

GIRLS ADVOCACY ALLIANCE (GAA)

News letter-2020



YOUTH ADVOCATES DURING COVID TIMES

EDITORIAL ◆

Subarna Ghosh, a working mother in Mumbai has expressed her dissent over the lack of participation of men in household chores during lockdown through a petition urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene.

Indian households often see an unbalanced and unfair workload of household tasks performed by Indian women as compared to men. The quibbles grew manifolds during especially when the Nationwide lockdown was imposed as househelps and domestic help including part-time cooks, cleaners and nannies had to refrain due to the spread of the Corona Virus infection in the past few months.

A recent study by the London-based Institute for Fiscal Studies has found tell-tale signs of how the lockdown has widened the gender gap in performing domestic duties. The report published on May 27, 2020, suggests that 'of parents who were in paid work prior to the lockdown, mothers are one-and-a-half times more likely than father to have either lost their job or quit since the lockdown began'. A clear point shows where Girls and Young Women are not having access to Equal Rights and Opportunities.

Further, mothers who have stopped working during the lockdown do twice as much childcare and housework as their partner. 'In the reverse situation, in families where the father has stopped working, the parents share childcare and

housework equally, while the mother also does 5 hours of paid work a day.'

Adding to the woes is the rising Domestic Violence cases impacting women across the country due to joblessness of men sitting at home all day. In 2020, between March 25 and May 31, 1477 complaints of domestic violence were made by women. This 68 day period recorded more complaints than those received between March and May in the previous 10 years.

If that is not enough, the lockdown has also encouraged many parents to force their wards to get married or perform child marriages silently. The ones who had access raised alarm and the others became victims.

To know more about the situation at grass roots level, Girls Advocacy Alliance-Mahita has interviewed its Youth Advocates on their take on gender based violence and how communities are responding to the current situation and their change in 'social behaviors. The result is the special newsletter "Youth Advocates during Covid Times", that shows their perspective of Covid 19 impact. A first of kind of experience for all in 20th century, the lockdown has shaken the entire World.

Wishing you a Happy Reading!

Girls Advocacy Alliance – Mahita

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STAYING TOUGH IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IS THE NEED OF HOUR

As a youth advocate, I reacted to the situations in a calm manner and created awareness among girls in my community that they can overcome this Covid pandemic, abuse and the need to stay mentally and physically strong, says Kavya Prasanna from Kurnool.



subject to stigma related to Covid 19, she adds. “I educated that the pandemic is temporary and will get back to normal soon once the vaccine is available”, she says. It is foremost that they need to focus on education and

maintain cordial relations with family members.

Girls, in particular, are overburdened with household responsibilities and exposed to household tensions, which creates mental stress. In addition, school closures have meant their routines are disrupted and their usual support systems outside home are unavailable. These factors might cause depression, disappointment and anxiety among them, especially for those

Emotionally blackmailing young girls in the name of marriage and making them the scapegoat of misery has led to a depressive state in many young minds. “They were constantly reminded that they need to leave home as early as possible as they are considered as additional baggage at home”, explains Kavya.

Motivation is the key to success. “Explaining the importance of physical activity along with mental health is necessary because being lazy causes many health issues”, she quips. Added to it, hormonal fluctuation in menstrual cycles worsened the current situation among girls, to which I counselled them.

Staying tough in difficult situations when career is in jeopardy should be the motto of students in the present academic year, says Kavya. “I chalked out a plan to apply for masters in universities, leave it I did not even complete Bachelors due to Covid”, she laments about the uncertainty arising out of the present situation.

She hopes to see the Sunshine very soon to spread her wings and fly with dreams.



YOUTH ADVOCATE TIP-OFF HELPS STOP A CHILD MARRIAGE



Changing the identity and all personal details for security reasons

“**My** neighbour has shown the wedding invitation of her friend, who was 16 years at that time”, says Ms. Vani (named changed), who then determined to stop the child marriage and help prevent a girl from becoming a victim.

It was lockdown period and a video conference was organised for Youth advocates. “I informed the district coordinator, Mr. Srikanth about the child marriage and asked how to stop it”, she adds. Having been scared about the community who could go against her decision, she asked solution on dealing with it.

“I went to my neighbour’s home without her knowledge and passed wedding invitation in Whatsapp to DC”, she quips. After two days, the

child line team, Adilabad visited the girl family and counselled them. Later my friend revealed that child line authorities prevented the child marriage and it was cancelled.

Many of her friends were married at 10th and now face the problems dealing with household responsibility, working in unskilled labour without proper wages, dowry, harassment and child care. “A girl has to attain a minimum age of 18 to get married and educated, that is why I decided to stop this marriage”, she says.

Having completed B.Ed and currently pursuing B Sc she aims to become a Teacher. “It is my dream since childhood”, she says. Her uncle is an established teacher and encourages her good work and at the same time cautions to be careful. “Stopping the child marriage is the only thing that I did not share with my uncle”, she adds due to the fear.

There were few corona cases in March, however post lockdown people started moving without taking precautionary measures leading to a spike. “We hardly have any classes and all we do is self-study”, says about her education. It is because all students do not have access to laptops, internet and phone connectivity.

She further adds that a lot of awareness was created among her friend circles to raise their voice over gender discrimination and also report any child marriage cases.

DREAMS TRANSFORM INTO CONCRETE ACTIONS

In a village named Arilova in Vishakapatnam, Gowthami as part of GAA was creating awareness on child marriages. During their stay, the team has noticed a tree wooden log being used as a bridge to connect the main road by the dwellers. In one such scenario, a youth has fallen off the log leading to injuries.

Gowthami along with other youth advocates managed to meet the local leader and expressed the need to construct a bridge. Next year, when they visited the same village for a camp, their eyes were filled with joy as their dream turned into concrete action.

This inclination towards social service work is due to the fact that she wants to become an IAS officer. "I want to bring change in the society and it is possible by becoming a civil servant", says Gowthami hailing from Vishakapatnam. She is



As per the IANS-C Voter Covid tracker survey, nearly 60 per cent of men those aged between 25 and 45 years took active part in household chores. The survey also pointed out how 38.2 per cent said they have been already chipping in, while only 18.7 per cent said "No". According to the survey, in the gender category, 57.1 per cent females said they participated in household chores, while the males came close at 54.4 per cent.

moving ahead with self-study program as it is impossible to go to coaching centers due to Corona virus.

It is only in the recent times that we started having online classes. "We have regular subjects in the morning and tests in the evening", she says.

Post lockdown, students started moving a lot without fear. It is the Whatsapp statuses that keep surprising her. "I ask my friends not to take such steps", she adds.

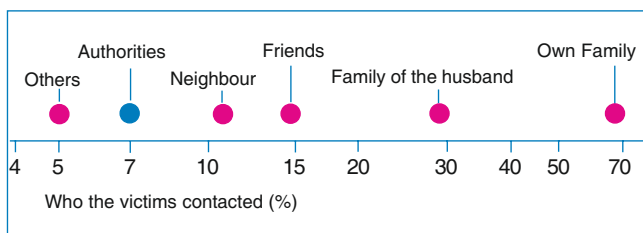
Gowthami's father, a Teacher by profession has taken the initiative of helping his wife during lockdown. "Earlier, he used to do household chores only on Sundays, but during lockdown he made sure that mom is not burdened

with workload", she shares with a proud smile.

COUNSELLING PARENTS NOT TO PERFORM EARLY MARRIAGES DURING COVID

“I counselled my relatives not to get their girl children married early instead provide skill education to sustain in life”, says Ms Komolika a BSc Computer Science, Final year from Vizag. Taking advantage of the Corona crisis, many parents are insisting their wards to get married, which is definitely not a right step.

Having been part of Girls Advocacy Alliance for two years, she is one of the active Youths advocating for the empowerment of girl child. “On the eve of National Girl Child Day, a group play was done enacting the role of Ministry for WCD and discussed several issues”, she adds. Government officials, NGO members and women commission were part of the program and lauded their performance.



Source: National Family Health Survey 2015-2016

The current crisis of Corona is aggravating violence on young girls and women. “Girls no matter what, they have to first perform household chores and then attend online classes”, she adds over gender imbalance at home. The elderly have now turned arrogant and started imposing many restrictions curtailing the freedom.

The officials of Women Development and Child Welfare (WD & CW) department, Andhra Pradesh has prevented 165 marriages in the state during the 49 day lockdown period. Almost all the weddings were planned at their houses.

Adding to the woes, is the impending examinations where the final date is not decided. “We have completed theoretical exams and only practical tests are left”, she says. The campus recruitment drive at college premises has offered Komolika triple luck as three companies have selected her.

“In this pandemic, our careers are stopped and time is wasted, whatever we study will help us in job training”, she says. I feel in future, this will be a burden.

With a ray of hope in heart, she opens up and promises to work for educating girls in slum areas in improving their lives.



A WORLD WHERE MEN AND WOMEN ARE EQUAL

Being with GAA for over one and half year, Pavani works on the issues of gender based violence. One of her college mates was harassed by a Doctor in a clinic and the victim did not dare to talk about this with her parents. “I took the lead, gave her the confidence and spoke to her parents, who later filed the case”, she says. Later, the license of the Doctor was cancelled.

Despite creating so much of awareness, the society is still being the same. “A girl should help herself and be trained in self defence mechanisms”, adds Pavani who wants to see a world where men and women would have equal status.

Staying one and half kilometre away from Beach,

she was a regular visitor before lockdown. “Once in a week I used to visit the beach, I miss it a lot”, she says.

There are increasing cases of Corona at



Madhurvada, it is due to the reason that it is a slum area. “People are uneducated and does not follow minimum safety measures causing chaos”, she adds. Despite Police creating awareness, it is only 40 percent who use masks post lockdown.

Slum dwellers faced myriad of problems. “They did not have money and hence food was a problem”, she says. They suffered with Diarrohea, unconsciousness, Sweatiness and other health issues. Government then supplied them with ration and other basic necessities for their livelihood.

Pursuing B.Sc. Statistics, Final year, she aims to be a Data Scientist. The Final exam first term exam was to be held in April and they are postponed. By September mid- the second term exam were to be completed. “Don’t know when they will conduct exams, it feels like they are playing with our lives”, she ends.

Type of Violence	Never told anyone	Told someone	Sought help from a source
Physical	79.5	9.0	11.6
Sexual	80.6	9.5	09.8
Physical & Sexual	61.3	9.9	28.8
Total	76.6	9.1	14.3

Source: National Family Health Survey 2015-2016

LOCKDOWN TURNS PEOPLE LAZY

“People have reduced their 3 time meals into one, which has led to a drastic change in lifestyle leading to uncontrolled diabetes and other health issues”, says Ms Uma from Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh.

No work, no income has been the notion for many during the lockdown. The result is the Domestic Violence on women in households. “They started to hit their wives/children staying home all day”, she says about physical and mental abuse during the lockdown period.

Lockdown has become an evil, especially for the teenage girls, who are pursuing education. “Parents are now insisting girl children at home to get married, which is causing early marriages or child marriages”, she adds.

With advent of online classes in private and government schools, children are suffering at the highest. “Not all have access to smart phones/computers leading to lack of interest in studies”, she says. The situation is more pathetic with children from rural areas who have least access to technology or internet, she observes.

The most disturbing time is when girls have their monthly periods. “With no access to stores and increase in price in black market, many did not get access to sanitary napkins”, she quips. We have not received free napkins distributed by the

According to a study by National Commission women published in The Hindu – In 2020, between March 25 and May 31, a total of 1,477 complaints of Domestic Violence were made by women. This 68 – day period recorded more complaints than those received between March and May in the previous 10 years.

government and feel bad to take birth as a girl child, she laments.

The most hit are the migrant workers who were stranded in makeshift houses or walking on bare foot to reach their destination. Post lockdown, there is no improvement in living conditions of people and the misery continues. There is no continuance in getting their salaries credited at any time soon, she adds.

It will be very helpful if government provides scholarship to the school/college going students, and also employees to buy health-related essential things, opines Uma. “NGOs should also come forward and help BPL families in getting access to basic needs”, she ends.



COVID 19 LOCKDOWN UNVEILS THE GREAT INDIAN DIGITAL DIVIDE

“I have been getting treated for a major health issue since six years in Karnataka, due to lockdown it has now halted”, says Ms Keertana from Gadwal, Telangana.

Adding to the woes is the insufficient income of the family which prevents from getting medicines and also accessing basic essential materials, “My father, a farmer could not get monthly income and started borrowing money from others leading to debts”, she says.

The situation in rural areas is quite different from that of the cities. Talking about the digital divide, “Even though schools and colleges have started online classes, most of them cannot access due to internet connectivity”. Financial constraints in procuring a high speed internet connection, frequent power cuts and a range of socio-economic problems have hit students hard.

The situation must be remedied to avoid exacerbating the rural-urban gap. “It obviously

There is a rural-urban component to the digital divide, as per CSC e-Governance Services India Ltd. Of more than 60 crore internet users in India, 29 crore are in rural areas - internet density in rural areas accounting for 66 % of population is around 25 %, while among urban population (34%), internet density is almost 98%.

leads to a sector of students losing their valuable education”, she quips.

After-lockdown, scenario has not enhanced her family living style in any way. The income her father gets is very less and they couldn't afford for her health/education.

Keertana requests Govt/NGO, if possible to help her get the treatment done, as Rs10000 was the largest amount they have spent for her treatment. She says, once her health issue gets treated completely, she can concentrate on her studies.



THIS IS A SUFFERING PERIOD FOR STUDENTS !

I heard about Corona virus in China through TV news in the month of January and thought it's a usual flu which comes and goes. "Never did I expect that it can spread to other countries at a rapid rate", says Pooja , pursuing B.Com Computers at Ambedkar Degree College in Chikkadpally, Hyderabad.



The college management has started online classes after a gap of 15 days after the lockdown was announced. "It was difficult to grasp lessons as there were either connectivity issue or professors voice was unclear", she says about the teaching methodology. Students will have learning difficulties and are not confident about the subject, she adds.

A native of Rangareddy district, Pooja and her two siblings along with parents migrated to Hyderabad city five years ago in pursuit of higher education. Her father, auto driver by profession and elder brother, Gym trainer are the bread winners in the entire family. However, now the situation is no more the same after Covid 19.

"My father tells that people are not interested in travelling by auto, due to the fear of virus, which is leading to financial instability in the house", she said. Her brother, a Gym trainer is tired of being empty handed and is eagerly waiting for the gyms to function so that he can help parents.

If things deteriorate further, the family is planning to migrate to their native village. "My father is of the opinion, that at least they can do some or the other work in the village and sustain them happily", she says despite cases rising there also.

Further, many students did not attend online classes, as they were not interested. "Earlier due to lecturer fear, atleast students use to be present in the class, but now they are distracted". They drifted from studies and it is a huge loss for students. This will definitely affect the employment opportunities both for girls and boys.

However, the entire syllabus has been completed and they are waiting for the exams to get over, so that they can pursue higher studies. "There is no clarity if they will promote us or conduct exams, whatever may be, there has to be a say about this at the earliest", says Pooja with a uncertainty looming over the future. This is a suffering period for us, she adds.

More worrisome is the children whereabouts, as they are hardly seen. "With no regular schools, many are dropping out and may be forced by parents to stop education completely", she says.

COVID BEING LAID AS A TRAP FOR CHILD MARRIAGES

With the advent of government rule that only 20 people can attend a marriage during Covid, many parents are insisting them to get married early. “They feel it is a good time to get their wards married within less budget and no relatives attending the event”, says Manasa from Gadwal, Telangana



As many as 204 child marriages were performed in 25 out of 33 districts in Telangana state during the lockdown period from March 24 to May 31, according to a report published in leading English daily, The Hindu. This information was shared by CHILD LINE, a 24x7 free helpline for children in distress, which works in partnership with NGOs in 600 districts and 129 railway stations across the country.

Another form of gender based violence is that women and children are abused by their husbands sitting at home all time due to joblessness. Added to it, household chores have increased drastically burdening girls and women at home.

Online education is definitely having two way impacts on students, she says. Even though education is digitised, lack of signal and network connectivity issues

is preventing students in rural areas from getting access. “Whereas in cities, they are getting addicted to mobile phones and straining their eyes”, she adds.

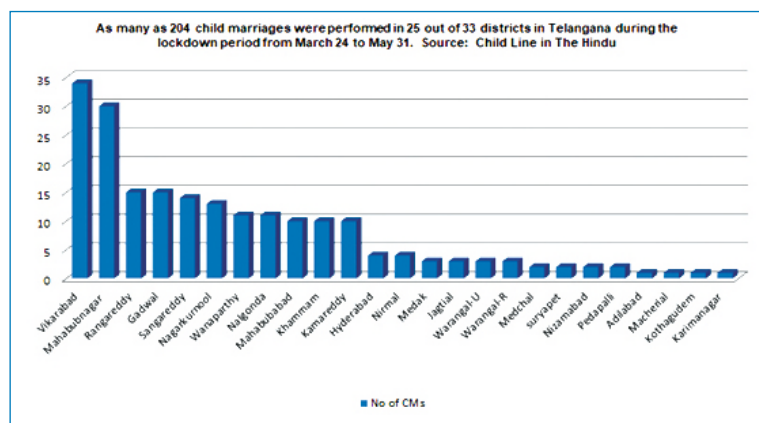
Having a regular health check-up is a night mare before and after lockdown. “It is difficult to go to hospitals for getting treated for health ailments”, she says. Those in rural areas and undergoing treatments for

chronic illnesses are facing problems while traveling to cities/towns due to less transportation.

Income issues are always being faced by the daily wage workers and private employees. During the lock down any way they had to bear the loss, due to zero income, which has also forced most of them to borrow money from others.

Govt should give scholarships to the students, ensure the availability of respective study material online and offline, as most of the students who had no access to the internet can buy materials in the shops. NGOs can give

career guidance to the students who are in their graduation, as most of the students are losing hopes due to the long gap in their education, she ends.



LIVELIHOOD MATTERS FOR ALL!

Lockdown has affected physical health and most importantly mental health. Being in one place months' together affects humans especially students in various ways.

The sudden lockdown has its impact in many ways especially in monetary terms. The victims are the younger generation who are facing the brunt. "Government should give scholarships and encourage them to pursue studies", says Sasikala from Gadwal, Telangana. This gives ray of hope to parents and students.

Adding to it, availability of study material both online and offline is essential. "This helps students with no access to internet to study without interruption", she adds.

With those who use mobile Internet, about 40.2 per cent face poor connection, 3.2 per cent power issues, and 56.6 per cent face signal issues.

Most of the students couldn't afford for the internet recharges. "Hailing from poor socio-economic backgrounds, with no access to desktops, computers and even smart phones is a disadvantage", she says. This obviously is creating gap between students and academics as they eventually lose interest in continuing their education, she further adds.

With lack of regular education, several students are undecided about their future. "It is in these times, NGOs should provide career counselling

The NSS report on Social Consumption Expenditure (2017-18) stated that only 23.8 per cent of Indian households had access to the Internet. The number drops to 12.5 per cent when we consider Indian households with students who have access to the Internet. Symonds (2020) reported that in India, more than 50 per cent of the people with fixed broadband had a poor Internet connection at home. Furthermore, about 3 per cent of people face cable cuts, 32 per cent have a signal problem, and 11.47 per cent have power issues.

as students are losing hopes due to long gap in their education", she says.

Though they had enough food to eat, the zero income during lockdown had its own difficulties in buying essential materials, says Sasikala. "The scenario is still continuing as the income is irregular post lockdown", she quips. Along with humans, animals also fought against hunger during the lockdown.

Transportation has been a carrier of virus. "Many daily wage workers and private employees who don't possess own vehicle

choose public transport to travel and are most likely to be affected by Corona", she says. Livelihood matters for all.

Most of the women are in a depressed state and facing health issues as they are pressurised mentally. "Low income have turned men violent who started abusing women and children at home during lockdown period", she says.

In rural areas child marriages happened during the lockdown, as parents feel that it is a goodtime to get their children married with a very less budget, as no relatives would attend the wedding. "In case of girls who are above 18, they are insisted to get married despite their NO", she ends.





The Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) is a global initiative of Plan International - Plan Netherlands, Terre des Hommes- Netherlands and Defence for Children - ECPAT Netherlands. In India, Plan India is implementing the project in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states in partnership with Mahita. The project primarily advocates for addressing the pressing societal issues like Child Marriage and child trafficking by promoting Secondary education among girls and Job Oriented Vocational Training for young women in both states. The implementation model comprises four key actors i.e., Communities, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Government and Private sector essaying a strong role to maxim the impact.

