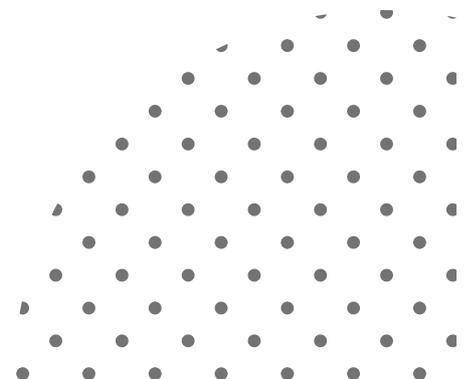


महिला जन अधिकार समिति
MAHILA JAN ADHIKAR SAMITI

A LEDGER OF SUBLIMATED HOPES

A Factsheet on Social & Economic Impact
of Lockdown on Adolescent Girls in Ajmer





FACT SHEET

Impact of COVID on Adolescents: Violence and Abuse

Context

On April 6 2020, in her statement Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women said, “with 90 countries in lockdown, four billion people are now sheltering at home from the global contagion of COVID-19. It’s a protective measure, but it brings another deadly danger. We see a **shadow pandemic** growing, of violence against women.”¹

There are reports from across the world of increase in gender-based violence, especially violence against women. India too has seen such an increase in gender-based violence.

The World Health Organization, in its attempt to explain the spike in violence, made use of the ecological model that delineates the symbiotic role played by individual, community and social dimensions during the COVID19 pandemic, both in escalating the social-crisis and combating it. This model shows how the three actors potentially can increase the risk of violence against women in these present times.

For many women, the necessary emergency and preventive measures in the fight against COVID-19 increase their load of housework and care work for children, the elderly, and ill family members. Restrictions on movement, financial constraints, and widespread insecurity also encourage abusers, giving them additional power and control.²

National Commission of Women (NCW) registered an increase of 2.5 times in cases of domestic violence. Reporting of different Civil Society Organizations, from their respective field areas, has seconded the facts presented by the NCW.³ The Union Minister of Women and Child Development, Smriti Irani, has presented a contradictory stance to the above reporting denying an increase of cases as well as considering the acts of shedding light on this ‘Shadow Pandemic’ as ‘scaremongering’. While claiming that the situation with respect to scope to domestic violence remains under control, the minister added “scaremongering done

¹<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>.

² https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S0102-311X2020000400505&script=sci_arttext&tIng=en.

³ <https://www.theleaflet.in/pandemic-triggers-domestic-violence/#> ;

<https://www.epw.in/engage/article/locked-what-covid-19-pandemic-spells-survivors>;

<http://indiatogether.org/domestic-violence-women>.

especially with some development partners who are in the NGO sector that 80% of women who are now at homes in India or across the world will be getting beaten up.”⁴

As per the study by Child Rights and You (CRY), more than 50 percent of the parents reported that their child has become more agitated or anxious during this period. Only 27 percent stated that their child has become more playful and happy during the lockdown.⁵

This study is based on data collected from 184 respondents between the age of 10-25 years from 10 villages in District Ajmer. This fact sheet only addresses their experiences and perception of violence during the lockdown due to COVID -19 and after.

Perception and recall of violence and abuse during the Lockdown

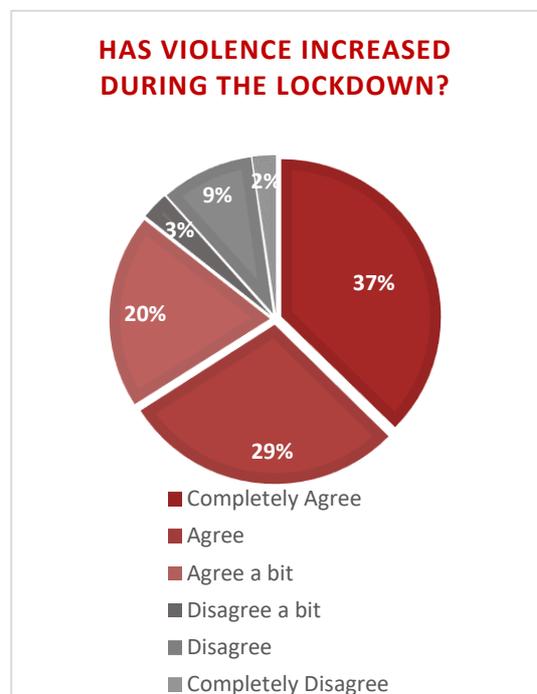
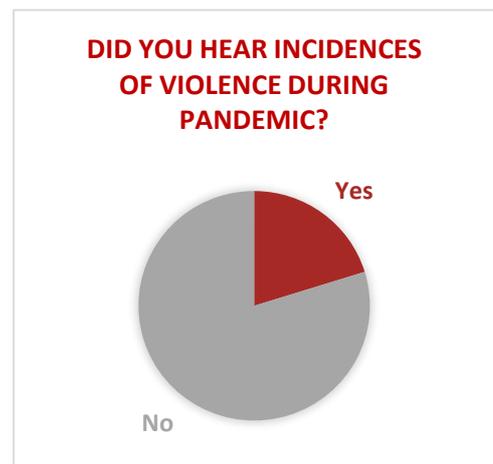
Over 85 percent of the respondents said that they have reason to believe that there has been an increase in violence during the lockdown because of the pandemic.

This is based on their experiences in their own families or neighbourhoods that they have witnessed or based on what they have heard reported by others in the course of conversation – some of which is hearsay.

Nearly 40 percent of the respondents felt ‘completely’ sure about the increase in cases of violence during the Lockdown. Close to 50 percent A considerable other percentage of respondents ‘agreed’ and ‘agreed a bit’ about surge in such cases.

Together these respondents constituted 157 respondents out of 184 surveyed who believed that there has been an increase in violence during the lockdown and after.

One fifth of respondents (36 respondents) had strong memories related to incidences of violence that occurred during the Lockdown. These respondents could recall 80 such incidents of violence that have happened in their vicinity during this period.



⁴ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/irani-denies-domestic-violence-increase-during-lockdown/article31776591.ece>

*Throughout the Factsheet, the names of respondents in narratives has been substituted by a pseudo-name to protect the identity of the individual.

⁵ https://www.cry.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Report-CRY_COVID-19-Study.pdf

Scarring the Unconscious!

The trauma of violent incidences could be clearly recognized in the narratives of adolescents. Memories of these violent abuses were vivid in the adolescent's mind which they shared during discussion, explaining these occurrences such as:

- In the initial phase of the Lockdown, liquor shops in my area were closed down and men addicted to alcohol could not find a way to access it. This often led to development of anger and frustration which was vented on women in my neighbourhood. In one such household, the man used to continuously beat his wife and she was tolerating it for a while. But the beating never stopped and once her condition deteriorated after 10-days, she went away to her parents' house.
- In another instance, an adolescent shared that a woman in her neighbourhood used to be abused by her husband as well as the in-laws for not being able to meet (over)expectations of her in-laws.
- Once the liquor shops re-opened in vicinity, an adolescent narrated how things took a turn for the neighbouring women and children. Every day the man used to come back very drunk to the house after having spent a good chunk of the earnings on consuming alcohol. On returning home, an adolescent shared, he started thrashing the woman and girl-child with a wooden stick. The adolescent was a witness to such beatings around 3-4 times.
- An adolescent also shared how police used to beat people during the Lockdown for unnecessary reasons, without considering why anyone has stepped outside their houses.

Violence and its Vicinity to Adolescents

It is well known that most of the violence is by person known to the victims. In a situation of lockdown too the abuse and violence shared by respondents were either happening within the domestic spaces of the respondents themselves or with someone with whom they were in close association.

73.5 percent respondents believed one of the major reasons behind invisibilisation of violence perpetrated on girls and women was because they remained unaware and skeptical about possibility of approaching police during the Lockdown.

Out of the 80 incidences shared by respondents, seven incidents had taken place with the respondent herself or respondent's sisters. Eight reported incidences of violence were experienced by the other female members of respondent's household such as mother, aunt, cousins etc.

It is also a well-known fact that most of the cases of violence and abuse remains unreported. During lockdown when mobility was completely limited, and the police was coming down heavily on people who were breaking the lockdown rules. In this scenario, victims were even more unsure about whom to approach for registering the incidence of violence.

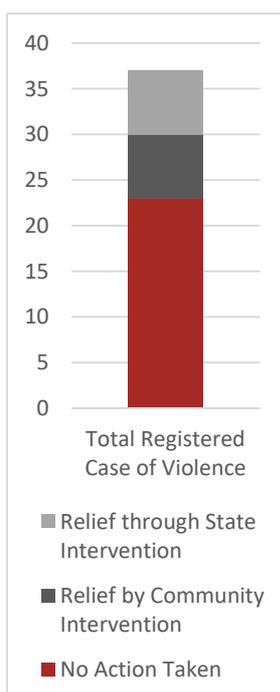
Lock(ed)down with the Perpetrator!!!

The reasons for such kinds of atrocities on adolescents and women were of all different kinds – under intoxication, depletion of resources, frustration etcetera – of which the root could be located in deep-seated patriarchal mindset of men. The urge to control both body and mind of a woman can be understood as the cause which got amplified and intensified during the Lockdown. One such incidence due to restricting a woman freedom can be seen from instance shared by the respondent –

*“Is there anything wrong in talking to a male friend, asked Subhadra? * When we used to go to our schools, we could easily talk to our male friends and share a lot of things with them. Yes, we also got involved in romantic relationships with them. During the Lockdown, a friend of mine tried talking to her male friend which is quite difficult to do in her family setting. It was during one such conversation that her parents got to know about she having conversation with a male friend. The father immediately snatched her phone and never returned it back. More so, he thrashed her just for talking to a male friend. All this started to have an impact on her mental well-being as she could not figure a way out of these troubles and loneliness. Dreading her condition, she consumed poison and on knowing her actions the male companion also consumed poison. The family immediately rushed her to the nearest hospital where she regained consciousness after complete 2 days while the boy took 15-20 days to recover.”*

Clearly Subhadra spoke not only about her friend but about girls facing such violence at-large. Her friend was fortunate enough to be saved but her other acquaintance was not so fortunate. The other friend died after consuming poison as she was forced to undergo *gauna* by her in-laws!

Status of complaints



Of the 80 cases of violence that the respondents, could recall, only 7 cases had some kind of follow up for redressal by state-agencies. Even in these cases, relief to the victims was in the form of police-intervention

Of the 80 cases that came in public knowledge, in 7 cases the arbitration was done by the community, through *Jati panchayats* or other local redressal mechanisms

Most of the cases addressed through community-based intervention pertained to incidences of domestic abuse. In one of the cases, as shared by the respondent, after being repeatedly abused by her intoxicated husband, post opening of alcohol-shops, the women reached out to community members for some support to which the community members responded by attempting to strike an understanding between the women and her husband which according to the respondent was not a concrete solution and did nothing to stop violence from recurring.

A total of 14 cases were reported to civil society organizations and received some nature of intervention. In the lockdown situation, the children reached out to Child Line for support and protection. Most other times it was the local NGO that came to the assistance of the girls and women.

Government services put in place to reach out children in distress, such as Childline, were also active and played an important part during the Lockdown in cases of abuse and violence. In one case, shared by the respondent, a complaint of sexual harassment was resolved by the intervention of Childline which insured that the complaint was formally registered with the police and action was taken to protect the girl-child.

Increased Vulnerability to Child Marriage

Rajasthan as a whole, and Ajmer district in particular continues to witness child marriage where very young girls and boys continue to be married off. There have been several reports from across the country that there has been a sudden increase in child marriages.⁶

Of the 184 respondents, 33 (almost 18 percent) reported that they had either heard of or know of child marriages that have taken place. 56 percent (103 adolescents) expressed their apprehension about girls and boys being forced into marriage in the shadow of the lockdown. Because of the restrictions families could do away with the 'big weddings' where they would have to invite many people, thus saving on expenses.

33 respondents said that they had heard of child marriages taking place.

33 respondents had heard about cases of child marriage that occurred during the period of lockdown. It is also noteworthy to take notice that majority (87%) of these 33 respondents came from the rural areas reached out through the research. 13 were from Kekdi and 16 from Srinagar.

A total of 29 such cases that were those that the respondents said that they had heard of, while 17 cases were those from within the families. No one from the government had intervened. One respondent shared the case of an underage boy in the neighborhood. Needless to say the bride would have been under age too:

"A boy in our neighborhood was getting forcefully married-off. There was a complaint made with the authorities making them aware of the situation and pleading them to stop it. On the day of marriage, the authorities arrived and were sent away by the family of the boy. Later on, the same day, the boy was married off."

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-54186709>; <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/sharp-rise-in-child-marriages-in-karnataka-during-covid-19-lockdown-6573188/>; <https://thewire.in/rights/children-abuse-lockdown>

Covid-19 and the spike in child marriages: Namita Bhandare

Gita got married when she was 12 but, like most married girls in her village in Rajasthan, continued to live with her parents and go to school. Her gauna, when the bride moves to her marital home, would happen years later. But when the lockdown began, her family decided it was time. Gita, on the verge of completing secondary school, was dispatched to her husband's home. When she left, three other girls from her village had their gaunas too. The surge in child marriage is an unanticipated side-effect of the pandemic. Between March and May, Childline India, an organisation helping children in distress, intervened in 5,333 such marriages. "Given that there was a lockdown and no events, no movement and no mobility, the number is very high," a Childline official explained. When the lockdown eased in June and July, child marriages spiked, marking a 17% increase over the previous year.

There's a strong correlation between Covid-19 and child marriage. Schools, and mid-day meals, are shut and families facing economic distress are keen to offload what they consider their "burden". "Adolescent girls are now at a higher risk of child marriage, or if already married, being forced to move to their marital home earlier than planned, with the resulting sexual exploitation," said Safeena Husain, founder of the NGO, Educate Girls. Years of activism that resulted in a 19% decline in child marriage for girls over the past decade are being negated.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/covid-19-and-the-spike-in-child-marriages/story-aLS6zAq2Beoiyb4wyrfbdM.html>

Demands for Confronting Perils of Pandemic

It is indeed a matter of concern that there has been such a high experience of violence and such low reporting although 141 of the 184 respondents were aware of whom to contact in cases of violence against women and girls. Although the reasons for not reporting were not clearly apparent in the current research, one can conjecture that this reflects reluctance to report either because of social pressure or lack of faith in the system or simply apathy. During lockdown it was also additionally the fear of going out or fear of the police was being reported to be quite violent with people violating the lockdown.

Respondent's Intended First Point of Contact	
Sources to Curb Violence on Women	Number of Respondents
Police	115
Civil Society	90
Women Helpline Number and Childline	21
Someone in their society	35

Role of the State

Through a serious engagement about violence experienced by adolescents during the Lockdown, it was necessary to not only record the narratives but also communicate with the State and other authorities the demands made by them. A total of 107 respondents strongly believed that the State authorities should step up in-order to address the needs for protection and safety of adolescents and women even in a post-COVID scenario as its externalities are here to stay. The respondents suggested:

- As cyber security is becoming a source of concern, adolescents should be given a proper training on how to protect themselves in cyber arenas.

- More emphasis should be given to train adolescents in techniques of self-defense such as Karate so that they can protect themselves of perpetrators.
- More tight knit women and girl-child networks should be brought in place and such online-conversations should be increased as it allows a much easier exchange of conditions that women and girl-child find themselves in.
- Adolescents should be properly educated on what qualifies as and how to maintain a good physical, mental and emotion well-being. This the respondents found quite crucial as period of Pandemic have left them at loss with all such notions.



FACT SHEET

Distanced from Schools

Impact on Education during Lockdown

Context

According to UNICEF, more than 1 billion children are at risk of falling behind due to school closures aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19. To keep the world's children learning, countries have been implementing remote education programmes. Yet many of the world's children – particularly those in poorer households – do not have internet access, personal computers, TVs or even radio at home, amplifying the effects of existing learning inequalities. Students lacking access to the technologies needed for home-based learning have limited means to continue their education. As a result, many face the risk of never returning to school, undoing years of progress made in education around the world.

Today a similar crisis looms large over India. A recent survey conducted by Oxfam pegs the number of children affected by closure of schools, in just 5-states, at 27-crore.

The implementation of lockdown, as a preventive measure in containing spread of COVID, had a serious impact of the access to education for children and adolescents. Schools across the country went into shutdown overnight with little time for either schools or students and their families to prepare for it. Overnight schools moved from school buildings, class rooms and play grounds to screens that beamed lessons online. This, when only 50% of the population has internet connection (as in 2020).⁷

A report released by UNICEF brings to attention the disturbing facts of over 15 lakh schools closing down during the Lockdown affecting 28.6 crore children from pre-primary to secondary levels.⁸

The impact of schools closing down was felt by adolescents enrolled in both private and government school divided but the qualitative difference of these impacts remained unfavourable for the students in government schools. A Oxfam survey of government private schools indicated that while the major problem faced by students in private schools was of accommodating to newer modalities of education that of online education, for students

⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/792074/india-internet-penetration-rate/>

⁸ Neetu Chandra Sharma. *Why India needs to invest for safeguarding education from Covid-like crisis in future.* October 14th 2020. Url: <https://www.livemint.com/education/news/why-india-needs-to-invest-for-safeguarding-education-from-covid-like-crisis-in-future-11602689281773.html>. Last Accessed on: 23rd October 2020.

attending government schools it was manifold.⁹ 82% parents of students attending private schools faced challenges, in providing proper access to digital education with internet speed being the most common problem faced by them. For the students in government schools, the impact was not just limited to accessing education but also meant lack of mid-day meals, an integral part of the nutrition they received. 80% parents complained that students were completely cut-off from any source of education and 84% teachers struggled in delivering classes through the online medium. Even after the government order issued to schools across the country for ensuring the delivery of mid-day meals to the students, 35% children, had not received mid-day meal during the Lockdown.¹⁰

As has been reinforced time and again, through researches by CSOs, dropping out of schools has a strong correlation with adolescents getting pushed towards child-labour. The signs towards such precarities have started appearing as children are being kept away from schools for such long periods.¹¹ The impact of lack of access to schools for girls has meant a lot more with studies showing an increased vulnerability to child-marriage and violence. Studies have also shown a greater lack amongst girls for accessing online education with access to internet being 26% lesser amongst girls when compared to their male peers.¹²

This study is based on data collected from 184 respondents between the age of 10-25 years from 10 villages in District Ajmer. This fact sheet only addresses their experiences and perception of violence during the lockdown due to COVID -19 and after.

Educational Status Pre-Lockdown

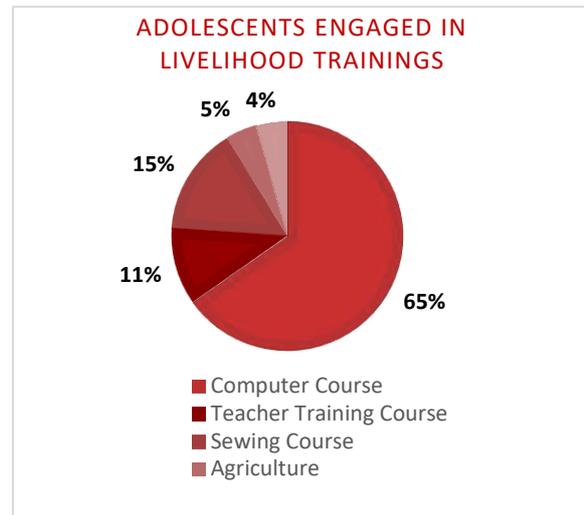
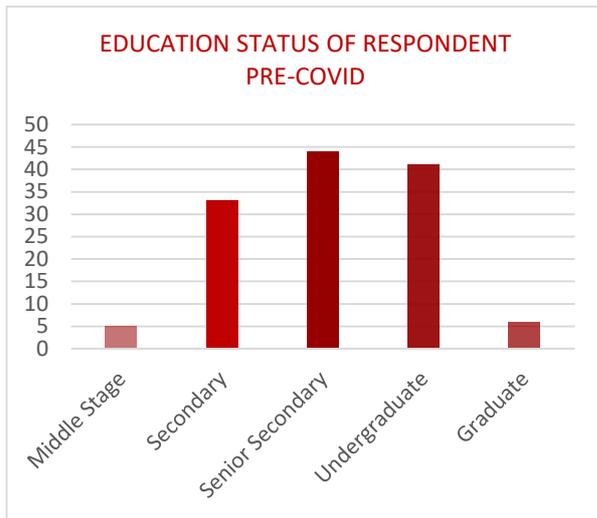
Amongst the adolescents reached out through the survey, a total of 134 were engaged at different educational levels with a majority of them, 42%, at Secondary (9-10) and Senior Secondary (11-12) levels. A significant other proportion of the 41 respondents (22%) were at the undergraduate level. Along with enrolled in different levels of education, 46 respondents were also engaged in different forms trainings with 30 respondents receiving training in computer courses.

⁹ Oxfam India. *Status Report- Government and private schools during COVID-19*. Url: <https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Status%20report%20Government%20and%20private%20schools%20during%20COVID%20-%2019.pdf>. Last Accessed on: 23rd October 2020.

¹⁰ Ibid

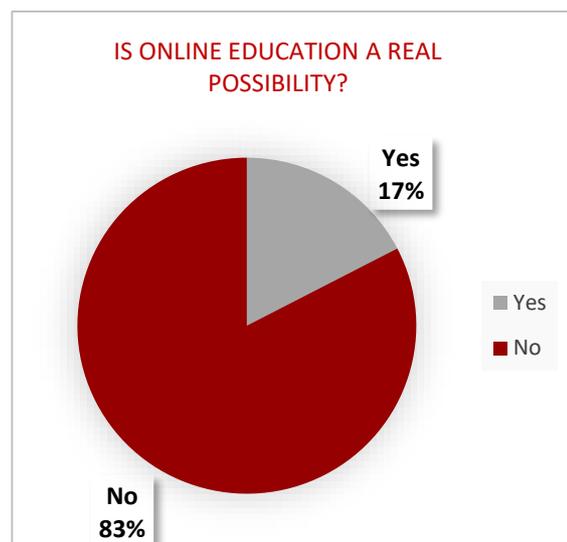
¹¹ Jeffery Gentleman and Suhasini Raj. As Covid-19 Closes Schools, the World's Children Go to Work. September 27th 2020. Url: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/27/world/asia/covid-19-india-children-school-education-labor.html>. Last Accessed on: 23rd October 2020.

¹² What's happening to girls' education during the COVID-19 pandemic? Url: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/educating-girls-during-covid-19/>. Last Accessed on: 19th November 2020.



Impact of Lockdown

With every school, college and training centres closed down during the Lockdown period, the children found a great difficulty in managing their educational levels and lost an avenue where they could share their personal thoughts with peers. More than 70% respondents acknowledged that they were unhappy that schools had shut down. A significant number of respondents faced a challenge in coping with the syllabus which would have been covered through personal contact with teachers. For respondents at critical junctures of educational levels – 10th, 12th, Graduate Final Year etc. As was said by one respondent, the pause put on their access to schools and colleges meant that they were not able to concentrate completely on their examinations. They are now left with fear of dealing with vast portions of syllabus on their own without a proper environment for studying at their homes. The alternative of online education was not a viable option for 152 respondents who found it difficult to transfer to the online medium.



The temporary suspension of schools has also led to increase of vulnerabilities in the future for the adolescents. From the total, 95 respondents (52%) believed that the lockdown would become a deterrent in access to education for themselves and other girls in future.

With Schools Closed, Percentages take Tumble

Sahira was in middle of her class 10th Board examinations when the lockdown was announced. A first in her family to reach 10th standard, Sahira looked forward to continuing her studies in most adverse of circumstances as a result of being married at the early age of 10-years. With her ambitions in sight, Sahira wanted to pass her examinations with flying colours and a major reason for her success till now had been access to proper schools and support of her teachers.

Because of the lockdown Sahira's option of going to school was taken away overnight and the economic conditions of her household made a rapid shift to online education extremely difficult.

Whatever little space that Sahira had been able to find for her studies in school-hours was now squeezed out by the added household chores. As the time elapsed between her examinations, whatever she had been able to learn was slowly fading away. Finally, when the examinations were announced, Sahira could only attempt it with the little preparation leading to her scoring 43 marks in two subjects. Barely managing to pass her examinations, the two subjects made a heavy dent on her overall percentages and her aspirations.

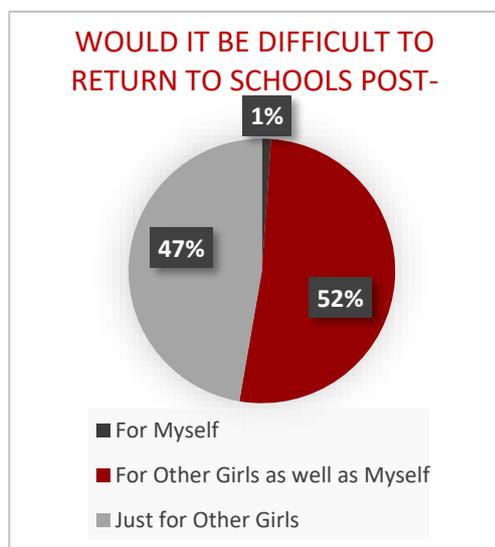
Sahira's disappointments echoes closely with narrative of many students across the country. For Sahira, and many others, the lockdown and the shutting down of schools and inadequate or no option to the online option offered, means that they no longer have the only option they had been able to negotiate to change their lives.

Online Education – Is it a valid new ‘normal’?

The emphasis on online education as the go to new ‘normal’ is far out of reach for the adolescents covered in the survey. From the total respondents, 122 adolescents were not having a personal mobile-phones and were majorly dependent (116 respondents) upon the male-members of their households for accessing any content of mobile-phone. Still, close to 50% (over 95) adolescents were not having access to smart phones which automatically translates to their distancing from any kind of internet services. Hence the very basic requirement of online-education, being the internet, was not available to half of the population surveyed let alone the secondary-levels of problems faced for online-education such as internet connectivity etc.

Returning Back to Schools

According to the respondents they were being forced into child-marriage, forced into child-labour with deterioration in economic conditions of household and increase in household chores. More than 45% of respondents could sense a growing dis-interest amongst their parents with respect to continuing their wards education in the Lockdown period. This they believe would also contribute in girls dropping out of schools once the Lockdown is lifted and schools reopen. It also came under observation that to a broad question about the long-term impact of the present Lockdown, 82 adolescents strongly voiced their concerns about dip in numbers of children attending schools.





FACT SHEET

The 'other' Health Crisis

Impact on Health during Lockdown

Context

The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War Two. Since its emergence in Asia late last year, the virus has spread to every continent except Antarctica. But the pandemic is much more than a health crisis, it's also an unprecedented socio-economic crisis. Stressing every one of the countries it touches, it has the potential to create devastating social, economic and political effects that will leave deep and longstanding scars.

- UNDP¹³

In the latest analysis of health ministry data, by a national daily, a predictable non-COVID health crisis across the country can be sensed. The reason for which remains an already battered health system of the country which became close to non-functioning during the Lockdown.¹⁴ The disruption meant that a significant spectrum of health services were affected leading to a minimum of 100,000 children not receiving their BCG vaccination and another 200,000 missing their dose of pentavalent vaccine. The analysis also reveals a probable spike in unattended home births during the Lockdown with sharp decline in medical interventions performed on pregnant women.

The general restriction on movement during the Lockdown played a detrimental effect in the rural areas of the country with a complete halt of public transportation making it difficult for the patients to access healthcare at the nearest health centre. This concern was echoed by Yogesh Jain, founder member of Jan Swasthya Sahyog, who shared that access to proper healthcare can only be possible where availability of hospitals and medical practitioners is complemented with access to it.¹⁵

¹³ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/coronavirus.html>

¹⁴ Rukmini S. *How covid-19 response disrupted health services in rural India*. April 27th 2020. Url: <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/how-covid-19-response-disrupted-health-services-in-rural-india-11587713155817.html>. Last Accessed on: 26th October 2020.

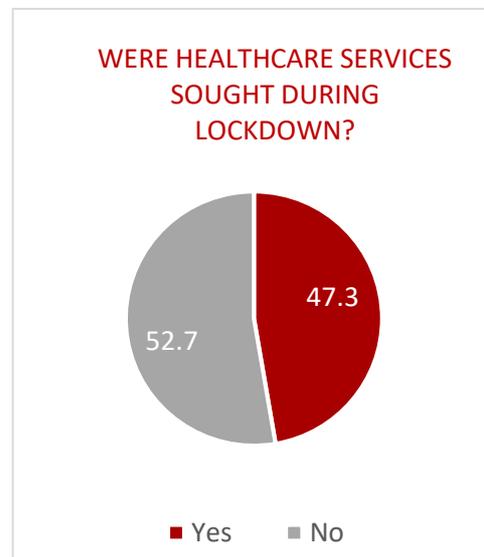
¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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Access to Healthcare during Lockdown

The necessity of accessing healthcare services, for themselves as well as other family members, was experienced by 87 respondents during the lockdown period. Out of these 87 respondents, 61 affirmed that they were able to reach hospitals or nearby Primary Health Centers (PHC).

The point of concern came from a subsequent question regarding proper treatment made available to them during their visit to healthcare centres. Here, 26 respondents (42%) expressed their dissatisfaction with the medical assistance received by them during the visit.

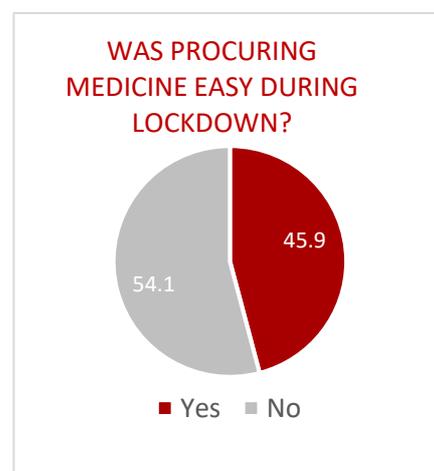


The health care system at the primary level that is inadequate even under normal circumstances, is stretched beyond capacity in times of Covid-19 with inadequate staff and resources. But what made it harder was the stigma that has come to be attached to the virus resulting in doctors hesitating to attend to patients.

This can be understood well through a narrative of respondent who sought healthcare services due to complications arising during her pregnancy period. This young woman was bleeding leading to blood loss during her pregnancy and needed urgent medical attention. To her horror, the doctor on duty quickly gave her some medicine, without proper check-up, adding that she should not be visiting hospital at the moment due to the risk of being a carrier of the virus as well getting herself infected with the COVID virus.

A temporary curfew on movement of individuals led to shortage of essential medical supplies during lockdown. The shortage of medicines in the market, along with the lack of money, yet another impact of COVID and lockdown, made it difficult to buy medicines.

Of the 87 respondents, who sought medical assistance 47 respondents narrated their difficulty in procuring medicines in lockdown period even for patients with chronic health issues like diabetes.



As a result, any attempts to treat even common diseases – common-cold, fever, headache or diarrhea etcetera – became quite difficult to manage and on contrary cases of such aggravated at times.

Menstrual Health

More than 90% respondents (166 respondents) agreed that same sanitary pads had to be used for prolonged periods due to constraints on availability of sanitary pads with all shops closed down for long periods. Many respondents had to face severe health complications due to a prolonged use of the sanitary pads in genital areas. Some respondents shared that without any remedy in hand, excessive bleeding during the menstrual periods forced them to bear severe stomach aches for multiple days.

In rural areas, the schools are a major source for distribution of sanitary napkins. With the schools being closed down the respondents found it difficult to

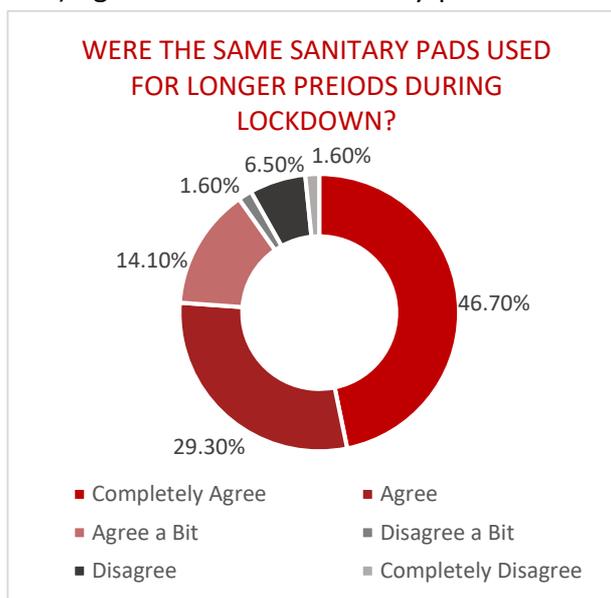
comfortable procure sanitary pads. In such periods, respondents shared, a network of loaning sanitary pads started amongst the adolescent peer groups. If in need, an adolescent would approach her friend to procure sanitary pads and in time when the adolescent was able to procure sanitary pad from the market, she would return number of sanitary pads borrowed to her friend.

The tragedy is that although sanitary towels were declared an essential commodity,¹⁶ they remained scarce or unavailable in the villages of Ajmer district putting girls and women in a stressful situation.

Lockdown – A Period of Mental Trauma, Anxiety and Depression

Out of the 184 respondents, 80 respondents narrated about their experience of facing mental trauma, anxiety and depression during the lockdown. Across the narratives, many cases of deteriorating mental-health conditions originated from reasons such as vulnerabilities induced by the economic instability being faced by the family, prolonged periods of isolation from outside environment with children kept strictly confined to their homes and the overbearing presence of authoritative family members reinforcing patriarchal norms within the household. In addition to these reasons, the study also enabled us to understand contingencies enforced by the lockdown which pushed adolescents into circumstances of mental-health vulnerability.

Besides the above-mentioned reasons, the lack of access to proper healthcare during the lockdown led to heightened levels of health insecurity and caused anxiety amongst the respondents. One of the respondents, a 22-year-old female living in the rural area of Ajmer district, shared how she witnessed medical negligence of the doctor at the rural health centre who refused to give her a delivery date at the hospital during the lockdown period. The



¹⁶ <https://www.shethepeople.tv/coronavirus/sanitary-napkins-essential-commodity-lockdown/>

respondent narrated about the many sleepless nights she had during the last days of her pregnancy trying to think if a way to procure a place in the hospital for her delivery and wondering if not then how she could assure herself a safe birth.

Many respondents to the survey, were placed into precarious positions, during the lockdown, by their family members who either forced the respondents into early age engagements or pressurized them into forced marital alliances. In cases where the adolescents were engaged prior to the lockdown, many were pressured to give in to their marital homes demands of staying with them to have an extra helping hand to carry out the household chores. With the second set of respondents, who had been forced into early marital alliances by their family members were forced by their own parents due to economic hardship, to move to their marital home. The impact in both cases on adolescents led to increased levels of anxieties from the sudden rush of uncertainty introduced in their lives. One of the respondent shared her experience of battling prolonged period of depression as she was pushed into a quick marital alliance during the lockdown that saw her dropping out of schools and subjugated to multiple pressure from her own parents and her in-laws to shift residences as her in-laws wanted an additional support with the household chores.

Listening to the narratives of adolescents on experiencing mental traumas during the lockdown period has reiterated how socio- economic vulnerabilities get exacerbated during uncertain times. The narratives show how issues concerning children – child marriage, child labour etc. – have been reinforced on account of the current financial and social compulsions of the present times which leads to a situation of greater vulnerability of mental-health concerns for adolescents.