



CHAMPIONS
FOR GIRLS'
EDUCATION

POLICY BRIEF

Gendered impact of COVID-19 on education of school-aged children in Uttar Pradesh



1. Background and context

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected marginalised sections globally. With school closures, schools being substituted largely with online education, underprivileged children have been the worst hit. Not surprisingly, girls get affected more than boys¹. In India, several girls at the intersections of gender, class, and other structural hierarchies like caste, have little or no access to the internet or digital education. They are likely to be the first to be whisked away from their studies towards domestic duties. Prior to the pandemic, girls were already twice as likely as boys to have less than four years of education. Even boys face the burden of their gender: the economic crisis brought about by the pandemic is going to push them towards child labour.

The state of Uttar Pradesh, rife with casteism is likely to face the impact of the pandemic, especially among its poor and marginalised populations. We² surveyed 944 households in the rural and peri-urban areas of 11 districts (Ambedkarnagar, Ayodhya, Faizabad, Hamirpur, Hardoi, Kanpur, Kushinagar, Lucknow, Moradabad, Sultanpur and Raebareli). We found in our sample, that marginalised households inhabit areas mostly abandoned by the upper castes. Nearly half of the families are SC/STs, 30% OBC, and 15% Muslims. The average family size was large (8). Majority of men (68%) were employed in low-skilled labour, a little less than one-fifth said they were farmers on their own land. Only about 28% of our adult respondents were women and 69% of them were not engaged in any occupation outside the household, mostly being involved in domestic chores.

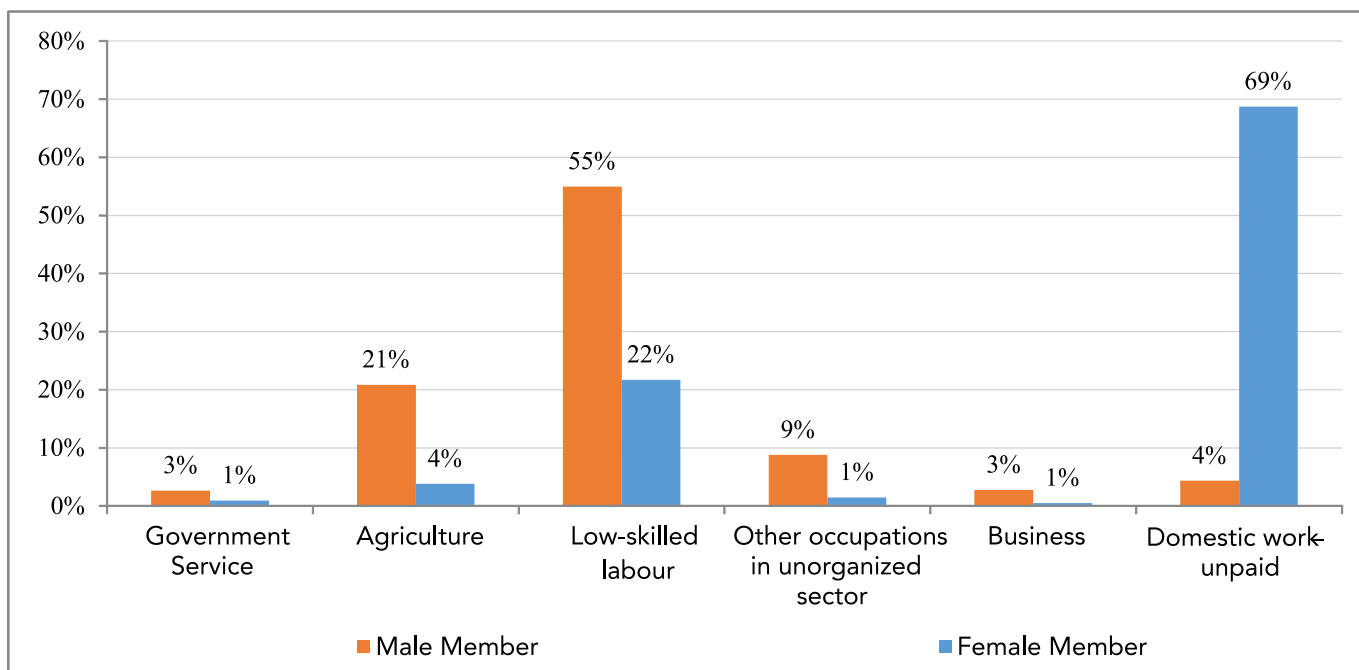


FIGURE 1: Occupational distribution of male and female members

2. Responses and support to mitigate economic distress

About 68% of the households received³ additional ration but less than one-fifth reported receiving meals from the Anganwadi centres. In light of the pandemic and job losses, the Government had announced direct cash transfers of Rs.1500 to women account holders and advance transfers were allowed for a number of existing cash transfer schemes to mitigate the immediate effects of the pandemic. Among our respondents in UP, only one-fourth received such cash transfers in the Jan-Dhan account, and a meagre 9%, under the existing scheme Ujjwala Yojana. However, about 85% of the families received uncooked food or ration but only about 9% received any information related to maintenance of health or Covid-19.

The Education department did not seem to be very active with just 7% respondents having received any form of support from them.

3. Key findings: Impact of Covid-19 on Education and Schooling

We interviewed 944 adolescents, mainly girls (86%) between age 10 to 18 years in UP. An equal number of girls were going both to private, unaided and government schools, while more than half of the boys (54%) were in private schools. There was clear preference by the parents to send their boys to

private schools in comparison to the girls especially amongst the upwardly-mobile OBCs.

The boys were slightly older than the girls in the sample as most of them were in upper primary (43%) and senior secondary (33%) grades as compared to girls who were mainly in upper primary (43%) and secondary (23%). However, all children were in foundational years of learning coming from vulnerable backgrounds, where any small shock and consequent gaps in schooling could result in learning loss and impact continuation of education adversely.

3.1 Disruptions in learning: technology enabled learning poor substitute for school

Although schools in UP closed since the lockdown in March 2020, 53% of the children reported that the syllabus for the previous academic year was not completed and 69% of the children reported the term-end examinations were not held before the schools closed suggesting that even without school-closure, there existed causes of concern regarding syllabus completion.

After the school closures, the presence of technology did not ensure access to education and showed a clearly gendered pattern: only 15% reported watching educational TV shows or programmes for educational purposes, even though 53% had a TV set at home. Most children reported having a phone at home but only 22% had access. This number was even lower for girls at 21% compared to 29% boys. Phones in most cases (80%) belonged to the male

member of the household. Access to internet was also limited with about 52% of the children claiming to have access.

3.2 Disproportionate burden of domestic chores and care work on girls

Our data on time-use reveals a clearly gendered pattern with 64% girls spending their time on chores and care work and 78% of boys were spending their time on leisure. However, only 29% of both boys and girls reported spending any time on studies.

3.3 Life was better before Covid-19

Absence of mobility, time away from school and peers, pressures of domestic chores meant children perceived their life to be worse now as compared to pre-Covid-19 days. About 74% children saying that their life was better before the lockdown, the gender break-up revealing a higher percentage of girls (75%) feeling so as compared to boys (67%). About 25% boys said that their life had no impact due to the lockdown, and it was the same as before. But a smaller number of girls (15%) thought the same. This is obvious as for many girls, school offers the rare opportunity to go out of home.

As seen in the figure above, responses as to their reasons why they preferred their pre-lockdown life were gendered. A much larger percentage of girls (47%) said that earlier they could go to school and study, as compared to a smaller percentage of boys (18%). It is clear that for majority of girls, going to school was the only outing allowed and the loss of that opportunity made their lives highly restrictive. Only 9% girls -- in comparison to 15%

boys -- said their mobility has been curtailed due to the pandemic. While both sets of children expressed concerns related to peer interaction, our data suggests that peer interaction was more severely restricted for girls due to school closure.

3.4 Majority, including boys, uncertain about returning to school

About 82% of the boys and 54% of the girls were uncertain about returning to school on reopening. Only 18% boys and 45% girls were confident of their return. The pandemic has not only affected their learning situation, but has also added to the uncertainties of continuing education. This also suggests that boys are no less vulnerable, as despite facing less restriction on mobility or responsibility for domestic work, they are more prone to being pushed into child labour.

4. Key recommendations

The situation calls for urgent measures to be taken in the state to ensure that gains made in the realms of education, especially for girls, are not lost and that education systems develop resilience to public health crises and other disasters. In addition to the SOP issued⁴, the following additional measure would help all children, especially girls:

Response: If school closures continue or have to be re-implemented, there is a need to –

- Continue essential care services during school closures — such as Iron Folic Acid and sanitary pad provision, psychosocial support, and mid-day meals — to maintain good health and

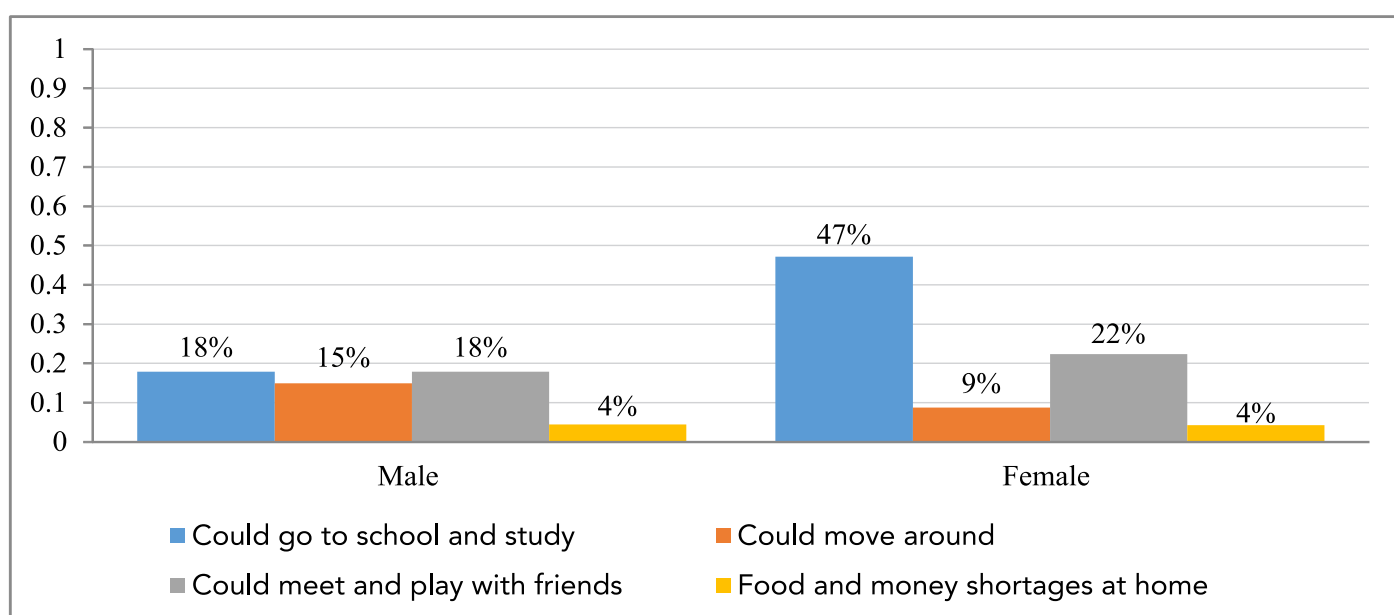


FIGURE 2: Reasons cited by children for life being better before lockdown

hygiene, mitigate trauma, address hunger and malnutrition and limit negative coping mechanisms

- Ensure home visits and telephone communication between teachers and students, to support learning and keep girls connected to the school
- Develop diverse and low-cost distance-learning material — using radio, TV, SMS, printed material, peer-to-peer and parent resources — which reaches girls equitably
- Ensure a strong child protection safety net as mandated by the Integrated Child Protection Scheme — across all village and block Child Protection Committees (VLCPCs and BLCPCs) — to safeguard girls from child marriage, child labour or abuse

Recovery: Inclusive measure to bring children, especially girls back to school –

- Enlist women's groups to help children especially girls with educational and social support and safeguard from abuse
- Engage GP and VLCPCS to give a clear political message that any form of child abuse would not be tolerated by the government
- Support children by cash transfers for scholarships
- Make secondary education free for girls with immediate effect
- Develop mass community outreach programmes with civil society and youth leaders to encourage girls to re-enrol, particularly in rural areas
- Establish systems to monitor girls' re-enrolment as mandated by the NEP-2020 and make this data publicly available.
- Provide learning and counselling support, especially to girls transitioning between primary and secondary level, from marginalised communities (as per the NEP-2020).
- Ensure adequate mental health support is available particularly to children infected and are at risk of facing stigma.

Resilience: Build better systems by –

- Creating safe spaces for girls within the community for social and emotional wellbeing as well as recreational and educational activities in small groups.
- Provide day-care and early childhood care services under Integrated Child Development Scheme for extended hours to alleviate the burden of childcare from older siblings.
- Ensure functional WASH facilities in all schools and train teachers to provide gender-equitable personal, social and health education, incorporating specific guidance to prevent further outbreaks of coronavirus.
- Incorporate comprehensive sexuality education into the curriculum to mitigate risks of rising sexual violence and abuse during emergencies.
- Hire and train more female teachers to promote increased girls' enrolment and retention; and to bridge the digital divide.
- Scale up and expand access to digital learning and other low-cost alternative education provision.
- Ensure teachers, parents and community actors have the knowledge and skills to deal with instances of gender-based violence and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, including information on safe referral practices and on online safety
- Build gender-responsive contingency plans for education now for future public health emergencies based on feedback and lessons learned.

Developed by Neha Ghatak, Achala S Yareseeme and Jyotsna Jha, based on the study

"Life in the time of Covid-19: Mapping the impact of Covid-19 on the lives of school going children especially girls in India"

Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (2020) [for India Champions for Girls' Education]

References

1. A recent study shows that increased rates of poverty, household responsibilities, child labour, teenage pregnancy may prevent as many as 20 million secondary school-aged girls around the world from ever returning to the classroom.
2. India Champions for Girls' Education, an initiative, supported by Malala Fund, is made up of education champions across civil society who are working to speed up progress towards girls' education. This study was developed, designed and conducted by CBPS on behalf of India Champions for Girls' Education
3. The Government of India had announced addition ration through existing PDS system and the state government had also instructed Anganwadicentres to distribute food. To understand if they had access to the Public Distribution System (PDS) where cereals and ration is distributed at a highly subsidised rate, we asked how many households had ration cards.
4. SOP developed by Ministry of Education (http://seshagun.gov.in/sites/default/files/update/SOP_Guidelines_for_reopening_schools_0.pdf)

