GIRLS GRAPPLE WITH PRESSURES DURING PANDEMIC: STUDY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Women - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Among the biggest challenges was the inability to attend online school.

Twenty-five girls from seven cities set out to interview their peers to record the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and found that adolescent girls were grappling with an increased pressure to get married, spent longer hours on household chores, lacked tools to continue school education online, and reported an increase in gender-based violence.

The study titled 'COVID In Her Voice: A Girl-led and Centred Participatory Research Study' was released on April 13. It was conducted by girls aged 13-24 years from Ahmedabad, Alwar, Bareily, Delhi, Lucknow, Mumbai and Pune within their communities.

Unique method

It adopted a unique methodology where girls were trained as researchers to conduct interviews with a total of 153 girls from their respective communities.

The study was supported by the U.K. government and conducted by EMpower, a global philanthropy focused on at-risk youth in emerging markets.

Among the biggest challenges girls faced was the inability to attend online school.

This was a result of nearly 80% respondents reporting an increase in household chores, which meant that 64% of girls and young women felt they did not have the space or get the time to study online.

Lack of access to resources and technology was also a challenge — nearly 28% of those surveyed didn't have the tools such as mobile phones or Internet access to learn online.

With households from marginalised communities facing financial stress due to the economic impact of COVID-19, girls believed that the pressure to get married had increased, with nearly 42% reporting this.

Mental distress

Almost 90% of girls reported experiencing mental distress and despair without any access to information about coping mechanisms.

Their mental distress was exacerbated because of barriers in communicating with friends and teachers.

26% respondents believe there was an increase in gender-based violence and felt that fears and threats of violence intensified restrictions on their freedom.

On concluding the field research, seven girl leaders finalised a list of priority recommendations which include establishing girl-friendly spaces within the community such as skills training

centres and violence-free spaces.

They also seek well-maintained, safe and free toilets in close proximity to communities, as well as digital hubs in the community with charging stations and WiFi access, especially in the smaller cities.

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