

Title: Influence of First Wave of Covid-19 Pandemic on Adolescent Girl's Schooling/ Studies in Jharkhand, India

Context: With schools closed for most part of academic year 2020-21 due to Covid-19 pandemic, the gains made so far on education, in terms of school enrolments, learning outcomes, bridging of gender gap in enrolment, etc., are at risk of dissipating. It is estimated that 20 million girls in developing countries¹ and 10 million in India² may never return to school, putting them at risk of early marriage, poverty and violence. In this context, aim of this research is to assess short-term and long-term effects of first wave of Covid-19 pandemic on girls' school enrolment, participation of school going girls in digital learning opportunities, likelihood of returning to school and support required for continuing studies once schools re-open after pandemic. Research objectives were met by personally interviewing adolescent girls aged 15-18 years and her parents in UMANG field area of Godda and Jamtara districts, Jharkhand, India.

Methods: Cross-sectional, rapid quantitative household survey was held with adolescent girls aged 15-18 years and her parents by UMANG program partner (Badhlao and Saathi) staff in Godda and Mahagama blocks in Godda district and Jamtara and Nala blocks in Jamtara district, during February-March 2021. Data for this study was collected by using two types of computer aided personal interviewing (CAPI) data collection tools separately for girl and her parent (father/mother), at home of girl, by adhering to all the Covid-19 protocols of Government of Jharkhand at the time of survey. Rapid survey covered a total of 493 households. However, the following is the coverage according to type of respondent:

- Both girl and her parent (father/mother) interviewed: 463 (93.9%)
- Only parent interviewed and girl could not be interviewed: 14 (2.8%)
- Only girl interviewed and parent could not be interviewed: 16 (3.2%)

For key indicators we have tried to provide block-wise variations.

Results: Background characteristics of 493 households covered by rapid survey (Feb-Mar 2021) are: Mean household size 6.7 members, Other Backward Caste (OBC) - 50% and one-fourth Scheduled Tribe (ST). More than half (54%) of the mothers and 15% fathers of girl are illiterate and majority of the households rely on cultivation or agriculture labour, as main source of income.

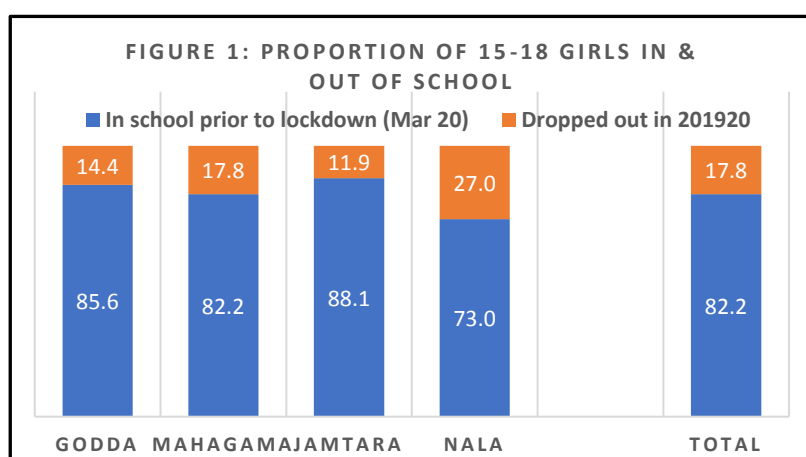


Figure 1 presents block-wise proportion of girls who were enrolled in school prior to lockdown (during the academic year 2019-20) and who dropped out of school during the academic year 2019-20. Out of the 479 girls covered by rapid survey in Feb-Mar 2021, 82% girls were in school/college prior to lockdown and 18% girls have dropped out of the school during academic year 2019-20. Dropouts were also high (27%) in Nala block and fewer

¹ Malala Fund (2020). <https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-releases-report-girls-education-covid-19>

² Rodriguez L (2020). Covid-19 is undoing 70 years of girls education progress in India.

in Jamtara block (12%). Dropouts were high among in Scheduled Tribe (30%), girls of Illiterate parents and whose parents are engaged in agriculture labour.

There existed a strong inter-relationship between school going status of girl prior to lockdown (Mar 2020) with her participation in labour force and her marriage. As expected, proportion married among dropped out girls was more than three times (17%) than those who were enrolled in school (5%). In the households with unmarried girls, discussions about her marriage were also higher (42%) among households with dropout girls as compared to households with school going girl (25%). Similarly, higher proportion (16%) of parents of out of schoolgirls want to get their daughter married in next six months as compared to parents of girl who are in school (8%). Dropout from school is also strongly related to participation of girl in paid work, with 32% dropped out girls engaged in paid work as compared to 12% among school going girls. Similarly, 68% of dropout girls were engaged in unpaid work when this proportion in school going girls was 48%.

More than half (56%) and more than three-fourth (76%) of the school going girls aged 15-18 years/in classes 6-12, were aware about television (TV) and Digi-Sath (*A Government of Jharkhand initiative to continue studies using mobile and social media technology*) classes, respectively. However, reach of these two digital platforms of continuing studies in UMANG program area is limited with only 38% and 43% of all school going girls ever watched a class on TV and are connected with Digi-Sath initiative, respectively. Fewer parents have knowledge of these two digital platforms and among the two, knowledge of Digi-Sath is better (35%) as compared to knowledge of TV (8%) classes. Only 40% parents of school going girls reported that their daughter ever participated in either or both the platforms of continuing education.

During intense nation-wide lockdown (Mar-Jun 2020) around 80% girls lost interest in studies or were unable to concentrate on studies. This proportion has dropped to around 55% after a year (Feb-Mar 21) of lockdown. Now (Feb-Mar 2021) on an average each girl is spending 2.9 hours in a day on "*reading class books, homework, tuition, TV/Digi-Sath classes*", although, 18% girls are not spending any time on study related activities, making them at risk of dropping out from school. On the other hand, 79% parents said their daughter has enough time for studies at home during lockdown. It is in this background; 66% girls said the time they have spent on studies in Feb-Mar 2021 has "*increased or remained same*" as compared to the time they used to spend on studies during lockdown. By Feb-Mar 2021, for slightly more than half (53%) the 6-12 class girls, schools have already started and they are going to school, 41% are "*eager to go to school*" and 6% are "*little eager/not much eager*" to go to school, once it opens.

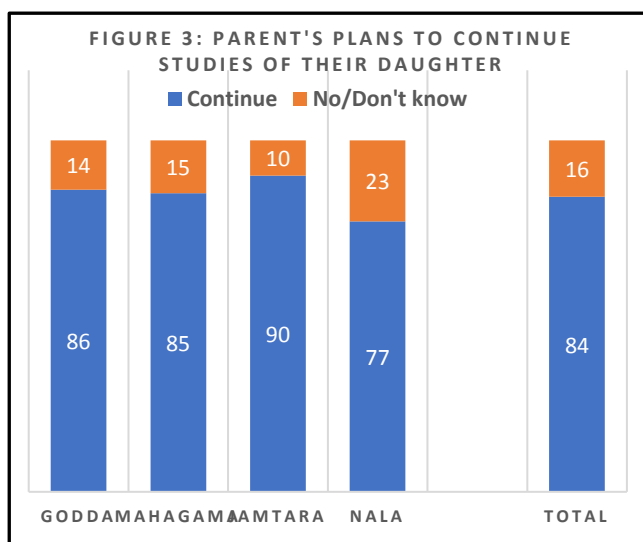
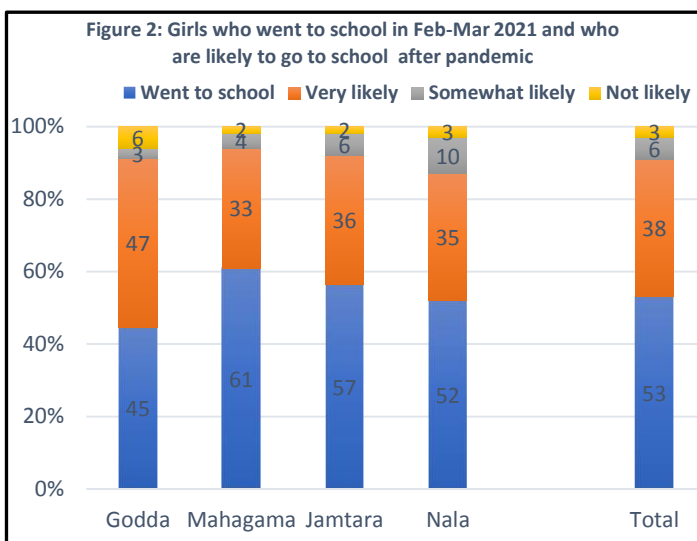
If there was no Covid-19 pandemic and girls can study till whatever level they want, then 67% girls want to complete graduation or more, 92% wants to complete 12th standard or more and almost all girls want to complete 10th standard or more. Given the first wave of pandemic, in Feb-Mar 2021 only 53% girls expect to complete graduation or more and 80% expect to complete 12th standard or more. Aspirations of girls to study to a certain level closely matched with aspirations of parents.

By Feb-Mar 2021, around 53% girls' have started going to school, 38% girls are of the opinion that they are "*very likely*" to go to school and 9% girls are "*somewhat likely/not likely*" to go to school, once it opens after pandemic, mainly due to reasons like; parents will not allow, not interested in studies, domestic work, marriage plans etc.

Block-wise variations are minor in terms of girl's opinion to continue studies, with 94% girls of Mahagama already in school/most likely to continue studies against 87% in Nala (Figure 2). Parent views about continuation of studies closely matches with the views of girl (Figure 3).

Only 5% parents said they are "not planning to continue studies of their daughter/not certain about continuation of studies", due to reasons like lack of money, marriage etc. **Keeping in view opinions of both the girl and the parent, we may**

summarize that out of 394 girls enrolled in school in 2019-20; 350 (88%) are already in the school/most likely to continue studies once school re-opens, 8 (2%) girls are most likely to discontinue studies; and 36 (9%) girls are vulnerable for dropping out from school.



Despite 88% girls and her parents sure of continuing studies once schools re-open after the pandemic, only 24% girls do not anticipate any difficulty to continue studies in post-pandemic period. Remaining girls anticipate the following difficulties like: monitory problems (51%), maintaining social distance in school (42%), burden of domestic work (24%), marriage (12%) and poor performance in studies (11), etc. For continuation of studies in post pandemic period without any difficulty, both the girl and her parent want support like, books and/or dress (73-88%),

transportation/money for transportation (39-53%), scholarship (65-67%) and tuitions (77-94%).

Only 5-7% girls and her parents said they do not require any support to continue studies of girls in post pandemic period.

Thus, our study highlights how first wave of COVID-19 pandemic has impacted girls interest in studies, how it will impact continuation of studies in post-pandemic period and what kind of support they need to continue studies. Although initiatives from the Government like television classes and Digi-Sath are well-intended, the efforts have not been adequate to match the scale of crisis. With second wave hitting hard on India and the third wave round the corner, girls are already away from schools in academic year 2021-22. To stop this devastating impact of Covid-19 on girls' education, governments should prioritise education sector in their response and recovery strategies and avoid harmful cuts to education budgets.