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"Not everything is lost": The role of education during adolescence to mitigate the effects of the early experience of poverty

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Young Lives is the largest and most comprehensive cross-country longitudinal study of children, identifying the dynamics underpinning childhood poverty, and providing policy advice on the causes, consequences, and means of tackling child poverty from each of the world's major developing regions. The study follows the lives of 12,000 children in two age cohorts, the younger cohort and the older cohort, born 7 years apart from different social, religious, ethnic, and language groups across 80 rural and urban sites in four countries—Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru, and Vietnam.

The Young Lives attrition rate is among the lowest-observed attrition rates in longitudinal studies in developing countries, with an annualized average attrition rate of 0.5% for the younger cohort and 0.8% for the older cohort. The larger rate observed for the older cohort is possibly related to transition into adulthood of cohort members. One of the papers for this special issue investigates attrition patterns over the past 15 years of the study. Sanchez and Escobal find that attrition is correlated with aspects such as household wealth, area of residence, ethnicity, and caste across countries. Attrited individuals in Peru are poor, and those in other countries are wealthier. When analyzing a set of nutritional and cognitive outcomes, suggestive evidence of attrition bias exists, part of which is driven by child mortality. Therefore, even though attrition is very low in all study countries, their findings suggest the importance of controlling for household socioeconomic characteristics and ethnicity/caste to correct potential attrition bias that is driven by observable factors.

The power of Young Lives research lies in its potential to link children's early life experiences to their later outcomes. It is one of only a handful of cohort studies in low-and-middle income countries that can be used for *life*-course *analysis spread over* infancy, childhood, and adolescence. This special issue builds on this strength and investigates how influences occurring during early phases of childhood can consolidate or disrupt the emergence of a particular attribute during adolescence. In fact, many key decisions and circumstances that impact children's chances of reaching their full potential take place at very early ages or long before they are born.

While there is now a solid body of evidence to suggest that the window of opportunity for intervention to ameliorate effects of poverty on child development is during the first few years of life, adolescence is now increasingly identified as a period of particular significance. Especially in developing countries, adolescence is recognized as a critical developmental period for life-course health, economic, and social trajectories emerge. Adolescence is a time of considerable responsibility when many boys and girls grapple with combining education with paid and unpaid work, as well as care

of younger siblings or incapacitated adults. Adolescence is also a time of extraordinary dynamism and change—biological, emotional, and social. Choices made by and for adolescent girls relating to schooling, sexual and reproductive health, timing of marriage, and fertility all impact them and their future offspring. During adolescence individuals commonly start experimenting with risky activities (including alcohol abuse, smoking, drug use, and unprotected sex).

Reducing the prevalence of teenage pregnancy remains an elusive goal for public policy in many poor countries, including Peru. Favara et al. investigate on an extensive set of early circumstances and life changes that might be the risk factors for teenage childbearing in Peru. About one out of five girls in the sample is a teenage mother, and the incidence of fertility before 19 is disproportionately concentrated in disadvantaged groups. In the article by Favara et al., growing up in a poor household, being raised in a single-parent household, leaving school at or before age 15, performing badly in school at age 12 arise as the key factors predicting a higher risk of early pregnancy in Peru, largely because anticipating the first sexual relationship.

Also, the authors find that improvements in self-efficacy and education aspirations during adolescence are associated with a decrease in the probability of early childbearing. From a policy perspective, Favara et al. results suggest that policies aimed at improving school attendance and achievements, sexual education, and socioemotional competencies among adolescents might be effective tools to reduce the high rates of teenage pregnancy in Peru. The role of school attendance as protective factors for teenage pregnancy is relevant in the Peruvian context, and possibly across the four Young Lives countries where almost all children are enrolled in school at age 12 and increasingly they get access to secondary education, although with important differences depending on the household wealth.

Furthermore, from an intergenerational perspective, Young Lives children attaine substantially higher education compared to their parents. For example, in India while 42% of fathers had no formal education, no 22-year-old among the older cohort was deprived of basic education. Ogando and Atherton find substantial differences in the probability to be in education and on educational outcomes and trajectories of "first-generation learners" compared to their peers. They argue that these first-generation learners growing up in poorly educated households lack educational support not only at home but also in school because the education systems fail to recognize the qualitatively different barriers "first-generation learners" must face suggesting an increasing in-school support as a potential policy instrument to compensate for home disadvantage.

Young Lives children have high hopes for their education, but their aspirations are being undermined by the poor quality of many schools, which too often works to reinforce existing inequalities. Castro uses a value-added model to estimate the relation between cognitive skill and school quality among 8-year-old Peruvian children. His model takes into account that skill attained during early childhood can either raise (dynamic complementarity) or reduce (dynamic substitutability) the productivity of school inputs. If preschool skill always rises the productivity of school inputs, ignoring such complementarity can lead to an overestimation of the contribution of school influences on the cognitive achievement gap. He found that differences in schools account for a significant share of the cognitive skill gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children. Getting quality education has an equalizing potential for those children who did not have access to early education, particularly those living in rural areas in Peru.

Similarly, Crawfurd and Rolleston found that improving teacher effectiveness in low resource contexts in Vietnam is crucial for raising learning outcomes at ages 12 and 15. Combining the Young Lives household survey data with the Primary School Survey data, the authors present estimates of teacher effects on long-run student outcomes in Vietnam. They find that being taught by a more effective teacher at age 10 leads to significantly higher test scores at ages 12 and 15. Their comparison of learning outcomes data from the Young Lives Secondary School Surveys in three developing

countries of Vietnam, India, and Ethiopia highlights two findings: (1) Vietnam is characterized by widespread gains in learning outcomes, and (2) this may be due to the significantly lower heterogeneity in teacher effectiveness in Vietnam.

The findings presented in this special issue suggest that interventions in adolescence to prolong schooling will build up human capital as well as delay marriage and childbearing, thus offering a promising avenue for breaking the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty.

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