accompanying changes on measures of resilience, mental health, general optimism or trust within a community or group.
- The study also looked at the added value of livelihoods training by comparing young people that participated in Intensive Sessions alone against those that participated in both the Intensive Sessions and Livelihoods. For this latter group, the study finds that there **are** improvements in resilience measures and mental health. Additionally, for this group, young people report more tolerance for the role of women as leaders and in the workplace.
- Girls and those over 15 years of age drive the improvements in human security, subjective wellbeing, and social cohesion. Boys and those under 15 years of age were less impacted. Qualitative research also finds that girls, in particular, report higher self-confidence and aspirations.

Impacts on Economic Life

- For Jordan and Lebanon, where the program combined targeted Intensive Sessions with an add-on livelihoods component, there are overall few statistically significant results for indicators related to economic life or behavioral measures for economic success.
- However, in Jordan adolescents and youth show improvements in personal initiative and on life skills such as the ability to self-start, persevere and exhibit future-focused behavior. Interestingly, for Jordan, this is largely driven by young people that participated in the intensive sessions only. This suggests that improvements in economic life measures stem from psychosocial support, versus any additional work-related skills.
- Results in Jordan are also more pronounced among girls and host community participants.

1.3 Conclusions

- Across a wide range of communities of adolescents and youth, concerted group-based psychosocial interventions *can* improve lives. Young people felt more secure and rated their wellbeing higher, and also reported increased interaction and tolerance of groups outside their own.
 - It is less clear why there are no statistically significant changes in resilience, mental health, general optimism, or “bonding” social capital. Separate of measurement limitations, it may be that Advancing Adolescents is making crucial headway with young people but is hamstrung by the daily challenges that confront its participants.
- Qualitative feedback from all three countries—from both boys and girls—suggests training that has built tangible skills, self-confidence, aspirations, and life skills that themselves are transferable—and form the building blocks for at least increasing the probability of employment in the future.
- Coaches are key to these measurable and observable transformations. Coaches provided steady, reliable mentorship and served as positive role models for young people.
- Across all three countries female adolescents and youth were overall very positive about their experiences, reporting increased self-confidence and professional aspirations. Separate of the training and mentorship received, the opportunity to travel outside the home and socialize with other girls was instrumental to their wellbeing.
 - The structures of the program, however, do risk reinforcing gender stereotypical roles in society and expectations for boys and girls. Options for vocational training and coaching were gender segregated and based on prevailing normative assumptions.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Adolescence and early adulthood are critical phases in human development. Recent studies have reframed previous understanding of the adolescent brain to show that this phase of life lays the foundation for core personality traits and is identified as the most creative time in life. For migrants and refugee youth and their families, the immediate impact of a conflict is not only the inability to meet basic needs; there is also a huge emotional and psychological upheaval from witnessing acts of violence, resulting displacement, and the loss of familiar social support networks.⁵

The mental health and wellbeing of those experiencing conflict and displacement can directly affect their ability to meet their own basic needs and those of their family.⁶ The psychological effects of conflict cut across all age groups and demographics. For adolescents and youth, however, a failure to address persistent levels of toxic stress from prolonged exposure to trauma, insecurity, and lack of protective relationships can have long-term physical, emotional, and cognitive effects.⁷

Issues of mental health often fall under the purview of specialist medical service providers—but in refugee and post-conflict contexts such as the Middle East, primary caregivers may themselves be dealing with high levels of stress or, more simply, be overwhelmed. Providers may also lack awareness of, or fail to recognize, the physical or behavioral signs among children and adolescents. Even when such specialized services are available, physical, financial, or cultural taboos around discussing mental health and wellbeing may present further barriers to accessing necessary services.⁸

Recognizing this, humanitarian actors have advocated for, and successfully integrated, psychosocial support services (PSS) into multi-sectoral interventions ranging from basic needs to education to economic opportunities. Yet resources and funding for PSS interventions continues to remain scarce, partly from the lack of rigorous evidence on these types of interventions. Researchers and practitioners also acknowledge that building this evidence in itself can be daunting, given the challenges of conducting rigorous experiments in humanitarian and conflict settings.

This report presents the results of a quasi-experimental, mixed methods study of Mercy Corps' Advancing Adolescents program—a three-year multi-country program targeting conflict-affected adolescents and youth⁹ with integrated PSS and livelihood intervention.

Advancing Adolescents operates in three countries—Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq—that neighbor Syria, and that have been severely affected by events in Syria and the outflow of people from that country. Military occupation and conflict in Iraq predate the Syria conflict and has fueled significant internal and external displacement. Lebanon and Jordan have hosted refugees from Palestine since shortly after the Second World War; and each of these waves of conflict and displacement only adds to the complexity of the current situation.

The Syrian civil war, which began with peaceful protests in 2011 and slowly morphed into an armed conflict, has pushed over 5.5 million Syrians from their country and mostly to Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. According to the UN, around 13 million Syrians still living in Syria need humanitarian assistance (out of a pre-war population of 22 million).¹⁰

Syria's neighbors have reacted differently to an influx of refugees, offering access to health, education, and labor markets to differing degrees. Donors, the UN, and humanitarian agencies—including Mercy Corps—have filled gaps where possible. The sheer level of upheaval has severe consequences for the

⁵ Greene et al., "Improving Humanitarian Assistance across Sectors through Mental Health and Psychosocial Support."

⁶ Greene et al.

⁷ UNESCO, "Education as Healing: Addressing the Trauma of Displacement through Social and Emotional Learning."

⁸ UNESCO, "Education as Healing."

⁹ Mercy Corps broadly defines 'young people' as those within the age range of 10 – 24 years old. Mercy Corps recognizes that this age range is only a guideline. Programs are purposefully designed to better understand and address the varied needs, skills and capacities of younger adolescents (10 – 14 years), older adolescents (15 – 18 years) and youth (19 – 24 years). 'Pathways to Progress: Mercy Corps' Approach to Partnering with Young People.' (Mercy Corps, 2017) <https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Mercy-Corps-approach-Partnering-Youth-2017.pdf>

¹⁰ UNHCR, "Syria Emergency," UNHCR, February 24, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>.

psychosocial wellbeing of displaced adolescents, however.¹¹ And while communities welcome those fleeing their homes, distrust and resentment is a real concern in communities stretched to their limits in service provision and economic opportunities.

Advancing Adolescents was designed to address the psychosocial and employment challenges wrought by the Syria crisis, by directly working to improve mental health as well as helping to equip young people to enter the labor market with the necessary skills in the future.

2.1 The Advancing Adolescents Program

Advancing Adolescents was a humanitarian program that worked with adolescents and youth—male, female, refugee, displaced, returnees, and those from host communities from 2017 to 2019. It operated at multiple sites in three countries: Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. In Iraq the program was called *PLLAY*, in Jordan *Nubader*, and in Lebanon it was referred to as *Bussma*.

The program was initiated in response to growing evidence of the pivotal role that adolescent years play in shaping social behavior and relationships over time, decision-making skills, as well as attitudes around the use of violence.¹² Adolescence is also the time period when gender norms and roles crystalize, shaping adult trajectories for males and females for years to come.¹³

Specifically, the program was designed to improve mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, through three-month intensive group sessions. These sessions used various activities of interest to young people—including sports, music, and language lessons, among others—as a vehicle through which to improve mental health. This is discussed in greater detail immediately below. Of note, the original program design included only the psychosocial support element—livelihoods training was added at a later stage. This was intended to more deliberately target the third expected outcome, preparing youth for the workplace by increasing “employability.”

The program, therefore, was designed to yield the following outcomes:

1. Young people demonstrate improved psychosocial wellbeing, are supported to pursue personal goals, have increased social capital, and have improved access to safe spaces.
2. Community has sustainable capacity and networks to support and protect adolescents and youth.
3. Young people are better prepared to enter the workforce with enhanced technical skills and improved awareness of labor market realities. (Jordan and Lebanon)
4. Young people expand their collective role in the community through active civic engagement and participation. (Iraq)

2.1.1 Intensive Sessions and the Profound Stress Attunement Model

Adolescent and youth participants took part in three months of intensive sessions and structured activities. These took place at community centers that were established as part of the program, and were done in segregated, single-sex groups. Those aged 12 to 19 years old¹⁴ were eligible to take part, and the groups

¹¹ Emma Soye, “Psychosocial Support in the Syrian Refugee Response: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Humanitarian Exchange*, July 2018, <https://odihpn.org/magazine/psychosocial-support-in-the-syrian-refugee-response-challenges-and-opportunities/>; Alun McDonald et al., “Invisible Wounds: The Impact of Six Years of War on the Mental Health of Syria’s Children” (Save the Children, 2017), <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/emergency-humanitarian-response/invisible-wounds.pdf>.

¹² Christian Kieling et al., “Child and Adolescent Mental Health Worldwide: Evidence for Action,” *The Lancet* 378, no. 9801 (October 22, 2011): 1515–25, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(11\)60827-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60827-1).

¹³ GAGE Consortium, “Gender and Adolescence: Why Understanding Adolescent Capabilities, Change Strategies and Contexts Matters” (London: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence, 2017), <https://www.gage.odi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Gender-and-Adolescence-CF-FINAL-1.pdf>; Fiona Samuels, Nicola Jones, and Bassam Abu Hamad, “Psychosocial Support for Adolescent Girls in Post-Conflict Settings: A Social and Gendered Norms Approach,” *Humanitarian Exchange*, July 2018, <https://odihpn.org/magazine/psychosocial-support-for-adolescent-girls-in-post-conflict-settings-a-social-and-gendered-norms-approach/>.

¹⁴ The age range for the program varied from one country to another. In Iraq, for example, Mercy Corps’ Advancing Adolescents program intentionally targeted young people from 12 up to 34 years due to the unmet needs for this target demographic. Within quantitative results, researchers disaggregate results by under-15s (younger adolescents) and over-15s (older adolescents). Within qualitative discussions where groups were mixed across age-ranges researchers simply refer to these groups as ‘adolescents and youth’ or ‘young people’.

were 8-15 in size. The groups were mixed by nationality. For example, Jordanians and Syrians would be in groups together, as would Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians. This was done intentionally in order to create social cohesion across groups.

Young people then selected from a number of different possible activities. For example, these could be fitness activities (such as nature walks and football), arts & crafts (sewing, graphic design, photography, and drama), vocational skills (hairdressing and beautician training) or technical skills (mobile phone repair, computer repair and English).

Sessions were taught by trained coaches who were volunteers from the local area, a number of which were refugees themselves. Coaches went through a thorough training program in which they were taught about emotional and behavioral self-regulation, including the profound stress and attunement (PSA) model, as well as the pedagogy behind experiential learning. The profound stress attunement (PSA) model is a non-clinical program of psychosocial care, based on neurological science, which takes into account the impact that long term stress has on the emotional brain.¹⁵ Implementation of the intensive PSS-sessions was standardized across countries.

2.1.2 Livelihoods Training

A subset of participants in the Intensive Sessions were also offered livelihoods training. The aim of the livelihoods training was more toward employability than actual employment. Given the target population of older adolescents aged 15 to 19, the program was alert to the risk of inadvertently promoting child labor (i.e., employment). However, at the same time, it did aim to prepare the adolescents for their future entry into the workforce (i.e., employability).

The nature of these sessions varied from country to country. In Iraq, for example, there was no livelihoods training. In Jordan, a group that was deemed to have performed well in the intensive sessions was then provided livelihoods services, including vocational training and apprenticeships. This selected group tended to be older. In Lebanon, selection criteria were not applied, and a number of livelihoods offerings were open to all, including life skills training, entrepreneurship sessions and job-market information sessions.

Beyond this, some countries also chose to include minor variations or additional activities to support life skills and/or increased community engagement for adolescents and youth. In Iraq, for example, the program engaged young people through Youth Advisory Committees (YACs) to address social and development needs in their own communities.

2.2 Theories Examined

This study is a mixed methods impact evaluation on the Advancing Adolescents program. Throughout, it draws on and contributes to literature from across the social sciences, especially psychology, political science, and economics. The main theories examined are outlined below.

2.2.1 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

The primary focus of Advancing Adolescents is to improve the mental health of adolescents and youth. This, indeed, is something of a humanitarian imperative. As such, this study builds on a growing body of evidence related to mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian contexts. This type of assistance primarily aims to alleviate suffering; however, by alleviating toxic stress, such programs may also lead to improvements in human development overall.¹⁶

¹⁵ Jane MacPhail, Michael Niconchuk, and Noora El-wer, "Conflict, the Brain, and Community: A Neurobiology-Informed Approach to Resilience and Community Development," in *The Routledge Handbook of Community Development: Perspectives from Around the Globe* (London: Routledge, 2017), 340–57, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315674100-24>.

¹⁶ Jack P. Shonkoff et al., "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129, no. 1 (January 2012): 232–46, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-2663>.

Mercy Corps has contributed positively to a growing literature that suggests that well-implemented, short, structured mental health interventions can have a positive impact.¹⁷ However, overall evidence is more mixed, and suffers from a lack of rigorous controlled evaluations.

Mercy Corps worked with independent researchers to evaluate earlier implementation cycles of Advancing Adolescents in Jordan. That study found small improvements, especially on human insecurity measures, compared to a randomly selected control group—and found that these effects were sustained almost a year post-program. However, given the limited evidence base overall for this type of program,¹⁸ the present study aims to provide further understanding of the mechanisms involved.

2.2.2 Livelihoods Activities and Vocational Training

While improved mental health may relieve suffering and help overcome trauma, in recent iterations of Advancing Adolescents, some participants have also led market assessments that shaped livelihoods training aimed at preparing them for the workplace. This builds on the existing parts of the program—since Advancing Adolescents' psychosocial support is skills- and activity-based. However, livelihoods programming was equally intended to increase the intensity of the life skills provided through the PSS intervention, by coupling skills training with ongoing PSS. The livelihoods training varied considerably, in intensity, market alignment, and implementation from country to country.

Livelihoods training generally comes in two types: vocational skills training (such as teaching a person how to fix a bike, paint toenails, or sell a mobile phone) and core employment skills (such as teaching someone how to be a self-starter, be persistent, or plan successfully). Unfortunately, the literature broadly suggests that, while vocational skills training can be effective (by increasing skills and earnings), it rarely meets a cost-benefit test—delivering vocational training is expensive, and the gains to earnings are not sufficient for programs to pay for themselves.¹⁹ Where such programs are possible, on-the-job, rather than classroom-based, training is more effective.²⁰ Being in line with labor market needs is also essential.²¹

Life skills, on the other hand, have been shown to predict long-run economic performance. These skills refer to a person's ability to focus on the future, and in particular to notions of self-control.²² Such skills are usually acquired through school, family, and involvement in the community. Therefore, displaced young people may miss out on the chance to develop them. Advancing Adolescents reasonably expected to impact life skills through either its psychosocial component or livelihoods, which incorporated these skills.

Related to life skills, some recent studies have also considered, in the context of development assistance, training in personal initiative explicitly, rather than technical skills training. When compared to traditional skills training among entrepreneurs, personal initiative training was both cheaper and more effective.²³

2.2.3 Girls' Empowerment

Advancing Adolescents was not intentionally designed to improve the life of girls, either by empowering girls or altering boys' (and girls') attitudes toward women's role in society. However, measuring the effect of programming on a series of outcomes is informative for program teams and also important in its own right. There are reasons to believe that this type of program could have important effects with respect to gender:

¹⁷ Panter- Brick et al., "Insecurity, Distress and Mental Health."

¹⁸ Karl Blanchet et al., "An Evidence Review of Research on Health Interventions in Humanitarian Crises," October 2015, <https://www.elrha.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Evidence-Review-22.10.15.pdf>.

¹⁹ Christopher Blattman and Laura Ralston, "Generating Employment in Poor and Fragile States: Evidence from Labor Market and Entrepreneurship Programs," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, July 19, 2015), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2622220>.

²⁰ David Card, Jochen Kluge, and Andrea Weber, "What Works? A Meta Analysis of Recent Active Labor Market Program Evaluations," Working Paper, Working Paper Series (National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2015), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w21431>.

²¹ Jochen Kluge et al., "Interventions to Improve the Labor Market Outcomes of Youth: A Systematic Review of Training, Entrepreneurship Promotion, Employment Services and Subsidized Employment Interventions," *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 13, no. 1 (2017): 1–288, <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2017.12>.

²² Lex Borghans et al., "The Economics and Psychology of Personality Traits," *The Journal of Human Resources* 43, no. 4 (2008): 972–1059.

²³ Francisco Campos et al., "Teaching Personal Initiative Beats Traditional Training in Boosting Small Business in West Africa," *Science* 357, no. 6357 (September 22, 2017): 1287–90, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aan5329>.

First, gains (i.e., improvements in income, psychosocial measures, etc.) may accrue disproportionately to girls because they are relatively deprived compared to boys due to cultural forces. Adolescent girls possess limited mobility and lack socialization compared with their male counterparts.²⁴

Second, Advancing Adolescents consisted, partly, of activity-based group sessions, which are gender-segregated. This type of group is potentially empowering for women in two ways. On the one hand, such groups provide a platform for delivering services to women and girls that they would otherwise not have access to. On the other hand, the dynamics of participation in groups may encourage women to be more assertive of their rights and priorities. Evidence suggests that the latter effect is most pronounced when this is an intentional part of the program design. In other words, it is not likely that just by getting girls together they will empower each other (though it is possible). However, if they are intentionally taught about, or encouraged to discuss, gender inequity and how to address it, this is likely to impact gender-related outcomes.²⁵

Advancing Adolescents does not intentionally seek to effect changes in female empowerment directly. Nevertheless, this study does assess the extent to which the program has an impact in this area, with important results that can be linked to a growing global evidence base on girls' empowerment in humanitarian settings.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Questions

This evaluation has been designed to understand the impact of the Advancing Adolescents Program on the psychosocial wellbeing, mental health, and economic lives of participating adolescents. The research questions were developed in conjunction with the learning goals of country program implementation and monitoring and evaluation teams. Together, Mercy Corps and the evaluation team developed the following research questions and sub-questions:

QUESTION 1: Impact on psychosocial wellbeing

1. Did Advancing Adolescents improve mental health, psychosocial wellbeing, social capital, and cohesion?
 - a. For whom does the intervention work? (i.e., subgroup analysis)
 - b. Do the intervention impacts persist after the program, and if so for how long?

QUESTION 2: Impact on economic life

2. For participants in Advancing Adolescents, what are the links between psychosocial wellbeing and employment / employability?
 - a. Is employment status, employability, or economic optimism linked to psychosocial wellbeing, mental health, or resilience?
 - b. What are the impacts of psychosocial support (PSS) programming on participants' economic outcomes (employability, resilience to socioeconomic shocks)?
 - c. What is the comparative impact of an integrated PSS and livelihood program on psychosocial and economic wellbeing, compared to stand-alone PSS? (Jordan only).

²⁴ Francisco Campos et al., "Profiting from Parity: Unlocking the Potential of Women's Businesses in Africa" (The World Bank, March 19, 2019), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/501971553025918098/Main-Report>.

²⁵ Seema Jayachandran et al., "Greater than the Sum of the Parts: Evidence of Mechanisms Operating in Women's Groups" (Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), Forthcoming).

3.2 Theory of Change

The primary purpose of the research conducted for this report is to measure the impact of the Advancing Adolescents program on a series of psychosocial wellbeing and economic outcomes. At the same time, it is designed to detect and explore causal links between the two, to the extent possible. Advancing Adolescents was designed to not only improve mental health of adolescents but also to start preparing them to enter the workplace. The addition of a livelihood component reinforced this dynamic. Thus, this study does not simply examine whether participating young people are more economically successful, but the mechanisms through which this might happen, as well as any impediments.

This focus is not narrowly on economic life in terms of income, profit, and wealth. Adolescents and youth are less likely than adults to enter the workforce directly—the report, therefore, attempts to measure employability, as discussed above, or the sense among participating young people that they are more equipped to enter the workplace when they are older.

The program may affect the economic lives of young people in one of two ways thus: either (1) by directly providing skills which adolescents and youth can put into practice in the workplace, and/or (2) by boosting life skills.

3.3 Outcomes of Interest

3.3.1 Psychosocial Wellbeing and Mental Health

In this research, the primary outcomes of interest are related to psychosocial wellbeing and economic life. That is, these are the key indicators of program success. For the former, analysis is based on three composite indices constructed to understand wellbeing. These indices follow the established practice of the monitoring and evaluation teams for Advancing Adolescents as well as previous Mercy Corps research in Jordan.²⁶ In particular, the report measures three dimensions of psychosocial wellbeing: human insecurity (10 items, 4-point scale), resilience (21 items, 5-point scale), and mental health difficulties (21 items, 3-point scale). The report also includes a measure of general optimism, as well as subjective wellbeing, using the Gallup World Poll methodology.²⁷

Additionally, a human insecurity scale attempts to capture experiences of fear and safety among adolescents and youth, while a resilience scale attempts to measure the extent to which adolescents and youth have structures of support as well as inner strength to cope with adversity. The mental health scale used was the Arab Youth Mental Health scale, originally created to screen for depression and anxiety among Lebanese youth.²⁸ These scales were chosen because they have been repeatedly used in similar contexts as that of the study, and because continuity in measurement would allow for analysis of changes over time among a subset of the sample.

3.3.2 Economic Life

The report measures economic life using three key indicators that reflect changes in young people's economic circumstances. First, researchers constructed a measure of each participant's individual—as opposed to household—wealth, using the value of any personally owned mobile phones or tablets. Second, the data collection instrument measured income and profit in the last seven days. Finally, hours worked in the past seven days were recorded. In addition to actual employment, researchers also measured self-reported employability. That is, the surveys used for this research asked adolescents and youth how prepared they felt for the workplace in terms of skills and access. The surveys also measured their levels of optimism related to future work and economic circumstances.

²⁶ See, for example, Panter-Brick et al., "Insecurity, Distress and Mental Health."

²⁷ Ed Diener, Shigehiro Oishi, and Louis Tay, "Advances in Subjective Well-Being Research," *Nature Human Behavior* 2, no. 4 (April 2018): 253–60, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0307-6>.

²⁸ Ziyad Mahfoud et al., "Validation of the Arab Youth Mental Health Scale as a Screening Tool for Depression / Anxiety in Lebanese Children," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* 5, no. 1 (March 24, 2011): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1753-2000-5-9>.

Work optimism is gauged by a scale based on responses to questions regarding whether a young person has the skills to succeed or whether barriers are likely to thwart their ambitions. Employability optimism stems from whether or not a young person anticipates that his or her level of employability will increase over a five-year time horizon.

3.3.3 Life Skills and Behavioral Measures

This study hypothesizes that an important link between psychosocial interventions and employment outcomes would most likely be seen through changes in life skills, also referred to as social and emotional skills.²⁹ These include things such as the ability to self-start, persevere and exhibit future-focused behavior. These life skills were measured using two indicators: the well-known short-version Grit Scale³⁰ and a measure of personal initiative.³¹ This study also reports two related self-reported behavioral measures: time preference and attitude to risk. Time preference measures how patient adolescents and youth consider themselves to be, while attitudes to risk measures how much of a risk-taker in daily life they consider themselves to be.

3.3.4 Social Cohesion and Social Capital

The report also examines social cohesion, and a related concept, social capital. With respect to social cohesion, the study measures two aspects: bonding (i.e., getting along better with members of one's own group) and bridging (with outsiders). The report defines "insiders" and "outsiders" in two ways: first with reference to the young person's community, or the people they interact with in daily life (for example, how well do you get along with people in your community?). Second, referencing people's national group ("how well do you get along with people from national groups that are not your own?" for instance). These measures were based on the World Bank's social capital measurement tools³² as well as recent Mercy Corps projects in the region.

3.3.5 Attitudes Toward Gender

Finally, the study measures attitudes toward gender, where adolescents and youth are rated based on attitudes and response to female emancipation and a woman's role in the family and society. In Lebanon, an additional metric was created to capture a respondent's likelihood to migrate overseas.

3.3.6 Multiple Comparisons

The quantitative survey answers were used to build 21 different indices or outcome measures. This large number of outcomes presents a risk: by testing so many different outcomes, the chances of incorrectly finding a positive result is increased. (This issue is described in more detail under "Limitations" below.)

One way to overcome this bias is to aggregate indices and to compare families of variables. As such, for the evaluation, four "family" indices: psychosocial wellbeing, social cohesion, economic performance, and behavioral measures. These are created by taking the mean of the z-scores for each of the component variables. The four variables are then adjusted using the Holm-adjusted Bonferroni correction method to correct for the use of multiple hypotheses. This method adjusts for the number of tests performed. It is a relatively conservative method, so both the unadjusted and adjusted values are reported.

Figure 1, below, shows the individual variables included in each family-wise group variable. For economic performance, only five of the seven individual variables are included. Income is excluded because it correlates with profit, and hours in education is excluded because it counter-weights hours worked. Under

²⁹ See, for example, United States Agency for International Development, "Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills," USAID Education Policy Brief (USAID, 2019), https://www.edulinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/USAID%20Education%20Policy%20Brief%20Social%20and%20Emotional%20Learning%20and%20Soft%20Skills_Final_0.pdf.

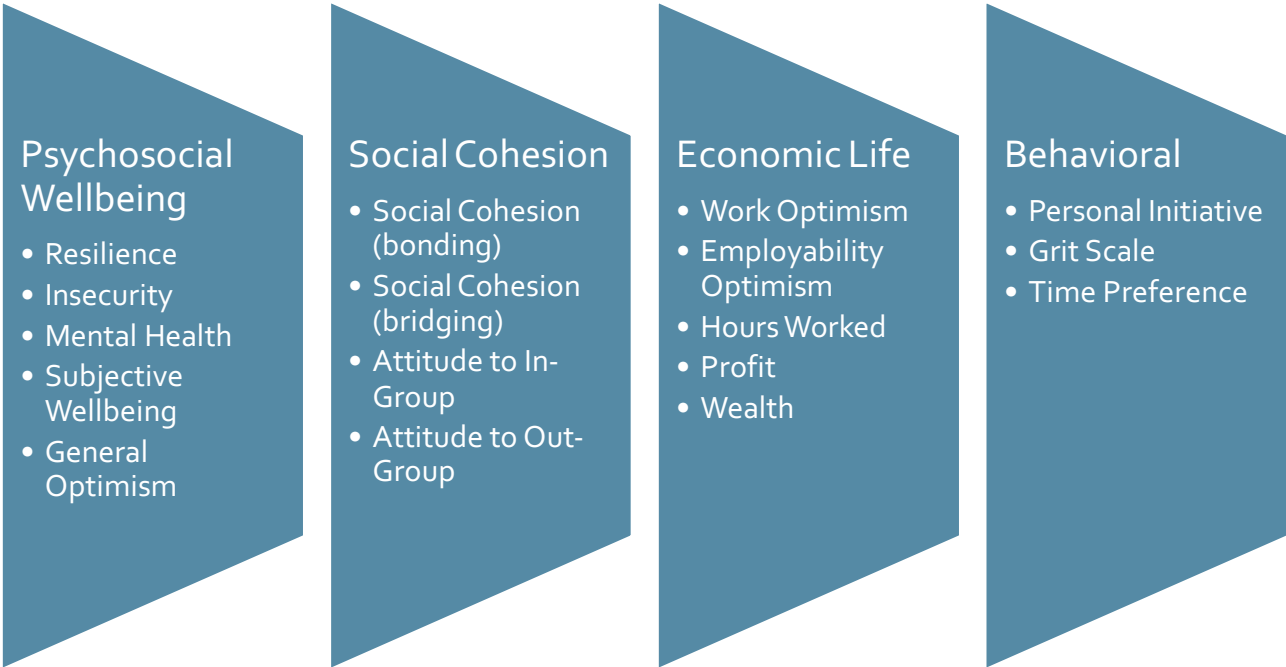
³⁰ Angela Lee Duckworth and Patrick D. Quinn, "Development and Validation of the Short Grit Scale (GRIT-S)," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 91, no. 2 (2009): 166–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223890802634290>.

³¹ Based on Campos et al., "Teaching Personal Initiative Beats Traditional Training in Boosting Small Business in West Africa."

³² Christiaan Grootaert et al., *Measuring Social Capital: An Integrated Questionnaire*, World Bank Working Papers (The World Bank, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1596/0-8213-5661-5>.

the behavioral group variable, risk is excluded, since whether an increase in this index is considered as positive or negative, varies based on the context.

Figure 1: Variables Included in each “Family-Wise” group variable



4.0 METHODOLOGY

This is a mixed-methods research project, designed and undertaken so as to compare and contrast between quantitative and qualitative findings, in order to more fully explicate and contextualize findings. For the regional report, specifically, the results of thorough individual country reports are compared in order to determine common themes, linkages, and contrasts.

The quantitative component merges data from across Jordan and Lebanon in the impact evaluation. Quantitative data from Iraq is also included, but this is only for adolescents and youth who were part of the program. There is no comparison group in Iraq, so this part of the results should be treated with caution.

Combining data from three regional countries allows lessons to be drawn from across diverse contexts. It also gives more power to detect effects statistically. However, it also masks differences across countries and sub-contexts within them. While results are analyzed by disaggregating sub-groups, this evaluation was not designed to have statistical power to detect effects below the regional level, i.e., at the country level. Subsequent qualitative data collection was used to validate or complicate findings and, as noted above, used to understand how programming was perceived by, and affected participating adolescents and youth.

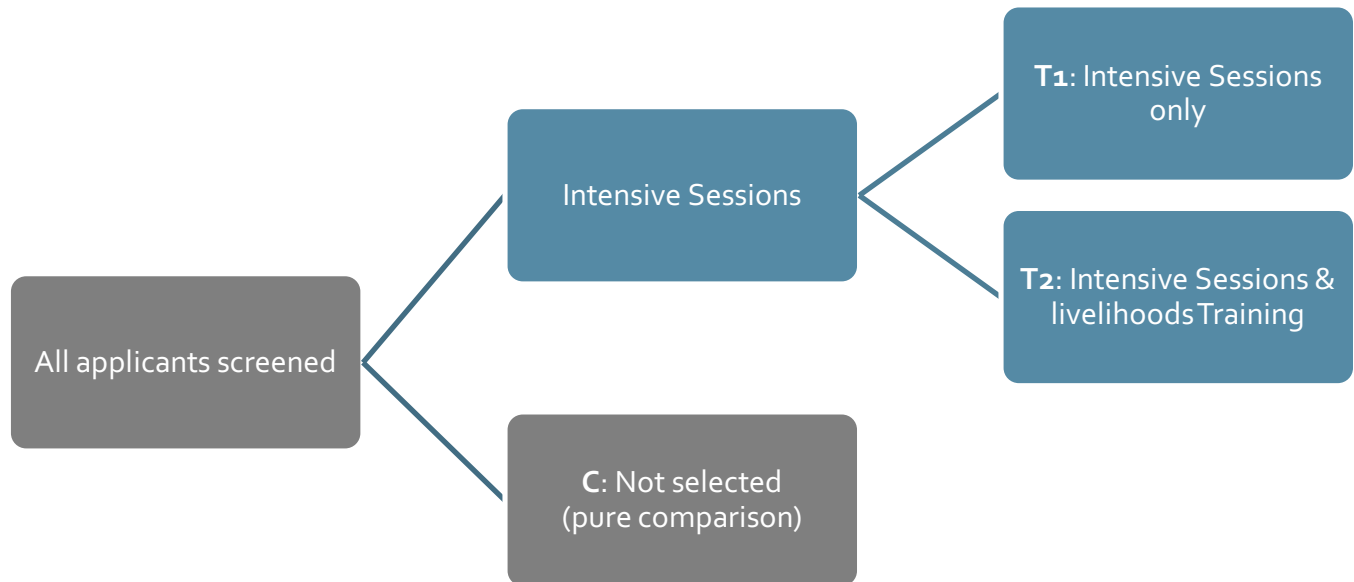
4.1 Identification Strategy

This impact evaluation combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The **quantitative component** is a quasi-experimental impact evaluation conducted on the program as implemented in Jordan and Lebanon. It is based on a matching design to test the effects of the intervention on the psychosocial and economic outcomes described above. The evaluation was designed after completion of the intervention; therefore, random treatment assignment was not possible. Similarly, a regression discontinuity design was not

possible as selection of individuals for the intervention was not based on a clear cut-off on a continuous variable.

The two treatment conditions and one comparison condition were: (1) participation in intensive sessions based on the profound stress and attunement model, (2) participation in intensive sessions with livelihoods training, and (3) comparison (no intervention). Figure 2 below shows how the groups are split.

Figure 2: Identification Strategy



Recruits to the Intensive Sessions were screened by Mercy Corps for challenges to mental health, including exposure to trauma and poor access to basic services. The screening data was used for matching individuals. First, a representative sample of all individuals who participated only in the Intensive Sessions (T1) was selected. From this sample the researchers used a propensity score matching method to select matched groups from those who also participated in the Livelihoods training (T2) and from those who participated in nothing at all (C). In Jordan, since the total number of individuals who participated in the livelihoods training was low, the entire group was selected, so T2 in Jordan was not matched (the team controlled for this in the results).

In Iraq, a matching design was impossible because there was no reliable list of potential comparisons. However, the same follow-up survey was conducted with program participants in Iraq to identify patterns that may add to the understanding of how the program operates regionally, using before/after data.

The **qualitative component** complements and contextualizes the findings of the quantitative findings. Adolescents and youth who participated in the program, as well as implementing agents such as coaches and trainers, all participated in a mix of focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

The qualitative sample was purposive—balanced by geography, gender and program intensity levels within each country, as well as to recognize differences between host, refugee, and internally displaced participant responses. This was largely successful, yielding mostly rich feedback. Interviews, specifically, targeted implementing agents, like coaches and life-skills trainers who worked most closely with adolescents and youth, rather than administrators, for example.

This was purposeful in order to continue to probe for program effectiveness from a different angle, with some additional input regarding process. FGDs meanwhile, organized by gender, were used to gather feedback from participating adolescents and youth.

4.2 Data Collection

Figure 3: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Available for Advancing Adolescents Evaluation

Survey name	Topics covered	Comparison Group	Treatment Group 1	Treatment Group 2
Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographics Mental health Exposure to trauma Access to basic services 	Whole population (n = 456)	Whole population (n = 498)	Whole population (n = 422)
Pre-program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health 	N/A	Subset of program participants (n = 145)	Subset of program participants (n = 54)
End of program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health 	N/A	Subset of program participants (n = 145)	Subset of program participants (n = 54)
Post program follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographics Mental health Social cohesion Economic life Other 	Matched sample (n = 456)	Matched sample (n = 498)	Matched sample (n = 422)
Qualitative Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ease of participation, including challenges to mobility and access to centers Daily activities Reflections on pre/post changes in behavior and future expectations Use of lessons outside of classroom Long-term vision and aspirations 	Sample	Sample	Sample

One round of quantitative and one round of qualitative data were collected specifically for this evaluation. However, the evaluation is also informed by three prior rounds of quantitative data collection that were collected for programmatic and monitoring and evaluation purposes. As a result, the evaluation draws on detailed demographic data for all participants and non-participants. Longitudinal data for a subset of program participants allows for the plotting the change of mental health scores over time. Unfortunately, a full longitudinal panel, which would have allowed for use of more powerful statistical tools, was not

possible, since individuals in the comparison group were not part of the pre- and post-program data collection rounds.

For the **quantitative** data collection, post-program follow-up data were collected between September and November 2019. Since the program was implemented in cycles, and these cycles were staggered, the dates of the other surveys vary. The process from screening through pre-program to post-program was predictable, usually lasting two months. The earliest screening for a respondent in the dataset was in November 2017. The average screening date was August 2018, however. The average period of time between screening and the long-term follow-up was nearly fourteen months. The average time between program start (i.e., pre-program survey, for which there is data for only a subset of respondents) was 9.5 months.

Figure 4: Qualitative Data Collection

Country	Key Informant Interviews	Focus Groups
Iraq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 female • 3 male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 girls • 5 boys
Jordan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 (male and female, but no precise gender breakdown) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 girls • 12 boys
Lebanon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 female • 3 male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 girls • 3 boys
Totals:	36	32

Data was collected by external enumerators and supervised by Mercy Corps’ monitoring and evaluation teams. During data collection, enumerators attempted to contact the matched samples using the contact data that was collected during screening; though this data did not include detailed addresses, and therefore it was difficult to track all participants. In the end, 63 percent of the matched sample was surveyed. During data collection, the enumerators identified themselves as working with researchers from Mercy Corps.

The surveys were conducted on tablets using Open Data Kit (ODK), a suite of open-source tools for collecting and storing survey data. For the most part, interviews were conducted at the youth centers which serve as bases for the project. In some cases, enumerators traveled to the homes of the respondents to conduct the interviews. In a very small number of cases, interviews were conducted by telephone.

Due to technical issues with the data collection devices, five variables³³ were not collected for 130 respondents in Jordan and 27 in Iraq. This represents around 9.5 percent of all respondents in the regional impact evaluation and about 11.5 percent of respondents in Iraq.

The **qualitative** data were collected after the quantitative survey work had been completed. These were collected by qualitative researchers in person, with language interpretation assistance provided by Mercy

³³ Subjective wellbeing, general optimism, employability optimism, attitudes to risk and time preference. For these values, linear regression is used to impute values. This does not change any of the findings but allows for the “family-wise” variables to be computed for all respondents.

Corps staff. In Jordan, a third-party research firm was contracted to conduct focus groups and semi-structured interviews across all three sites in Jordan. This resulted in a greater number of focus group discussions than would have been possible with the small research team by itself. Unfortunately, some of this data was less well recorded, translated, and/or transcribed, limiting its overall quality.

4.3 Balance Across Treatment Groups

This evaluation set out to interview adolescents and youth in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, though the respondents in Iraq were not part of the impact evaluation. In Iraq, a random sample of 502 adolescents and youth were identified, with 231 surveyed (an attrition rate of 54 percent). In Jordan, a matched sample of 717 youth was selected to form groups C and T1. Enumerators were able to survey 493 of those youth, yielding an attrition rate of 31 percent. In addition, enumerators surveyed 134 youth from T2—but this group was not matched. In Lebanon a matched sample of 1,245 youth was selected, and ultimately 749 were surveyed, an attrition rate of 40 percent. Overall enumerators surveyed 1,607 adolescents across three countries. For the matched sample, attrition was 36 percent.

The adolescents and youth surveyed were a mix of Iraqi, Jordanian, Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian, Arabs and Kurds, refugees, internally displaced people, and those from host communities. Matching methods were used to create treatment groups that are balanced across observable characteristics. In other words, using variables collected at baseline, matching aimed to ensure that variables presented similarly between the comparison and treatment groups. In the sample, there are 627 respondents in Jordan and 749 in Lebanon. There were 712 boys and 664 girls. 718 respondents were from host communities, whereas 658 were refugees. 754 were under 15 and 622 were 15 or over.

In order to ensure that the groups in the initial sample were balanced, tests of balance were conducted comparing all treatment groups using all available baseline characteristics (i.e., those collected at the initial screening). From these tests, there were no significant differences between C and T1. There were differences between C and T2, as a result of the Jordan component of T2 treatment group having been selected outside the matching method. A test of balance on the final surveyed sample was also conducted, or in other words a test of balance only of those who were surveyed. The results of this test revealed that C to T1 was imbalanced on one measure, out of 12; C to T2 was imbalanced on eight out of 12 measures; while the comparison between C and T1 / T2 pooled revealed imbalance on one out of 12 measures. The test of balance results is outlined in Table 1.

4.4 Estimation Strategy

This evaluation estimates the treatment-on-the-treated effect for the intended outcomes listed above. The analysis uses OLS regression to estimate the effects of treatment between pairs: T1 only, T2 only, T1 & T2 combined and T1 to T2.

The analysis controls for a vector of baseline characteristics where imbalance was detected between the treatment groups. In addition, location-fixed effects, enumerator-fixed effects, and a dummy variable indicating whether the survey was conducted after the large street protests in Lebanon started, were also included. To reduce sensitivity to outliers, economic variables were top-coded at the 95th percentile.

4.5 Limitations

While this report constitutes a rigorous impact evaluation, it nevertheless has some limitations, even as those are and were mitigated wherever possible. The most salient challenges to analysis and deduction are as follows:

1. **Matching design.** A matching design was the best option for an impact evaluation conducted after the fact with the available resources. However, a matching design is not as rigorous as a randomized controlled trial. In particular, despite balance across observable characteristics,

there are many characteristics that are unobservable. There is always the possibility that findings are driven to some extent by variables that are not included in the model.

2. **Non-matched sample for T2 in Jordan.** The group that participated in livelihoods training in Jordan was older, more female, from larger households, and likely to have better access to services than other participants in this study. Given these differences across the characteristics that are measured, it is plausible that there are additional differences that are not captured, though imbalances are controlled for where possible. Nevertheless, findings should be considered in the light of this and the only true “matched” comparison would be C to T1.
3. **Attrition.** At almost 40 percent for the matched sample, attrition was very high. Given that refugee youth, in particular, are highly mobile, and that the evaluation team possessed limited demographic and contact information with which to track respondents, the research team anticipated high attrition rates and therefore intentionally sampled a large number of adolescents and youth. The team also used a test of balance to identify controls that could be applied in the analysis.
4. **Multiple hypotheses.** Where many hypotheses are tested at the same time (i.e., by having many outcome variables), the probability of falsely finding a significant result increases. This is because with any test there is a small chance that it will yield a false positive. With many tests, this chance increases. This evaluation looks at around 21 separate outcome variables. One way to overcome this issue, and to prevent data mining, is to write a pre-analysis plan. While a formal pre-analysis plan did not form part of this evaluation, tests, expected results and outcomes were pre-specified. Other steps to mitigate multiple hypotheses issues are described above under outcomes.

Table 1: Test of Balance

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Comparison Mean</i>	<i>T1</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>T1 & T2</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>T1 to T2</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Age	Years	14.257	-0.012	0.131	0.018	0.017	0.003	0.640	0.028	0.000
Location	Lebanon = 1	0.500	-0.035	0.281	0.188	0.000	0.057	0.024	0.219	0.000
Gender	Female = 1	0.463	0.024	0.453	0.040	0.241	0.028	0.274	0.015	0.643
Foreign	Yes = 1	0.467	-0.030	0.352	0.068	0.043	0.013	0.600	0.098	0.003
Married	Yes = 1	0.011	0.121	0.368	0.211	0.095	0.133	0.161	0.095	0.400
Owns shelter	Yes = 1	0.320	-0.029	0.407	-0.039	0.282	-0.030	0.274	-0.010	0.773
Family health issue	Yes = 1	0.336	0.015	0.654	-0.123	0.001	-0.040	0.144	-0.136	0.000
Individual health issue	Yes = 1	0.129	0.001	0.987	0.007	0.884	0.003	0.929	0.006	0.895
Disability	Yes = 1	0.022	0.000	0.998	0.168	0.081	0.076	0.318	0.169	0.073
Access to Services	Scale 0 to 8	3.404	0.011	0.038	-0.007	0.186	0.002	0.596	-0.018	0.001
Individual working	Yes = 1	0.116	0.031	0.526	-0.176	0.003	-0.045	0.284	-0.199	0.000
Parent working	Yes = 1	0.575	-0.028	0.390	0.099	0.004	0.026	0.323	0.126	0.000

5.0 RESULTS

This section summarizes the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Within the quantitative data, the primary comparison is between the pooled treatment groups and the comparison group, or between C to T1&T2, specifically. This allows assessment of the overall impact of the program in its different iterations. Data are also analyzed by subgroups, to explore the heterogeneity of impact. Full disaggregation is presented in the Annex. On the qualitative side, key themes and feedback that emerged from across focus groups and respondents have been used to validate findings, add context, and highlight adolescents' experiences in their own voice. The full results for the outcomes examined are presented below, followed by analysis.

Programs like Advancing Adolescents address a clear need to improve mental health and wellbeing of vulnerable adolescents in humanitarian settings. After all data, quantitative and qualitative, are considered, this impact evaluation finds that there are overall small but positive effects on mental health, wellbeing, and social cohesiveness. These findings vary somewhat between the different countries and by group, as is explored below in greater detail. But it is clear that the program has been impactful to the lives of adolescent participants. With respect to economic performance, the impact is mostly limited, but this is not entirely surprising at this stage, and the real test will be as these adolescents and youth attempt to enter the workforce in coming years. Nevertheless, the evaluation provides insights into what appears to be working better, and what challenges remain.

5.1 Impacts on Psychosocial Wellbeing and Related Components

Question 1: To what extent did the program contribute to improvements in adolescents' psychosocial wellbeing, mental health, and other key intended outcomes?

Sub-questions:

1a. What are the attributable impacts of the Advancing Adolescents program on participants' resilience and psychosocial wellbeing, mental health, social capital and cohesion, and other outcomes of interest?

1b. Does the program's effectiveness differ for different subgroups (country, gender, displacement status), or based on differences in the program interventions (program exposure/ length of participation, intensive program participation only vs. drop-in and intensive participation)?

1c. Do the program impacts persist after the program, and if so for how long?

There were statistically significant improvements in personal security, aspects of wellbeing, and social capital. These are important results, but they are complicated by lack of movement along other, similar metrics.

After pooling the two treatment groups, or examining the combined effects of intensive sessions and livelihoods, the study found that there were significant improvements in human security, self-reported subjective wellbeing (young people said they were more satisfied with life), and the two measures of "bridging" social capital (the ability to reach out to people of other communities or groups). At the same time, there were no statistically significant changes among measures of resilience, mental health, general optimism, or "bonding" social capital (trust *within* a community or group). This discrepancy is explored more in the discussion below. These results are summarized in Table 2.

The findings are mostly replicated when the data from each treatment group is analyzed separately. Those who participated only in the Intensive Sessions, for example, experienced improvements in human security as well as social cohesion. However, the improvement in subjective wellbeing was not statistically significant for this group.

Comparing Intensive Sessions only to the combined treatment group i.e. those that participated in intensive sessions **and** Livelihoods, gives a sense of the added value of the livelihoods training, in particular. Young people who participated in the intensive sessions and the additional livelihoods training also had improvements in resilience and mental health. This comparison also revealed differences in gender attitudes. Those who received intensive sessions and livelihoods training, both, reported more tolerance of the role of women as leaders, or in the workplace, for example, as compared with those only exposed to intensive sessions (See Table 2 in the Annex).

As noted earlier, one potential limitation of this study is the use of multiple variables, and the associated risk of false positives. To correct for this potential issue, two indices for “families” of variables were created: psychosocial wellbeing and social cohesion. Psychosocial wellbeing shows an overall improvement for the pooled treatments, vis-à-vis the comparison group, while social cohesion shows an improvement overall as well. These findings, among a broader family of variables, suggest that the results reflect broad improvements rather than false positives, underscoring that the adolescents in the pooled treatment group are reporting significantly different, positive experiences—at least with respect to psychosocial wellbeing and social cohesion—than the comparison group.

5.1.1 Sustainability of Results Over Time

For the three psychosocial measures for a subset of participants in Iraq (n = 231), Jordan (n = 267), and Lebanon (n = 96), data reveal changes in the indicators from pre-program, to end of program and then long-term. This allows for some examination of the sustainability of the program’s effects. These are shown in Figure 5.

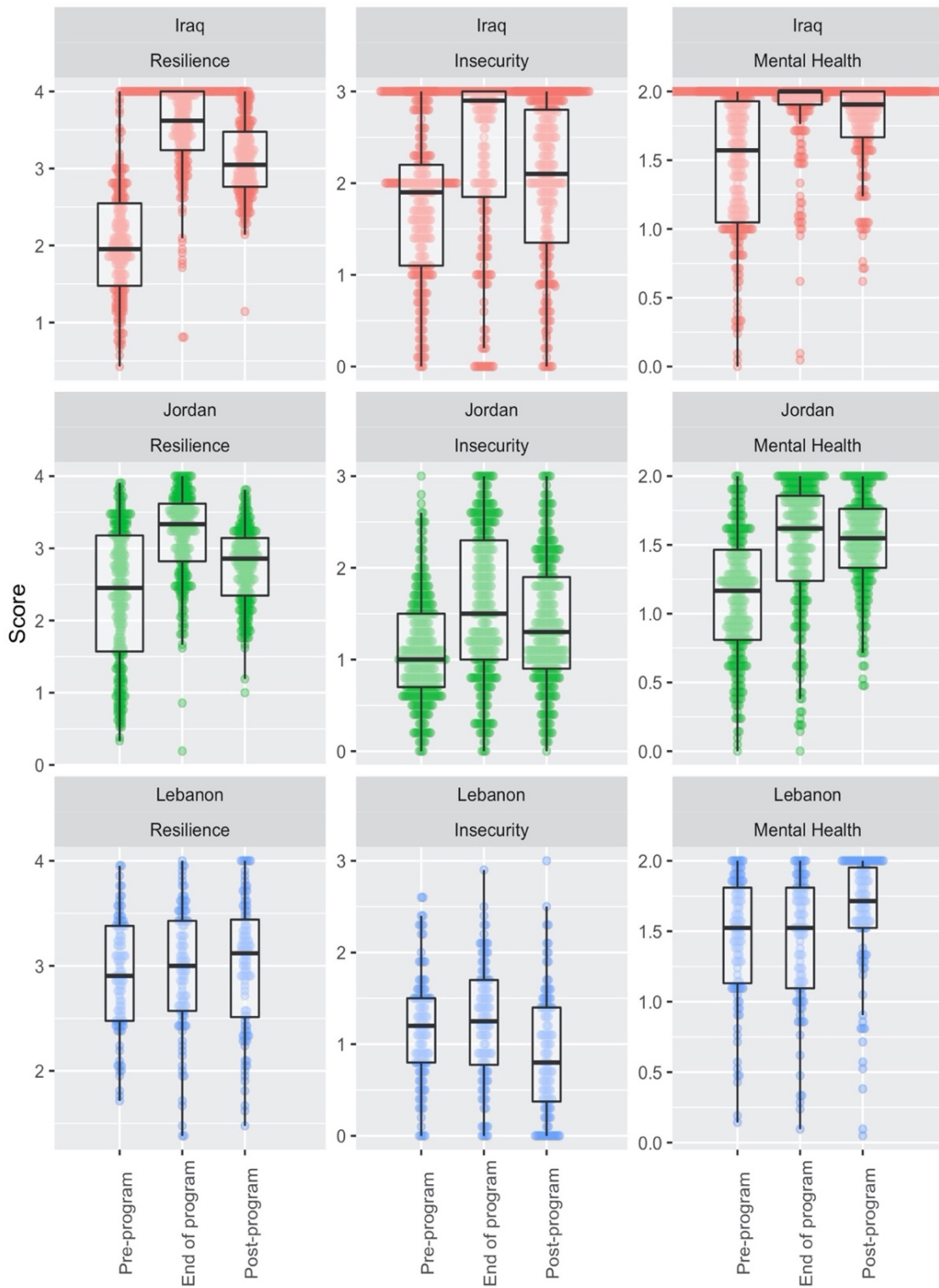
(In Lebanon, these time series are drawn from only around 13 percent of the overall sample, since only 96 individuals had data available at all three time points. As a result, the Lebanon results should be treated with some caution.)

In Iraq and Jordan, across all the indicators there is a marked improvement overall directly after the program, with a subsequent “tailing off.” However, even after the tailing-off, there was an improvement compared to the pre-program stage. In Lebanon, the picture is different. Insecurity drops, mental health improves, and resilience stays about the same.

This tailing-off is understandable. After having been part of an intensive program concentrating on psychosocial support, a large uptick might be expected. That this falls off is natural and expected as well.

While the plots (and the data) do not show changes in the comparison group, it should be noted that there are statistically significant differences only for human security. Thus, the expectation would be that the comparison group also saw improvements from baseline to long-term. This improvement would likely have been slower, and without a large uptick in the middle.

Figure 5: Time series plots for psychosocial wellbeing variables



5.1.2 Subgroup Analysis

Subgroup analysis was performed to understand which types of participants were driving these changes. First, the improvements are detectable at individual country level, but with less statistical significance. (Jordan’s improvements are slightly better, for example.)³⁴

Improvements, otherwise, are more pronounced among females and older adolescents, i.e. those over 15 years of age (over-15s hereafter). Females (in the pooled treatment group) also show an improvement in general optimism. Subgroup analysis suggests that the improvements in human security, subjective wellbeing and social cohesion are particularly driven by improvements among girls and among over-15s, whereas boys and younger adolescents (under-15s) were less impacted.

A number of these quantitative findings are substantiated through qualitative discussions. Figure 6 below provides a snapshot of the primary and consistent themes that came up during qualitative discussions.

Figure 6: Qualitative Themes and Relevance Across the Three Countries

Theme	Iraq	Jordan	Lebanon
Center as a refuge / safety	●●	●●●	●●●
Coaches as key agents	●●●	●●●	●●●
Presence / relevance of trauma or fear	●●	●●	●●●
Socialization (especially among girls)	●●●	●●●	●●●
Professional aspirations	●●●	●●	●●●
Role of family	●	●	●
Self-confidence among girls	●●●	●●●	●●●

(Relevance: ●●● = high, ●● = medium, ● = low)

5.1.3 Safe Space

The Advancing Adolescents centers were seen by adolescents as a refuge or source of safety. Across all countries, the role of the centers and their staff was a consistent theme. Many considered that the centers were a wellspring of calm, empathy, and safety.

Qualitative interviews suggest that the centers met a fundamental need—brick-and-mortar centers themselves were a destination, and a place of calm. Fear and trauma in the individual lives of participants were recurring themes, and at the centers they could socialize and receive much needed support. Centers became a place where there were friends, support, a positive learning environment, exercise opportunities, and just generally functioned as an “escape” where they could go to be free from social expectations or stereotypes.

Both boys and girls noted the importance of the center as a ‘safe space’, although girls’ responses were more expansive. For example, when asked: ‘What do you think of when you think of the center’, girls’ responses typically included: “Friendship,” “good relationship between Syrians and Kurdish,” “second home,” “mother [referring to coaches/teacher], someone who has taught us a lot.”³⁵ Others included: “We

³⁴ The sample was selected with power to detect effects at the regional level. The fact that effects at the country level are observable suggests a certain robustness of the findings, and that with greater power at the regional level, the effects are more pronounced.

³⁵ Girls FGD 3, Qushtapa, Iraq, Sep19

are excited to go out from our homes to participate in training in the center. It is different from going to school every day. Most of us look happy and excited as long as we are in the center.”³⁶

In response to the same question, boys in Federal Iraq noted: “Safe space; we find motivation here and we do our best; we have skills that we did not know we had, we use these centers to develop our skills.”³⁷

As one boy noted:

*We love this place because we feel safe here. In all other places we find a risk, but here there are no risks. Everyone cares about us here. There are explosions in public places and markets. Even parents prohibit [...] from visiting the market due to these risks.*³⁸

Boys generally and across country contexts appeared to emphasize the relative importance of skills-based training. Among girls, on the other hand, the role of their coaches as well as socialization benefits appeared to be integral to their ‘feeling safe’ at the center.

5.1.4 Social Cohesion

Refugees were more likely to report improvements in bridging social capital that asked about “community.” That is, they had improved opinions of interactions with people outside their *communities*. Whereas host community participants demonstrated an improvement on the measure reflecting tolerance of people of other *nationalities*.

Narratives from qualitative data collection generally substantiate this finding on bridging social cohesion. When asked about who they had formed friendships with outside the center, for example, male Jordanian young people noted that they did not consider there to be any differences between Syrians and Jordanians, that they had “friends from other nationalities” and elaborated that “their [boys’] parents were [also] friends.” However, others did note that, “we got to know our Syrian brothers, at school, but very few of them wanted to be our friends.”³⁹ That acknowledged, the term “friend” more likely refers to a casual acquaintance as opposed to close bonds. As one Jordanian boy summarized, “[I] have Syrian friends and [...] Palestinians, but do not talk with them in depth, and do not disclose [to] them secrets.”⁴⁰

It is also important to note that in a few discussions, some young people specifically cited how the center’s running of joint classes together, with the explicit intention of bridging the divide between refugees and hosts (in Jordan and Lebanon), was effective. In a mixed ethnicity FGD in Jordan, girls noted that, “at first, there was racism between Jordanians and Syrians participating in the same activity. This caused tension and hate. But later, after integration [...] there became an understanding of nationalities at the time of the activities.”⁴¹ Similar narratives also surfaced in Iraq where a boys group noted that the center and coaches deliberately mixed young people from previously conflicting communities to encourage them to discuss their fears or notions of one another.

5.1.5 Wellbeing

Qualitative data illustrates the pathways through which the program might have improved wellbeing. During discussions in Jordan for example, boys and girls, both, were readily able to provide concrete examples of what they had learned from the PSS sessions: Responses include: “took the Pikachu course [...] learned about the limbic system, the part responsible for storing information and how to transfer data and information from the front [...]the back part responsible for the preservation of information.”⁴²

Crucially, boys and girls were regularly able to translate how what they learned could be utilized in their own lives to improve their wellbeing. For example, “[We] learned how to control our feelings; self-control

³⁶ Jordanian and Syrian girls FGD 3, Mafraq, Sep19

³⁷ Boys FGD 1, Al Mahmoudiya, Iraq, Oct19

³⁸ Boys FGD 2, Al-Naser, Iraq, Oct19

³⁹ Boys FGD 2, Ajloun, Jordan Sep19

⁴⁰ Boys FGD 1, Kerak, Jordan Sep19

⁴¹ Jordanian and Syrian girls FGD 6, Mafraq, Jordan Sep19

⁴² Jordanian and Syrian boys, FGD 2, Mafraq, Jordan, Sep19

and patience [...] counting to ten before answering someone;⁴³ or “use of a rubber ball to discharge negative energy.”⁴⁴ Boys and girls, both, also acknowledged having acquired leadership skills, self-confidence in dealing with others and that the life skills sessions had positively influenced their communication skills.

These communication skills seemed to be particularly important to navigate new relationships and speak confidently in front of friends and family. As one Jordanian girl noted, “In the past, there was no discussion and no dialogue. I wanted to stay in my room, but now I meet friends and discuss everything with them.”⁴⁵ One Lebanese girl from a FGD declared that, “I learned how to be more brave,” because of her participation in the center and its activities.⁴⁶

Boys also used their participation in sports to note how it benefited their overall wellbeing. “Football gives me enthusiasm, teamwork, high intelligence and physical fitness,” was one response.⁴⁷ Interestingly, when asked to describe the center and its activities, in Jordan most of the girls chose to frame their description in terms of the social and emotional learning skills they had gained. Boys’ initial response was to list the vocational skills courses that they had enrolled in and only discussed life skills courses with additional probing. Even within this some boys chose to frame their learning around entrepreneurial or leadership skills: “[I] learned to be a leader more than to be a manager,” for example.⁴⁸

Overall, these findings point to the overall success of the program as it relates to enhancing psychosocial wellbeing which remains the primary focus of the program overall. The improvement in attitudes to people outside the participants’ groups is also a significant result.

5.1.6 Increase in Self-Confidence

A consistent theme that was captured, during qualitative discussions with boys and girls, was their self-reported increase in self-confidence (power-within).⁴⁹ While this manifested in various ways and through participation in a variety of activities at the center, boys and girls framed their narratives in different ways. For example, male Jordanian youth framed their narratives as the center helping them “get rid of the embarrassment and shame when talking with others and in front of people,” adding that the life skills classes had taught them to, “get rid of patronage, refine our character, self-strengthening and emerged the role of our leadership.”⁵⁰

Girls’ narratives, however, fall along multiple empowerment characteristics and on multiple dimensions. Some Jordanian girls framed it as improvements to their personality: “it influenced my personality very well. I feel that good changes happened to my skills and communication after I joined *Nubader*.”⁵¹ Other Jordanian girls framed it as a breaking down of gender stereotypical roles. For example: “In the past, we did not know anything about projects. we thought that only males know. [we thought that] males should have skills and should take responsibility. They should have ambitions in order to run a project.”⁵²

In Iraq, girls more explicitly called out their “power-within” to take control of their own lives: One girl noted that, “I have a lot more self-confidence now. I have learned that whenever we have doubts, we can deal with this ourselves.”⁵³ In Lebanon this self-confidence appeared to manifest into relational dimensions⁵⁴ as well with some girls stating that they are now able to discuss and broaden their parents’ views. One

⁴³ Jordanian girls, FGD 2, Kerak, Jordan, Sep19

⁴⁴ Jordanians boys, FGD 3, Kerak, Jordan, Sep19

⁴⁵ Jordanian girls, FGD 2, Kerak, Jordan, Sep19

⁴⁶ Girls, FGD 2, Barja, Lebanon, Sep19

⁴⁷ Jordanian and Syrian boys, FGD 2, Mafraq, Sep19

⁴⁸ Jordanian boys FGD 1, Kerak, Jordan, Sep19

⁴⁹ “Power within” comes from women’s empowerment literature, rooted in the seminal works of Naila Kabeer and Jo Rowlands. It refers to women’s aspirations and their support for gender-equitable norms. See: Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought* (London: Verso, 1994); Jo Rowlands, *Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1997).

⁵⁰ Jordanian boys FGD 3, Kerak, Jordan, Sep19

⁵¹ Jordanian and Syrian girls FGD 6, Mafraq, Jordan, Sep19

⁵² Jordanian girls FGD 2, Kerak, Jordan, Sep19

⁵³ Girls FGD 3 Qushtapa, Iraq, Sep19

⁵⁴ Relational dimensions are defined as changes taking place in power dynamics between a woman and other household members. See: Simone Lombardini, Kimberly Bowman, and Rosa Wilson Garwood, “A ‘How To’ Guide To Measuring Women’s Empowerment: Sharing Experience from Oxfam’s Impact Evaluations” (Oxford: Oxfam, 2017).

Syrian girl in Lebanon noted that, “we come from conservative families as Syrians, where there are a lot of things that are prohibited but here we are able to learn new things and become more aware, and then we are able to talk to our parents, able to communicate with them better and broaden their minds.”⁵⁵

Socialization and group work were a key platform for increased networks and self-confidence among sub-groups

From qualitative responses from both boys and girls, multiple activities—including exposure to potential future employers, field visits, community projects, as well as (in Iraq) participation in Youth Advisory Committees (YACs), which brings together boys and girls (in sex-disaggregated groups) to address commonly identified social problems—were crucial to both building self-confidence and building social cohesion.

In Federal Iraq, participation in YACs, and the opportunity to hold group discussions and collectively target social problems, left some of the biggest impressions on both male and female adolescents and youth. Though respondents were participating in other activities and classes, the opportunity to research options with peers, devise a strategy, make collective decisions, and organize and execute a community-benefit project, appear hugely important to young people and their self-confidence.

Some girls in Iraq described the functioning and mechanics of the YACs and their use of this as a platform to resolve a social problem in considerable detail:

We come together and solve common problems and challenges that we face in our communities. We meet twice and we discuss issues such as early marriage, common problems between men and women, and discuss solutions for these types of challenges. These YACs consist of people from different communities [hosts, refugees and so on]. Through the YAC we are encouraged to support those who have problems [female respondent 1].

For example, one of my friends got married early and she was being badly treated by her husband. Through the YAC I brought this up with the coaches and mentors and they helped intervene in this situation. The coaches and mentors met with the parents [of the girl who had gotten married early] and they in turn discussed this with the girl’s husband [female respondent 2].

Beyond this, while boys report that participation in sports activities such as football helped them gain team-spirit and make new friends, girls report using strategies such as talking about what they learned as building blocks to expand their friends circle at the center, and to expand their social circle at school. For example: “Yes, we met new girls and became friends. At first, we didn’t have any common topic to talk about, but now we know a topic from the training that we could use a topic to build friendship.”⁵⁶

Among girls and boys, working together as a group also led to opportunities to increase their social circle. For example, one participant responded that, “I made friends inside the center during activities, as I was asked to work in group activities and I performed some tasks with the other youth in the center, so it became friendship.”⁵⁷

5.2 Additional Salient Themes

5.2.1 Mobility

Adolescent and youth girls face restrictions to mobility. Girls referenced these mobility restrictions directly or indirectly, when talking about what they perceived as ‘benefits of the center’. In Iraq, one girl noted: “Because in our society we are not allowed to go out to any place that we want, so coming here [to the center] is an opportunity for us to meet new people and do some activities.”⁵⁸ Similarly in Jordan, one girl

⁵⁵ Girls FGD 2, Barja, Lebanon, Sep19

⁵⁶ Jordanian girls FGD 8 Ajloun, Jordan, Sep19

⁵⁷ Jordanian and Syrian girls FGD 6, Mafraq, Jordan, Sep19

⁵⁸ Girls FGD 2, Banislawa, Iraq, Sep19

noted, “the center encouraged us to get out of the house and change the routine [...] frankly, we were unable to leave home.”⁵⁹

Parents’ acceptance of the center as an appropriate, safe place for their daughters was crucial. Some girls acknowledged that their parents either continued to question the utility of the centers, or took additional convincing initially. One girl noted, “My father visited the center to know the training I received and to check the place and the trainers.”⁶⁰ Similarly in Iraq, some girls noted that, “In the beginning [my family] had problems with us attending these classes. But later they came and saw for themselves [the center, facilities and gender disaggregation] so it was ok.” In this context, the program structure including single-sex classes run by male or female coaches, as well as segregation of center days for boys and girls appears to have played a key role in parents’ acceptance of the center and as a consequence on girls’ ability to participate in the program.

Besides this, multiple participants, of both genders and in all countries, noted how important the provision of free transport was to their ability to access the centers on a regular basis. Boys and girls could only access program-provided free transport on the days they had classes scheduled, and the cost of arranging independent transport is prohibitive for most adolescents and youth not within walking distance of the center.

While the importance of transport was common across both sexes, transport was particularly instrumental for girls. Girls themselves highlight the center’s role in creating at least some sense of independence and freedom, and an important outlet for them to socialize with their peers.

5.2.2 Supportive Relationships

Role of coaches: Positive male role models; female mentorship:

For both boys and girls, their experience of the program—both positive and negative—and any perceived benefits seemed to be inextricably linked to the role of their coaches in facilitating this experience. Gains (or the lack of) were largely a function of how students perceived their coaches and the trust they instilled in coaches. Male and female youth routinely cited their coaches (often by name) when asked about the skills they had learned, or new habits, exercises, or enhanced socialization skills.

*We are so happy. There is personal motivation that the trainer is very flexible and responsive to our needs. We usually wait [for] the bus in a certain location, excited to pick us up to go to the club.*⁶¹

Coaches were looked to as key role models and arguably revered; this was a consistent theme across all discussions and in all three countries. Male youth in particular seemed to have developed a close bond with their coaches using multiple opportunities within the program to cultivate and nurture this relationship: A Jordanian boy, for example, reported “We get closer to trainers through certain activities such as playing football or volleyball in addition to vocational skills.”⁶² Boys also described these relationships with pride: “I even created friendship with the trainers,” for example.⁶³

Narratives from Syrian refugees and host community male youth indicate that coaches were mentors and advisors, to whom they could turn to for advice on personal matters including issues with friends and family.

*I communicated with the coach to speak about special and private topics. The coach showed cooperation and readiness to help.*⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Jordanian girls, FGD 1, Kerak

⁶⁰ Jordanian and Syrian girls FGD 3, Mafraq, Jordan, Sep19

⁶¹ Jordanian boys FGD 3, Ajloun, Jordan Sep19

⁶² Jordanian boys FGD, Ajloun, Jordan, Sep19

⁶³ Jordanian boys FGD 4, Mafraq, Jordan, Sep19

⁶⁴ Syrian male youth, Syrian and Jordanian boys FGD 1, Ajloun, Jordan, Sep19

Coaches were consistent, reliable forces of calm and trust within their social spheres; for boys they were like “big brothers” who nurtured and cared for them, helped them manage their anger and frustrations and helped them navigate fears or anxieties. “I used to go to the center,” a Jordanian boy noted, “to talk to the trainer about special issues such as my relation with my family and friends, and hear advice.”⁶⁵ Outside the center, adolescents and youth noted that coaches were less available for in-person interactions, but in more cases than not, were accessible through WhatsApp or Facebook, and responded to messages and provided support through these channels, even outside of class.

Girls were generally more subdued, but still referred to their female coaches with respect, and sometimes open admirations and care: “people in the [club] make us love it. The trainers have motivated us,” for example.⁶⁶ Female coaches were consistently discussed with admiration, and clearly served as role models for girls, even if the language and examples provided were not as poignant, or overt, as that which came from boys discussing male coaches. This may reflect more profound differences between in-group relationships, across gender, but it is unclear. It may also reflect subtle differences, and norms, in willingness to express such emotions.

Importantly, not all young people had positive experiences to report. As a boys group in Jordan noted, “during the limbic system course [...] they were neglected by the trainers [...] the trainers were sitting alone and leaving us alone; especially in the *Hadafi* program, they did not let us participate in the games.”⁶⁷

Overall, boys and girls did not report many negative experiences, however. While it is likely that the experiences of participating adolescent and youth were overwhelmingly positive, there is some risk that latent, perceived fears of negative feedback (overall, not just about their coaches) affecting the center is partly responsible for the positive responses. Indeed one group of male Syrian refugees aptly verbalized this fear, “If I tell you negative things about the center, does it mean the center will close?”⁶⁸ That said, these adolescent and youth voices—both positive and negative—simply serve to highlight the importance of these supportive relationships in their lives⁶⁹ and the potential knock-on effects on their overall wellbeing.

One important detail that emerged in discussions with both male and female respondents in Iraq, which is likely to be relevant elsewhere, was perception of the coach as an “ordinary person.” Specifically, boys in one FGD noted that their regular schoolteachers were typically of either a higher social class, or at least needed to be treated with a respect that created a distance between them and their teachers. Iraq’s *PLLAY* coaches, in contrast, were seen as approachable, “like them” and more empathetic, and ultimately more supportive than what they have experienced among adults anywhere else.

This was clearly and consistently a significant influence and created a significant impression on participants. Several other girls reported that a more disciplinary and negative tone typified their regular school atmosphere. The centers were in contrast enabling, supportive and nurturing environments. Again, this is tied directly to how coaches interacted with their students, as well as their training.

Coaches were well-trained but constrained by the short timescale of the program.

While the extent of training and experience was not always clear, on the whole coaches appeared to be well-trained (in PSA and PSS), attentive to challenges and student needs and, crucially, self-motivated to be at the center and working at the center. Coaches demonstrated confidence, engagement, and even pride in their work and that of the center.

⁶⁵ Jordanians boys, FGD 4, Mafraq, Jordan, Sep19

⁶⁶ Girls FGD 1 Kerak, Jordan, Sep19

⁶⁷ Boys FGD 1 Kerak, Jordan, Sep19

⁶⁸ Syrian boys FGD 4, Qushtapa, Iraq, Sep19

⁶⁹ This is also consistent with findings from others’ research. See: Panter- Brick et al., “Insecurity, Distress and Mental Health”; Suniya S. Luthar, Jeanette A. Sawyer, and Pamela J. Brown, “Conceptual Issues in Studies of Resilience,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1094, no. 1 (2006): 105–15, <https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1376.009>.

Coaches described their personal journeys to the center and their personal motivation to become coaches, as well as their preparation and awareness of special considerations, child protection, and how they reacted with difficult cases. It is notable that some coaches also discussed the extensive steps and measures that they undertook to be able to communicate and build trust with adolescents and youth. In Jordan, some coaches, both male and female, noted that they learned sign language to communicate with a participant with hearing difficulties; in Federal Iraq, male coaches discussed how they had independently researched tactics to address sectarian divides, specifically.

Multiple coaches expressed frustration at the short duration of the cycles, and more than once they questioned the value of enforced gender segregation—and offered recommendations when prompted. Others acknowledged the challenges of low remuneration⁷⁰ combined with the challenges of work and broader environmental challenges. (One, in Jordan, was open about his own stress related to work, and frustration with center administration.)

These moments appear to be more in the spirit of building a better center, rather than frustration or malaise. Nonetheless, given how important the role of the coach is in the life of participating adolescents and youth, and coaches own constant interaction with boys and girls with differing levels of stress and trauma, the physical and emotional wellbeing of the coaches themselves deserves considerable attention in future program iterations.

5.2.3 Role of Parents

Across the three Advancing Adolescent countries, the programs involved parents in awareness-raising and information sessions around topics such as community violence, volunteer work, stress management etc.⁷¹ When asked about parents' participation in qualitative discussions, boys and girls nearly unanimously responded that beyond attending these awareness-raising sessions, their parents' participation was limited. Boys and girls also noted that it was mostly mothers who attended “mothers' sessions.”

In Jordan, boys and girls noted that their parents or family were too busy to participate more regularly: “On the first day, everyone [parents] attended. But later, families lost interest and wanted to go back to their jobs;”⁷² or that they were not interested as they saw these activities as relevant only for young people. These narratives are not reflective of a lack of interest. Some boys and girls, however, did note that their parents were supportive of, and approved of their participation in the center and activities. For example, when asked about their relationships of trust (besides coaches and friends) one boy responded, “I talk to my cousin or father. My father gave me motivation, sense of protection.”⁷³ This was not uncommon.

One girl noted that her relationship with her family has improved [after joining the program] and that they are “proud” of her. Similarly, one Syrian girl in Jordan noted that, her mother regularly attends “mothers' sessions” and that her mother helps her resolve her problems, adding, “it was good for her to participate as it's the first time for her to attend this type of activity.”⁷⁴

Ranging from socialization benefits, to girls' participation in the center, and girls' self-confidence narratives, the role and importance of parents in the lives of young people is peppered throughout this report. Particularly with respect to professional aspirations (discussed in more detail in the next section), girls frequently cited cultural or normative constraints, including expectations and pressure from home to limit their professional ambitions and focus on a future spouse and domestic obligations. In Lebanon, when asked to articulate potential obstacles to their ambitions, one girl simply responded, “my father.”

Overall, these narratives highlight that in challenging contexts where Advancing Adolescents operates, intentionally engaging parents in regular center activities such as life skills, psychosocial support, or in

⁷⁰ Coaches were volunteers from the community who were paid a small monthly stipend. *Mercy Corps Advancing Adolescents program documents.*

⁷¹ *Mercy Corps Advancing Adolescents program progress reports.* (2017 – 2019). Unpublished.

⁷² Girls FGD 8, Ajloun, Jordan Sep19

⁷³ Boys FGD 1, Kerak, Jordan Sep19

⁷⁴ Syrian and Jordanian girls FGD 6, Mafraq, Jordan Sep19

mixed activities with adolescents and youth, may sustain the wellbeing of young people beyond the confines of the center and the program.

5.3 Impacts on Economic Life

Question 2: What are the links between psychosocial well-being and employment / employability?

Sub-questions

- 2a. Is employment status, employability, or economic optimism linked to psychosocial well-being, mental health, or resilience?
- 2b. What are the impacts of psychosocial support (PSS) programming on participants' economic outcomes (employability, resilience to socioeconomic shocks, livelihood activities)?
- 2c. What is the comparative impact of an integrated PSS and livelihood program on psychosocial and economic well-being, compared to stand-alone PSS? (Jordan only).

Overall, there were few statistically significant impacts of the program on indicators related to economic life, either on actual earnings, training, wealth, or our behavioral measures related to economic success. This was also largely true when disaggregated by subgroup (see Annex). This section presents the most significant findings.

The second area of analysis, and related research question, examines the economic lives of participants. This was measured in part through actual cash earnings, wealth, and time spent working or in training. The lack of movement along these indicators is not particularly surprising, given the program emphasis on future employability versus immediate employment.

A set of behavioral measures related to economic success were also examined, however, including optimism about work and perceptions of employability. These metrics may better reflect employability, i.e., the program objective. Qualitative inquiry was also used to gauge how participants anticipated and were preparing for employment, and what from this could be attributed to Advancing Adolescents.

Beginning with effects on the pooled treatment groups, there is an improvement in work optimism at the 10 percent level of significance and an improvement in the personal initiative measure, significant at the 10 percent level. This is encouraging by itself.

When the two treatment groups are compared separately, however, the results disappear for the most part. The group that received additional livelihoods training showed no changes across the economic life outcomes. Intensive sessions only resulted in a small change detectable at the 10 percent level in work optimism. This suggests that the extra effect of livelihoods training is overall quite small but is having some initial effect on at least optimism.

Looking at the coefficients overall, most of those relating to a young person's feelings or opinions about their prospects show positive increases (though these are not statistically significant). Those relating to cash and profits earned also show increases (again, not statistically significant). Whereas those that relate to time spent working or in training, as well as wealth, show decreases, but again this last part is unsurprising.⁷⁵

5.3.1 Additional Findings

There are observable effects in Jordan, specifically among female adolescents and youth.

In Jordan both personal initiative (at the one percent level) and the grit scale (at the five percent level) improved. In Lebanon, in contrast, there is no detectable difference. However, the impact in Jordan is

⁷⁵ Thus the program resulted in modest increases in income (by USD 2.56 per week on average, compared to a comparison group average of just over USD 11) but a decrease in time spent working (by half an hour per week) and a decrease in time spent in school or training (also half an hour per week).

driven largely by improvements by the Intensive Sessions-only group, which at least suggests that improvements in economic life measures stem from psychosocial support, versus any additional work-related skills per se. Results, it is worth noting, are also more pronounced among girls and host community participants.

5.3.2 Researching Work among Refugees

“Work” is a complicated subject for refugees. In many instances in the greater Syria response region, refugees possess restricted rights to work. Young people from host communities, feeling more settled, may be more likely to experience improvements given their unimpeded legal rights to work.

When the marginal impact of livelihoods training (i.e., the T1 to T2 comparison) is examined, the only difference is an overall decrease in the total hours in work and training (by four hours per week, significant at the five percent level). That is, youth who took livelihoods training were working four hours fewer per week than those that did only the Intensive Sessions. Nevertheless, their income and profits did not change. It is therefore not clear whether livelihoods training is improving livelihoods, certainly in the present, any more than the intensive sessions by themselves. This is the case even though, in this program, psychosocial support has not been targeted toward employment or employability.

This suggests an opportunity: If the psychosocial component included more focus on personal initiative, self-control and future focus, its impact could potentially be more pronounced.⁷⁶

5.3.3 Labor Market Exposure

Participants demonstrate increased awareness of labor markets everywhere, though Advancing Adolescents course options generally reflected gender stereotypical career paths. Focus group discussions in Jordan and Lebanon, in particular, revealed a variety of vocational skills courses that were offered to boys, especially, including robotics and hybrid-car mechanics in Jordan, and computer and photography skills in Lebanon. Options for adolescent girls, as presented by the program itself, included occupations such as hairdressing, beauty, wax making, tailoring and so on.

There were some exceptions, in terms of participation, to gender stereotypical training options. In Jordan, for example, some girls took phone repair classes and participated in sports, and both boys and girls cited their labor market class as particularly valuable. One Jordanian girl noted that, “I spoke with my friends that there are light maintenance courses especially for girls in the center.”⁷⁷ For the most part, however, genders are purposefully segregated, in practice, while training options for adolescent girls and boys are broadly restricted to gender stereotypical ones.

5.3.4 Gender Segregation

Gender segregation itself is a somewhat fraught topic, with mixed feelings expressed, though mostly among coaches. Coaches generally suggested that gender segregation was a practical option that satisfied parents and local authorities. Adolescent and youth girls consistently reported that gender segregation was an important factor to them, personally. As one girl noted: “The most beautiful thing about this center is that boys are separated from girls [in classes].”⁷⁸ One boy noted that his cousin did not want to attend the course as he thought classes were mixed between both sexes.⁷⁹ Multiple coaches, both men and women, in contrast, lamented the strict segregation of sexes, arguing that it would perpetuate stereotypes, and misperceptions.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Christopher Blattman, Julian C. Jamison, and Margaret Sheridan, “Reducing Crime and Violence: Experimental Evidence from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Liberia,” *American Economic Review* 107, no. 4 (April 2017): 1165–1206, <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20150503>; Campos et al., “Teaching Personal Initiative Beats Traditional Training in Boosting Small Business in West Africa.”

⁷⁷ Jordanian and Syrian girls FGD 3, Mafraq, Jordan, Sep19

⁷⁸ Jordanian and Syrian girls FGD 6, Mafraq, Jordan, Sep19

⁷⁹ Jordanian boys, FGD 1, Kerak, Sep19

⁸⁰ In Lebanon, classes were sex-disaggregated but male or female coaches (based on skills / availability) taught either boys or girls' courses.

5.3.5 Aspirations vs. Employability

Despite limited or mixed statistical outcomes in terms of work or employment optimism, adolescent boy and girl respondents in focus groups broadly reported satisfaction with their classes, what they were learning, and more simply the opportunity to learn new skills.

Overall, from qualitative discussions, there appears to be a disconnect between male and female participants' aspirations and what was being taught, however. The life skills/vocational skills components differ across all three countries, intentionally, so a comparison is difficult, but in all three cases, there appears to be a regular disconnect between communicated *intended* outcomes from the center's or program's perspective, and that of the student's *anticipated* outcomes.

In Iraq and Lebanon, for example, the programmatic objective of the life skills classes and "employability" courses was to use these as an entry point to engage with male and female adolescents and youth—specifically, using the mechanics of group participation and the opportunities for engagement with participants to improve their wellbeing, socialization and life skills. The programmatic goal was less on *actual* employment. This may not have been accurately understood by the participants (or their parents) themselves who may have had different motivations to join these classes.

In Lebanon, however, the program does appear to have broadly influenced the outlook and expectations of its participants. Girls, in particular, widely reported professional aspirations, crediting the role of their coaches and their training, in particular citing computer skills, English language lessons and learning how to craft a CV, as critical to their outlook.

Similarly, boys there also expressed a range of interests, including becoming a pilot, engineer, and lawyer. Across all FGDs and respondents everywhere, however, girls on average had qualitatively different aspirations than boys. Girls consistently expressed their desire to become doctors or engineers, for example, whereas boys most often spoke of becoming barbers, football players, or sometimes opening up a cell phone repair shop.

In Iraq, while girls expressed high-reaching aspirations, at least one female respondent noted that she had *previously* dreamed of being a doctor but is now focused on earning money as a tailor, using the sewing skills gained through Iraq's life skills classes. Whether this is a positive outcome (pursuing a pragmatic and attainable goal) or a negative (lowering one's sights) is uncertain from the outside, but given the environmental and circumstantial constraints on participants, this girl herself perceived this as an opportunity. In some instances, respondents described working with their coaches to devise a plan, which concretely laid out the intervening steps, whether exams or more schooling, required to obtain their goal. This is more encouraging but was observed sporadically.

One especially frank discussion with older Syrian refugee male youth in Iraq revealed deep frustration with life skills classes, and a fundamental disconnect between what they expected, what was available, and ultimate learning objectives. They noted that their goals with respect to professional training (specifically life skills courses in barbering / hairdressing) went largely unmet, and life skills coaches were ill-prepared. This is in contrast to virtually all other respondents, notably, but their disappointment was palpable. Their main complaint was that some activities such as field trips⁸¹ did not vary enough, for example revisiting the same x-ray machine at a local hospital more than once, and thus they did not gain enough awareness or exposure from these visits to prepare them for work. Along the same lines, they felt as though their particular certificate (for hairdressing) was made less valuable, as it was awarded to students who entered the program late. This undermined its value and made the male Syrian refugee participants feel as though the program was not serious.

The feedback from these refugee youth does reflect some critical shortcomings, particularly from the perspective of older adolescents. For these youth, their personal goals were of key importance, and

⁸¹ Within Iraq's PLLAY program, the main objective of field trips was to link young people with organizations, agencies, networks, services and other opportunities. Mercy Corps Iraq PLLAY program proposal. (2016) *Unpublished*

“employability” was less a concept but rather a destination—employment and income generation. For them, mere exposure and introduction to various activities was insufficient by itself.

Additionally, this group also demonstrated an air of fatalism, dismissing the notion of developing broader aspirations. One male Syrian refugee youth memorably quipped, in response to a question probing for their perceptions of the future, “I don’t know what will happen to me in five hours, why should I care what happens to me in five years?”⁸² Another jumped in: “What’s the point of pretending I’ll be a doctor or something?”⁸³ Similarly, in Lebanon, the feelings of optimism were sometimes tempered by young people’s observations of the world around them. Adolescents and youth of all genders, and across all of the center sites, noted that they needed more education to achieve their goals, and that it remains a significant barrier.

Boys, for their part, focused on mostly material obstacles to their goals, whether it was financing or equipment, which could be computers, hairdressing tools or electronics. Girls, in contrast, more often cited cultural or normative constraints, including expectations and pressure from home to limit their professional ambitions to focus on a future spouse and domestic obligations. “I feel like my dreams may not come true because I have seen that all the young girls in my family are married at a young age...I feel like that might happen to me.”⁸⁴

Another regular comment, after probing for what would improve participant experience, was the need for more opportunity to practice and, especially, more equipment with which to practice. These last requests could be relatively “easy fixes” programmatically but resolving the gendered outcomes will require a more thorough review of curricula, and participant feedback.

5.3.6 Material Outcomes and Possible Implications

As noted previously, observed improvements in mental health and social cohesion were driven largely by changes among female adolescent and youth participants. Thus, the program was relatively effective at boosting the psychosocial wellbeing of girls. What limited impact there was on economic life was also more pronounced for girls.

Girls were likely to be working more, and to have improved wealth (just over USD 12 increase, though not statistically significant) and higher income and profits (income up by over USD 7 per week, significant at the five percent level), though these are of less importance to program objectives as creating future employability.

The evaluation also examined whether there were actual, tangible improvements in girls’ status post-program. Wealth increased by about USD 12. This measure is a simple measure based on mobile phone and tablet usage. Beyond wealth, a mobile phone might be considered a means of empowerment for girls. The evaluation also examined whether phone ownership rates were higher among treated girls than the comparison group. However, the study finds that girls were not more likely to own a phone compared to girls in the comparison group.

Girls were also more likely to be working and earning cash. Access and use of communication technology is a key indicator of gender equality. Qualitative inquiry was unable to determine whether this was translating into greater equality in real time, but the combination of increased training, mobility, socialization, reported independence and optimism—and at least to some degree material gain—might push greater equality yet, though it of course remains uncertain.

⁸² Syrian boys FGD 4, Qushtapa, Iraq, Sep19

⁸³ Syrian boys FGD 4, Qushtapa, Iraq, Sep19

⁸⁴ Syrian and Lebanese girls FGD 1, Tripoli, Lebanon, Sep19

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Psychosocial support for refugees, internally displaced youth and host community adolescents can improve mental health outcomes. The effects of livelihood training are less obvious—there were improvements in work optimism and personal initiative, while qualitative feedback suggests overall quite positive experiences with the livelihood component.

Across a wide range of communities of adolescents, this report finds, concerted group-based psychosocial interventions can improve lives. Participants felt more secure and rated their wellbeing higher. This reflects broad trends among these types of interventions that also suggest positive effects on young people.

It is less clear why, at the same time adolescents and youth report improvements in wellbeing, there are no statistically significant changes in resilience, mental health, general optimism, or “bonding” social capital. This could be a function of the curriculum itself and limitations, or it could plausibly be that the evaluation did not have enough statistical power to detect the effects.

These mixed outcomes may also reflect something else: that the program is making some headway in the lives of participating adolescents and youth, as indicated by positive changes in wellbeing and bonding, but that the environment in which Advancing Adolescents operates is challenging, and that the myriad forces that bear on participants outside the walls of the centers simply cannot all be controlled, or counteracted, by the program. In this context the gains Advancing Adolescents appears to have made may be small but critical “wins.”

Results are also mixed as to how the program enhanced employability. This report detects improvements in one measure of employability and one measure of personal initiative, but only at the 10 percent level. Despite limited statistical evidence, now, real proof of enhanced employability will not be available until these young people enter the workforce in coming years. Moreover, qualitative feedback from all three countries, and from both boys and girls, suggests training that has built each tangible skills, self-confidence, aspirations, and life skills that themselves are transferable and form the building blocks for at least increasing the probability of employment in the future.

This was not universal—the report includes feedback from some older refugee boys in Iraq, for example, for whom the skill-based classes were instrumental pursuits, to which they attached high expectations they felt were unmet. This was generally the exception, but does underscore how older refugee participants, especially, view this training, the meaning and expectations they attach to it, and the significance of the service itself.

This report also observes improvements in social cohesion, in particular with members from other groups. Strikingly, this is apparent in two different measures for this type of social cohesion—one looking at other “communities” and the other examining experiences with other “nationalities.” This finding from the statistical analysis is broadly supported by qualitative evidence, in that respondents generally reported mixing with their peers of various backgrounds though, in some cases, young people acknowledged that their “circle of trust” consisted of only friends of the same background and gender. Nevertheless, mixing adolescents and youth from different backgrounds in the intensive sessions was directly intended to have an effect on these outcomes, though it is not explicitly taught through the curriculum. It is noteworthy that this format of program can have such a positive impact in this area.

Finally, while not specifically designed to empower girls per se, girls demonstrated enhanced wellbeing and mental health overall, and from qualitative inquiry, were broadly effusive about the benefits of socializing with other girls, working with a mentor/coach, preparing and training for the future and learning new skills, and finally the opportunity to transcend often severe restrictions on mobility outside the home socialize in public environments that their parents trusted and were socially acceptable. While not all of this translated into quantitative results—likely because of the weight of outside pressures and

expectations, whether from family, religion, or society in general—girls everywhere consistently expressed renewed self-confidence and aspirations.

Syria’s war and its spillover effects constitute one of the most intractable crises in the world, but it is also one within a wider region that has experienced conflict and displacement for at least 70 years. Jordan and Lebanon have experienced severe economic challenges, while Iraq has experienced over thirty years of on-and-off war and displacement.

Put differently, this is one of the most challenging places in the world to implement a program of this kind, where even refugee destinations themselves experience persistent social and economic upheaval. This type of program has been run in other contexts, but the fact that Advancing Adolescents is demonstrating measurable gains, in such a difficult context, suggests that this approach has much promise and may pay greater dividends yet.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Advancing Adolescents has clearly impacted the lives of participating adolescents and youth, but there may be necessary revisions that would further impact and sustainability. Cycle lengths, follow-up, and vocational content are some target areas, based in-part on reporting from coaches and young people, where revisions to programming may make further inroads.

The context of individual adolescents and youth participants must also be taken into greater consideration if Advancing Adolescents is to compete with the myriad forces bearing down on young people across the region. The program of course already acknowledges these, inherently, and was designed to address them—but as this report suggests its impact is variable, and limited. There are clear “wins,” and impact on participants, but they are truncated by what these young people experience consistently outside the centers. There may be more opportunities to blend PSS in groups with individual consulting, for example. The “individual plans,” discussed by girls in Iraq, appeared meaningful, constructive, and relevant, as well.

Life skills/vocational training varies across countries, whether out of necessity, as a function of limited budgets, or due to other factors. Regardless, the data suggest the transfer of skills is essential to employment, but trainings vary in their ability to deliver on this—or worse, may risk creating a false sense of preparedness or optimism. Such classes should be targeted, structured, and designed with core objectives in mind, in terms of learning and/or skills.

1. **Ensure that adolescents and youth receive longer exposure to coaches and community centers, once their official program participation ends.** Where there is a change in psychosocial wellbeing over time, the pattern follows a large increase after program participation, followed by a tapering-off. This may be because program involvement is essentially cut off after the three months of intensive sessions or livelihoods training. Given that adolescents and youth relied on transport provided by the program to reach the centers, they are essentially cut off. The program should instead work to devise ways to ensure more continued contact with participants. This could be, for example, through follow-up by counsellors on a regular basis or through ongoing provision of transport to the centers.
2. **Implement a full suite of evidence-based livelihoods activities, or instead focus only on psychosocial wellbeing.** At present it is not clear whether livelihood development is a program priority or not. The lack of detected impact for the program reflects this lack of focus. If the Advancing Adolescents program wants to improve livelihoods, it should do so in a more concerted manner, and make use of best-practice evidence-based program designs, including direct teaching of life skills, cash assistance and in-work training. However, it is also legitimate to focus resources on psychosocial wellbeing activities.

3. **If pursuing livelihoods training, make some basic revisions to more seriously cultivate employability.** Courses, for example, should be structured to avoid redundancy, and require a syllabus that lays out learning objectives and desired outcomes. Along similar lines, certificates should be granted based on merit, with criteria being at least a minimum attendance. Limited resources are assumed, but there should nevertheless be a minimum amount of equipment available for students to actively practice—like equipment for hairdressing and barbering. If resources and schedules permit, a “lab,” “practicum,” or opportunity for enrollees to practice with some supervision would be of potentially great benefit. While PSS is of course a component of life skills, and thus crucial (with measurable impacts on wellbeing as was noted above), there must nevertheless be a balance so that enrollees obtain a minimum standard of practice, equipping adolescents and youth materially, as well as emotionally, for employment.
4. **Tailor program design and intensive sessions more personally to individuals.** Young people’s experiences outside the program centers are varied, and so they would benefit from tailored teaching that helps them to navigate these different experiences. For example, the Intensive Sessions could be complemented by more one-on-one exposure to counsellors. Girls in Iraq reported how the “individual plans” that they developed, in concert with their coaches, were meaningful, relevant, and helpful. Even this small adjustment may serve as a model for other country programs.
5. **Organize peer learning sessions for coaches and center staff at a country and regional level.** Coaches are key to the success of Advancing Adolescents. All coaches seemed to experience difficulties, such as stress, financial hardship, and fatigue. Peer learning sessions would build cross-cultural comradery, reveal a bigger, wider team, underscore the program’s faith in and appreciation for coaches, and more instrumentally, help disperse best practices and coping mechanisms, and maximize learning. In particular, this will then allow for coach and trainer feedback to be looped back into program improvements and continuous learning.
6. **Recruit female and male coaches from a wider range of activity backgrounds.** Currently most female coaches teach traditional female activities and male coaches do the same. In order to provide more diverse role models for young men and women, Advancing Adolescents should make an effort to recruit female and male coaches from a wider range of fields, especially STEM-related and market-aligned.
7. **Provide more opportunities for girls to be empowered.** Advancing Adolescents should take an explicit stance on promoting female empowerment. Providing more opportunities for adolescent and youth girls to travel outside the home would continue to spur emotional, and potentially professional, benefits. Additionally, consider revisions that allow for greater experimentation by female adolescents and youth with potential career paths, or at least in areas of study that are not gender stereotypical.
8. **Provide greater access to the centers, as resources allow.** Most adolescents and youth expressed interest in visiting the center outside of regularly scheduled classes, drop-in sessions, etc., if it were available to them. It usually is not an option, however, either because of limited or expensive transportation required, or because the center is closed or only available to one gender or the other. Providing even unstructured or “open sessions” for enrolled participants and their caregivers may further encourage the centers’ use, as well as further influence outcomes such as safety, wellbeing, and other intended outcomes that have yet to be met, like mental health and personal resilience.
9. **Run more mixed-gender activities at the centers.** While it is culturally appropriate for the intensive sessions to be in single-sex groups, it would be beneficial to provide some mixed activities. This would provide more outlets for youth socialization and learning. This was a recommendation that was expressed by coaches of both sexes repeatedly, of note.

10. **Continually engage with parents during and after the program.** Parents and caregivers will bear the most responsibility for, and influence over, their children's psychosocial health. So, Advancing Adolescents should more actively engage them. Parents were engaged initially, it appears, but their participation was overall very low and further dwindled over time. Consider how parental outreach or engagement can be restructured to facilitate participation. Intentionally engaging parents in regular center activities such as life skills sessions, psychosocial support, or in mixed activities with adolescents and youth, may help to sustain the wellbeing of young people beyond the confines of the center and the program.
11. **Pay attention to the wellbeing of center coaches:** Coaches (and center counselors) continue to interact with adolescents and youth with varying levels of fear and trauma throughout the program lifecycle and sometimes beyond. Given how important the role of the coach is in facilitating positive experiences and gains for adolescents and youth, coaches' own workload, work hours and their own emotional wellbeing warrants attention.

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ANNEX I: FULL REGRESSION TABLES

Table 2: Concise Table Overview

Variable	Details	Comparison Mean	T1	p-value	T2	p-value	T1 & T2	p-value	T1 to T2	p-value
Psychosocial Wellbeing										
Overall Psychosocial Wellbeing	Z-score	-0.028	0.045*	0.098 / 0.293	0.099***	0.001 / 0.002	0.069***	0.004 / 0.016	0.085***	0.004 / 0.015
Resilience	Scale 0 to 4	2.778	-0.005	0.894	0.028	0.459	0.011	0.724	0.069*	0.071
Insecurity	Scale 0 to 3	1.074	0.105***	0.008	0.125***	0.003	0.112***	0.001	0.024	0.578
Mental Health	Scale 0 to 2	1.540	-0.001	0.968	0.024	0.370	0.003	0.895	0.062**	0.021
Wellbeing	Scale 0 to 10	4.819	0.131	0.246	0.394***	0.003	0.255**	0.015	0.255*	0.055
General Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	1.118	0.041	0.687	0.038	0.738	0.058	0.524	-0.002	0.985
Social Cohesion										
Overall Social Cohesion	Z-score	-0.036	0.076*	0.052 / 0.207	0.07*	0.086 / 0.257	0.079**	0.020 / 0.060	0.038	0.365 / 1.000
Social Cohesion (bonding)	Scale 0 to 12	6.992	0.027	0.786	0.04	0.700	0.064	0.456	0.111	0.291
Social Cohesion (bridging)	Scale 0 to 12	7.257	0.273**	0.018	0.16	0.192	0.259**	0.010	0.017	0.889
Attitude to Ingroup	Scale 0 to 12	7.989	0.022	0.869	-0.107	0.475	-0.032	0.792	0.013	0.929
Attitude to Outgroup	Scale 0 to 12	5.079	0.308**	0.023	0.496***	0.001	0.354***	0.003	0.154	0.289
Economic Life										

Variable	Details	Comparison Mean	T1	p-value	T2	p-value	T1 & T2	p-value	T1 to T2	p-value
<i>Overall Economic Performance</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	-0.015	0.012	0.708 / 0.910	0.031	0.420 / 0.840	0.029	0.322 / 0.472	0.015	0.690 / 1.000
<i>Work Optimism</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.564	0.059*	0.080	0.027	0.467	0.054*	0.067	-0.008	0.825
<i>Employability Optimism</i>	<i>Scale -10 to 10</i>	-0.214	0	0.999	0.168	0.227	0.066	0.560	0.124	0.362
<i>Work Hours p/w</i>	<i>Hours in the past week</i>	7.362	0.475	0.745	-1.348	0.362	-0.551	0.657	-1.797	0.226
<i>Profit</i>	<i>USD in the past week</i>	3.518	-0.075	0.936	2.453	0.227	1.569	0.267	2.959	0.138
<i>Wealth</i>	<i>USD</i>	74.135	-7.543	0.293	-1.753	0.825	-2.489	0.690	-1.196	0.863
<i>Income</i>	<i>USD in the past week</i>	11.314	2.434	0.312	2.566	0.400	2.56	0.292	0.729	0.820
<i>Education Hours p/w</i>	<i>Hours in the past week</i>	11.447	0.332	0.793	-1.251	0.388	-0.482	0.677	-2.203	0.110
Behavioral										
<i>Overall Behavioral Measures</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	-0.022	0.028	0.455 / 0.910	0.017	0.693 / 0.840	0.04	0.236 / 0.472	0.032	0.431 / 1.000
<i>Personal Initiative</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.811	0.056	0.109	0.027	0.505	0.059*	0.059	0.008	0.833
<i>GRIT Scale</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.976	0.028	0.523	0.028	0.563	0.038	0.329	0.048	0.317
<i>Risk Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	5.836	-0.058	0.677	0.054	0.737	0.014	0.910	0.194	0.223
<i>Time Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	6.473	0.013	0.928	-0.091	0.572	0.001	0.994	-0.082	0.603
Gender										
<i>Gender Attitudes</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.177	-0.021	0.515	0.067*	0.051	0.033	0.250	0.079**	0.029
<i>Phone Ownership</i>	<i>Yes = 1</i>	0.407	-0.005	0.882	0.002	0.957	0.017	0.532	-0.031	0.339

Table 3: Full regression results—Comparison Group (C) → Intensive Sessions Only Group (T1) (N = 954)

Variable	Details	Comparison Mean	Full Sample	Male	Female	Host	Refugee	Under 15	Over 15
Overall Psychosocial Wellbeing	Z-score	-0.028	0.045*	0.007	0.074*	0.065*	0.011	0.054	0.019
Resilience	Scale 0 to 4	2.778	-0.005	0.029	-0.054	0.055	-0.089*	-0.003	-0.035
Insecurity	Scale 0 to 3	1.074	0.105***	0.058	0.141**	0.109**	0.102*	0.128**	0.080
Mental Health	Scale 0 to 2	1.540	-0.001	-0.021	0.016	0.008	-0.010	0.017	-0.032
Wellbeing	Scale 0 to 10	4.819	0.131	0.113	0.154	0.187	0.026	0.032	0.243
General Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	1.118	0.041	-0.161	0.242	-0.054	0.120	0.064	0.004
Social Cohesion									
Overall Social Cohesion	Z-score	-0.036	0.076*	0.042	0.095	0.107**	0.027	0.041	0.127**
Social Cohesion (bonding)	Scale 0 to 12	6.992	0.027	-0.082	0.092	0.089	-0.067	-0.013	0.105
Social Cohesion (bridging)	Scale 0 to 12	7.257	0.273**	0.275*	0.243	0.294*	0.218	0.257	0.284
Attitude to Ingroup	Scale 0 to 12	7.989	0.022	-0.032	0.070	0.107	-0.118	-0.029	0.086
Attitude to Outgroup	Scale 0 to 12	5.079	0.308**	0.2000	0.375*	0.396**	0.200	0.119	0.587***
Economic Life									
Overall Economic Performance	Z-score	-0.015	0.012	-0.051	0.102**	0.028	-0.027	0.013	0.010
Work Optimism	Scale 0 to 4	2.564	0.059*	0.045	0.082	0.102**	0.000	0.051	0.06
Employability Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	-0.214	0.000	-0.181	0.296	-0.035	-0.003	-0.072	0.073
Work Hours p/w	Hours in the past week	7.362	0.475	-2.155	3.739*	0.379	-0.316	1.564	-0.623
Profit	USD in the past week	3.518	-0.075	-0.093	0.028	0.022	-0.803	-0.115	-0.097

<i>Wealth</i>	<i>USD</i>	74.135	-7.543	-16.033*	4.644	-5.253	-9.895	-6.829	-7.094
<i>Income</i>	<i>USD in the past week</i>	11.314	2.434	0.198	6.384**	2.463	1.174	3.816	0.854
<i>Education Hours p/w</i>	<i>Hours in the past week</i>	11.447	0.332	2.061	-1.842	-0.094	0.729	-0.799	1.566
Behavioral									
<i>Overall Behavioral Measures</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	-0.022	0.028	0.038	0.002	0.085*	-0.065	-0.017	0.072
<i>Personal Initiative</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.811	0.056	0.05	0.051	0.126***	-0.044	0.019	0.105*
<i>GRIT Scale</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.976	0.028	-0.021	0.070	0.065	-0.065	0.010	0.045
<i>Risk Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	5.836	-0.058	0.016	-0.165	0.078	-0.255	-0.097	-0.084
<i>Time Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	6.473	0.013	0.208	-0.244	0.011	0.026	-0.165	0.193
Gender									
<i>Gender Attitudes</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.177	-0.021	-0.089**	0.017	-0.031	-0.006	-0.099**	0.078
<i>Phone Ownership</i>	<i>Yes = 1</i>	0.407	-0.005	-0.004	0.012	-0.005	-0.017	-0.030	0.042

Note: (***) = $p < .01$, (**) = $p < .05$, (*) = $p < .1$).

Table 4: Full regression results—Comparison Group (C) → Intensive Sessions & Livelihoods Training Group (T2) (N = 878)

Variable	Details	Comparison Mean	Full Sample	Male	Female	Host	Refugee	Under 15	Over 15
Psychosocial Wellbeing									
Overall Psychosocial Wellbeing	Z-score	-0.028	0.099***	0.065	0.131***	0.102***	0.088**	0.080*	0.090**
Resilience	Scale 0 to 4	2.778	0.028	0.040	-0.002	0.075	-0.014	0.038	0.013
Insecurity	Scale 0 to 3	1.074	0.125***	0.068	0.203***	0.112*	0.123**	0.040	0.186***
Mental Health	Scale 0 to 2	1.540	0.024	0.055	0.005	0.004	0.025	0.059	-0.049
Wellbeing	Scale 0 to 10	4.819	0.394***	0.260	0.457**	0.056	0.710***	0.290	0.505***
General Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	1.118	0.038	-0.162	0.231	0.317**	-0.208	-0.007	0.072
Social Cohesion									
Overall Social Cohesion	Z-score	-0.036	0.07*	0.077	0.060	0.076	0.047	0.024	0.116**
Social Cohesion (bonding)	Scale 0 to 12	6.992	0.040	0.080	0.013	0.049	0.015	-0.114	0.240*
Social Cohesion (bridging)	Scale 0 to 12	7.257	0.160	0.215	0.040	-0.039	0.325*	0.075	0.306*
Attitude to Ingroup	Scale 0 to 12	7.989	-0.107	-0.223	0.058	-0.060	-0.251	-0.085	-0.084
Attitude to Outgroup	Scale 0 to 12	5.079	0.496***	0.553***	0.424*	0.716***	0.266	0.373*	0.431**
Economic Life									
Overall Economic Performance	Z-score	-0.015	0.031	-0.023	0.097*	0.063	0.022	-0.039	0.083
Work Optimism	Scale 0 to 4	2.564	0.027	0.034	0.016	0.017	0.039	-0.017	0.047
Employability Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	-0.214	0.168	0.022	0.378*	0.136	0.198	0.104	0.151
Work Hours p/w	Hours in the past week	7.362	-1.348	-3.698	1.557	0.430	-2.804	-3.288	-0.719
Profit	USD in the past week	3.518	2.453	1.578	3.394	5.897	0.450	-1.102	5.949

<i>Wealth</i>	<i>USD</i>	74.135	-1.753	-9.064	6.959	-5.023	6.146	-1.854	4.892
<i>Income</i>	<i>USD in the past week</i>	11.314	2.566	-2.681	8.612**	7.527*	-1.426	-0.123	4.450
<i>Education Hours p/w</i>	<i>Hours in the past week</i>	11.447	-1.251	0.256	-2.586	-0.002	-2.109	-0.510	-1.163
Behavioral									
<i>Overall Behavioral Measures</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	-0.022	0.017	0.008	0.006	0.009	0.035	-0.041	0.071
<i>Personal Initiative</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.811	0.027	0.018	0.024	0.055	0.013	-0.025	0.074
<i>GRIT Scale</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.976	0.028	-0.028	0.099	0.024	0.055	0.011	0.050
<i>Risk Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	5.836	0.054	0.043	-0.082	0.029	0.078	-0.116	0.189
<i>Time Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	6.473	-0.091	0.055	-0.277	-0.229	0.022	-0.202	0.022
Gender									
<i>Gender Attitudes</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.177	0.067*	0.011	0.103**	0.041	0.105**	0.069	0.126**
<i>Phone Ownership</i>	<i>Yes = 1</i>	0.407	0.002	-0.016	0.054	-0.042	0.055	-0.006	0.071

Note: (***) = $p < .01$, (**) = $p < .05$, (*) = $p < .1$).

Table 5: Full regression results— Comparison Group (C) → Intensive Sessions Only and Intensive Sessions & Livelihoods Training (T1 & T2) (N = 1,376):

Variable	Details	Comparison Mean	Full Sample	Male	Female	Host	Refugee	Under 15	Over 15
Psychosocial Wellbeing									
Overall Psychosocial Wellbeing	Z-score	-0.028	0.069***	0.037	0.099***	0.079**	0.048	0.078**	0.046
Resilience	Scale 0 to 4	2.778	0.011	0.040	-0.037	0.068	-0.055	0.014	-0.015
Insecurity	Scale 0 to 3	1.074	0.112***	0.058	0.176***	0.102**	0.111**	0.105**	0.124**
Mental Health	Scale 0 to 2	1.540	0.003	0.008	0.002	-0.008	0.012	0.040	-0.052
Wellbeing	Scale 0 to 10	4.819	0.255**	0.200	0.327**	0.174	0.318*	0.143	0.391**
General Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	1.118	0.058	-0.129	0.24*	0.122	-0.018	0.083	0.030
Social Cohesion									
Overall Social Cohesion	Z-score	-0.036	0.079**	0.061	0.084*	0.102**	0.047	0.028	0.131***
Social Cohesion (bonding)	Scale 0 to 12	6.992	0.064	0.037	0.064	0.083	0.022	-0.033	0.187
Social Cohesion (bridging)	Scale 0 to 12	7.257	0.259**	0.280**	0.188	0.209	0.300*	0.198	0.322**
Attitude to Ingroup	Scale 0 to 12	7.989	-0.032	-0.137	0.072	0.063	-0.185	-0.079	-0.002
Attitude to Outgroup	Scale 0 to 12	5.079	0.354***	0.304*	0.378**	0.500***	0.224	0.145	0.543***
Economic Life									
Overall Economic Performance	Z-score	-0.015	0.029	-0.029	0.119***	0.061	-0.015	-0.006	0.052
Work Optimism	Scale 0 to 4	2.564	0.054*	0.038	0.062	0.088**	0.014	0.029	0.069
Employability Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	-0.214	0.066	-0.086	0.299*	0.035	0.078	-0.021	0.133
Work Hours p/w	Hours in the past week	7.362	-0.551	-2.590	2.664	0.431	-2.211	-0.391	-1.163
Profit	USD in the past week	3.518	1.569	1.452	2.494	2.981	-0.432	-0.138	3.233

<i>Wealth</i>	<i>USD</i>	74.135	-2.489	-12.597	12.256	-1.591	-2.144	-5.262	-1.088
<i>Income</i>	<i>USD in the past week</i>	11.314	2.560	-0.029	7.761**	4.965	-1.038	2.400	2.377
<i>Education Hours p/w</i>	<i>Hours in the past week</i>	11.447	-0.482	1.399	-2.743*	-0.369	-0.704	-0.268	-0.262
Behavioral									
<i>Overall Behavioral Measures</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	-0.022	0.040	0.036	0.022	0.082*	-0.011	-0.015	0.095*
<i>Personal Initiative</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.811	0.059*	0.045	0.057	0.114***	-0.005	0.015	0.108**
<i>GRIT Scale</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.976	0.038	-0.019	0.090	0.066	-0.005	0.019	0.059
<i>Risk Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	5.836	0.014	0.057	-0.105	0.136	-0.117	-0.087	0.061
<i>Time Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	6.473	0.001	0.159	-0.201	-0.03	0.051	-0.171	0.209
Gender									
<i>Gender Attitudes</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.177	0.033	-0.045	0.064	0.016	0.056	-0.040	0.115***
<i>Phone Ownership</i>	<i>Yes = 1</i>	0.407	0.017	0.003	0.058	-0.001	0.028	-0.023	0.063

Note: (***) = $p < .01$, (**) = $p < .05$, (*) = $p < .1$).

Table 6: Full regression results—Intensive Sessions Only Group (T1) → Intensive Sessions & Livelihoods Training Group (T2) (N = 920)

Variable	Details	Comparison Mean	Full Sample	Male	Female	Host	Refugee	Under 15	Over 15
Psychosocial Wellbeing									
Overall Psychosocial Wellbeing	Z-score	-0.028	0.085***	0.112***	0.084**	0.080**	0.093**	0.093**	0.077*
Resilience	Scale 0 to 4	2.778	0.069*	0.096*	0.044	0.064	0.073	0.077	0.075
Insecurity	Scale 0 to 3	1.074	0.024	-0.002	0.078	0.004	0.037	-0.034	0.085
Mental Health	Scale 0 to 2	1.540	0.062**	0.111***	0.032	0.057	0.074*	0.076**	0.022
Wellbeing	Scale 0 to 10	4.819	0.255*	0.169	0.390**	-0.179	0.632***	0.346*	0.230
General Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	1.118	-0.002	0.080	-0.053	0.396**	-0.336**	0.048	-0.043
Social Cohesion									
Overall Social Cohesion	Z-score	-0.036	0.038	0.071	0.027	0.003	0.069	-0.025	0.071
Social Cohesion (bonding)	Scale 0 to 12	6.992	0.111	0.35**	-0.032	0.020	0.204	-0.03	0.294*
Social Cohesion (bridging)	Scale 0 to 12	7.257	0.017	0.040	-0.009	-0.178	0.200	-0.171	0.216
Attitude to Ingroup	Scale 0 to 12	7.989	0.013	-0.057	0.133	-0.007	0.058	-0.083	0.093
Attitude to Outgroup	Scale 0 to 12	5.079	0.154	0.154	0.17	0.217	0.043	0.101	-0.113
Economic Life									
Overall Economic Performance	Z-score	-0.015	0.015	0.053	-0.027	0.009	0.017	-0.037	0.071
Work Optimism	Scale 0 to 4	2.564	-0.008	0.021	-0.052	-0.043	0.013	-0.032	0.032
Employability Optimism	Scale -10 to 10	-0.214	0.124	0.151	0.129	-0.014	0.228	0.204	0.029
Work Hours p/w	Hours in the past week	7.362	-1.797	0.404	-3.779*	-0.155	-3.418	-5.194**	0.662
Profit	USD in the past week	3.518	2.959	3.244	2.606	5.005	0.998	0.445	5.550

<i>Wealth</i>	<i>USD</i>	74.135	-1.196	0.047	-3.826	-7.826	7.724	-0.445	2.580
<i>Income</i>	<i>USD in the past week</i>	11.314	0.729	0.768	-0.563	3.430	-3.116	-3.147	4.250
<i>Education Hours p/w</i>	<i>Hours in the past week</i>	11.447	-2.203	-2.012	-2.244	-0.920	-3.426**	0.726	-3.497*
Behavioral									
<i>Overall Behavioral Measures</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	-0.022	0.032	0.025	0.049	-0.025	0.114*	0.055	0.014
<i>Personal Initiative</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.811	0.008	0.029	0.001	-0.018	0.074	0.026	-0.025
<i>GRIT Scale</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.976	0.048	0.019	0.107	0.022	0.136**	0.064	0.024
<i>Risk Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	5.836	0.194	0.217	0.096	0.033	0.313	0.153	0.320
<i>Time Preference</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 10</i>	6.473	-0.082	-0.159	0.012	-0.258	0.018	0.049	-0.160
Gender									
<i>Gender Attitudes</i>	<i>Scale 0 to 4</i>	2.177	0.079**	0.075	0.078	0.080	0.101**	0.145***	0.049
<i>Phone Ownership</i>	<i>Yes = 1</i>	0.407	-0.031	-0.038	-0.020	-0.079*	0.033	-0.033	-0.002

Note: (***) = $p < .01$, (**) = $p < .05$, (*) = $p < .1$).