



Extended Interrupted Education Due to COVID 19: Some Cases of Deprived Girl Child

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Abstract

We have observed cases of gendered impact of extended school closure during COVID-19. Past experience reveals to us that public health outbreaks have distinct gender dimensions and these crises underplay a role in widening inequalities. While COVID-19 is primarily affecting public health, spill over effects can be observed in education, stemming largely from extended school terminations. Out of the total population of students enrolled in education globally, UNESCO estimates that over 89% are currently out of school and this includes nearly 743 million girls. According to census estimates of India, the literacy rate has continued to climb to 73% in 2011; however, the gender gap has only narrowed slightly, with women still at literacy levels 16% below men (GOI 2011). Along with other marginalized populations, for girls, especially from minority groups, getting an education is already a struggle. Longer school closures could result in an increased risk of dropout for girls, particularly from lower income groups. Education is lifesaving for them and provides protection as well as instils hope for a brighter future. Therefore in this paper we focused to find out the major constraints faced by the school going girls particularly those who belongs to the marginalised section of the society during the COVID 19 pandemic. The paper is based on the selected case studies developed to support the observations regarding vulnerability of girl child during stressed situations to continue education in state of Uttar Pradesh in India. To get an overview of the problems, cases have been selected from different categories - students of primary level, secondary level and senior secondary level. Further, from each category student from rural, urban and the peri-urban areas of the state has been selected for the case studies.

Keywords: Extended Interrupted Education; Gender Biased; Inequalities; Dropout

Introduction

Past experience discloses to us that public health outbreaks have distinct gendered impacts and that readiness and reaction systems must understand the gender dimensions of these crises. The COVID-19 pandemic is the same. While COVID-19 is primarily affecting public health, spill over effects can be observed in education, stemming largely from extended school terminations. The extended interrupted education that disengages students from the learning process has the possible expense of turning around gains in learning outcomes. Along with others, marginalized populations, including children and specially girls from minority groups, are neglected in the best of times and have lower educational out-

comes than their peers. Longer school closures could result in an increased risk of dropout for girls, particularly from lower income groups. Without access to education, children are more vulnerable and unprotected. As household finances are being strained and needs increase, out-of-school children are more likely to be exposed to risks like, child labor, and forced marriage. For the most vulnerable children, education is lifesaving. Not only does it provide safety and protection, importantly, it also instils hope for a brighter future.

Young and adolescent girls are twice as likely to be out of school in crisis situations and face greater barriers to education and vul-

nerabilities when not in school. Girls and adolescent girls are also impacted by the care work burdens. Observation shows that adolescent girls spend significantly more hours on chores compared to their male counterparts. School closures do not just mean that girls are taking on more chores at home, it could also lead to millions more girls dropping out of school before they complete their education, especially girls living in poverty, girls with disabilities or living in rural, isolated locations. While all eyes turned to digital technologies to provide learning continuity, the existing digital gender divide was made increasingly clear, and risking to further marginalized girls. We know from data and experience that millions of girls in India are not online and therefore may not have access to the learning which is taking place in the digital space.

Review of Literature

Out of the total population of students enrolled in education globally, UNESCO estimates that over 89% are currently out of school because of COVID-19 closures. This represents 1.54 billion children and youth enrolled in school or university, including nearly 743 million girls. Over 111 million of these girls are living in the world's least developed countries where getting an education is already a struggle. These are contexts of extreme poverty, economic vulnerability and crisis where gender disparities in education are highest.

According to census estimates, the literacy rate in India has continued to climb to 73% in 2011; however, the gender gap has only narrowed slightly, with women still at literacy levels 16% below men (GOI 2011). Literacy rates among youths age 15-24 were higher still, at 81% in 2005-2008, yet a 14% gender gap remained [1].

Inequality in educational expenditure within households in rural areas is primarily the result of enrollment differentials between boys and girls [2]. Using data from the IHDS, Azam and Kingdon [3] also reveal that gender disparities in educational expenditure are more prevalent in rural areas. Historically, Indian girls enrolled in school at lower rates than boys (GOI, 2000), and when they did enroll, they tended to "enter late and dropout earlier" [4].

Girls also did not progress to or enroll in upper primary levels at the same rate as boys with major impediments to their continued progression being the lack of a nearby upper primary school, cultural attitudes toward female education, and being diverted to household and child rearing tasks that may have economic value for the family [5]. Reasons for diminished engagement in school

related activities include the need to fulfil household responsibilities such as domestic work and caring for younger siblings. These competing demands for girls' time may present an opportunity cost for parents who wish to employ girls in activities that permit the economic survival of the family.

Other reasons cited for girls dropping out or spending less time in school-related activities include the burden of school expenses, a lack of parental interest in educating girls, girls not being allowed to travel to distant schools, and the dearth of female teachers [4-6]. Of special note, the issue of caring for younger siblings is exacerbated in India by a scarcity of early education and care facilities, which can have particularly negative consequences for older girls in large rural families [5,6]. However, improvement in the availability of early care facilities may be partially responsible for the recent success in girls' enrollment, in addition to the overall decline in fertility rates in India (GOI 2000; United States Census Bureau 2014).

Gender differences in educational outcomes are also related to community and family attitudes regarding the education of girls. These attitudes are embedded in cultural norms and are influenced by marriage and kinship patterns which may lead parents to invest more emotional and financial resources in educating sons rather than daughters [7]. The centrality of preparing girls for marriage is pronounced in the north of India where parents have historically held lower aspirations for educating daughters rather than sons [5,8-11].

Methodology

The present study is based upon selected case studies from the state of Uttar Pradesh. Due to Covid-19 pandemic it is not feasible to conduct field survey on a larger sample basis. The case studies are selected on the basis of purposive sampling. Population is stratified in to Urban, Peri-Urban and Rural clusters. Three case studies are selected from each cluster. Further, cases have been selected from different categories - students of primary level, secondary level and senior secondary level. In this way nine cases are identified to analyse the impact of school closure on the education of girls, specifically from the lower socio-economic background.

Listening to girls during pandemic: Case Studies

Case 1

Jyoti, 5 years old, daughter of a farmer, studies in primary school in 2nd standard. Her school is situated near her village in

Jahangirabad (Barabanki). Jyoti belongs to a poor family. Jyoti has 3 brothers Ritesh, Jitendra and Anuj. Ritesh studies in class 8th, Jitendra studies in class 6th and Anuj studies in class 3rd. All the siblings study in a government school. Father Shivbaran is extremely stressed about his daughter's education during this pandemic. He does not have Smartphone to avail the virtual facilities of education for his daughter. Father Shivbaran earns INR 200 per day from Naveen mandi. Both the parents of Jyoti are illiterate, unable to teach their children at home. Father Shivbaran says COVID-19 is a difficult situation for his family, especially for his daughter. Because Jyoti is unable to go to school and he cannot afford Smartphone and internet connection for her online classes. Jyoti's father also says there is a very big problem of network in his village so this is also a hurdle for online class of his children. Rest 3 brothers of Jyoti works in the fields with father Shivbaran. Now Jyoti is completely disconnected with her studies. And there is no help available in the vicinity of Jyoti's house from where she can take some guidance for her studies. Jyoti's parents are scared about the fact that after spending much time at home, totally disconnected with studies, Jyoti won't be able to remember what she studied earlier.

Case 2

Fiza, student of class 9th, goes to a private school. Her mother Parveen is a home maker and father Ajaz is a police man. Fiza's father does not live with his family because he is posted in a police station which is very far from his home. Therefore mother Parveen takes care of her 4 children alone. Sometimes it becomes difficult for her to make their children study at home because she is an illiterate woman. Fiza has 3 siblings, one elder sister and two brothers. One elder sister studies in class 12th. One brother Noman studies in class 9th and other is Sufiyan, studies in class 7th. Fiza's family lives in Barabanki in a rented house for the purpose of their children's education. The grandmother and grandfather of Fiza are not in the support of girl's education. Because of these circumstances they had to leave their village and came to Barabanki. They belong to a village called Dildar Nagar near Banaras. The whole family of Fiza went to their village for 4 days on starting of March but could not come back due to lockdown. And now when unlock 1.0 has started Fiza's father is not getting leave from his job to take them back home. Fiza is totally distracted from her studies due to this pandemic as she is unable to study at home because of the biased male dominated atmosphere of the family. Fiza says there is only one phone in her home among 4 children and mother, so it is also dif-

icult to grab that phone. Fiza says, she has to do some household chores when she is not going to school. She is the most intelligent child of the house but since few months she is unable to study at all.

Case 3

Hafsa, a 7 years old girl, studies in class 3rd in Blue cross Academy in Barabanki. Hafsa belongs from a lower middle class family. Her mother Mrs. Tabassum is a tailor and father Mr. Khalid works in a cloth factory. But due to lockdown Mr. Khalid is jobless since 4 months and unable to earn a single penny. Hafsa has one brother, name Hanzala, studies in class 4th in the same school. Hafsa's family belong to a village in Dariyabad. They came to Barabanki for the sake of the studies of their children. Father used to work in cloth factory in Delhi. So Mother Tabassum lives alone in Barabanki in a rented house with her two children. She takes care of both children alone. Hafsa is a bit weak student in studies so she needs proper guidance which she is not getting due to lockdown. Hafsa is very upset from her school because they are not offering any virtual facilities for her studies. Mother Tabassum is earning a very meagre amount of money. She manages to pay the house rent and school fees of both the children. But due to lockdown she is unable to pay her house rent and the tuition fees of both the children. Hafsa's mother is a very hardworking woman and very dedicated towards the study of her children specially her daughter because she does not want her daughter to face the circumstances as she is facing. Hafsa's mother also says that her children are studying on the mercy of their tutor otherwise she would have left with no option during Covid-19. Hafsa's mother is not a literate woman that is why she is unable to teach her children.

Case 4

Vanshika is a student of class IV. She lives in Dantal village near Meerut. She is 10 years old. Vanshika belongs to a backward caste family. Her father Naresh was a labourer but due to chronic illness he left his job. Now he sells milk to earn his livelihood. Vanshika's mother Shiv Kumari is an illiterate housewife. She has four other siblings. Vanshika has three brothers and one sister. Eldest brother;

Sachin, has left studies due to poor economic conditions. All the children go to government school. Though their father is poor and mother is an illiterate person, they always encourage their children to study well. But they could neither teach nor guide them in their studies. Vanshika is a laborious student. At home, during school closure she get to involve her in household activities. When she was asked about her ambition, Vanshika replied that she wants to be a doctor but she does not have any idea about how many years of study she has to put in and which subjects she should opt for to become a doctor. Moreover, now due to covid -19 it has become difficult to engage herself with studies. Parents cannot provide private tuition for her. Her parents do not have access to modern learning techniques so they cannot connect to the virtual classrooms. Parents do not prefer to send her out to share mobile phone of other children. They do not find it safe for her. She is now completely disconnected with her studies.

Case 5

Khushi lives in Kambala village in Baghpat District of Uttar Pradesh. She is a 15 years old and studying in class XI. She hails from a poor family. Her two brothers study in class IX and VII respectively. Her father is a small marginal farmer. They have a small portion of cultivable land. During cultivation season they take the help of hired labourers otherwise they manage the entire activities themselves. Being the elder daughter Khushi has to perform lots of responsibilities. In the morning when her mother goes to the agricultural field she has to cook for all members of her family. Khushi cooks in the evening also. From her daily routine she hardly manages any time to study. She is not attending school due to covid -19 pandemic. The only mobile phone with internet facility is most of the time possessed by her brothers. They attend their virtual classes using that phone. Khushi rarely get opportunity to use the mobile phone. She wants to complete class XII and dreams to get a job so that their standard of life would improve and her brothers would get all types of support from her to complete their education successfully. But she is not very optimistic about her future.

Case 6

Anandita is just 11 years old; she studies in class 3rd in Vibgyor High School. She studies in one of the topmost 'A' graded school of Lucknow, yet fails to understand a virtual teaching platform. This virtual teaching platform is a road towards digitalization but is burdensome for toddlers. Anandita spends 3-4 hours a day on online learning, this has an impact not only her health but also her

mother too. Her mother shared, it's difficult to make a child sit for so long and make her study. Everyday the 3-4 hours class that is being conducted from past 3 months have stressed her eyes. Further, her mother told, when Anandita becomes restless she calls her up and her dad to accompany in her in the class. All this has disturbed the whole house schedule. Her mother suggests, school considering the health of small children should reduce the hours of class, or plan out classes on alternative days. Also, school association should be concerned towards parents who have more than one child, so that the class timing of two different children of two different classes is managed. She also adds the concept of digital education best, but it needs to be more refined considering the impact it puts on the health of children.

Case 7

Sushila, in her early 30's was already a mother of five daughters and a son. She abandoned her drunkard husband and made her way, along with her children, to the city in the hope of better tomorrow. She helps in household chores in 4-5 houses to feed the family of seven. With the meagre earnings compared to the vast expenses of the city, Sushila was left with no other options than to put her two elder daughters to work. This bought sufficient amount to meet the basic expenses of the house which include food, housing, clothing, healthcare costs and a sum to fund the education expenses of a younger daughter (Class iv) and the youngest son (Class ii) in a private English medium school.

But the onset of the pandemic made it difficult to hold together this semblance of normalcy. Sushila was instructed by some of her employers not to come to work following the lockdown. Her daughters were completely refrained from working. This fragmented the family income and in a month, she was left with no other option than to abstain her daughter from the education. Further, the disease outbreak inevitably added to the unpaid care and domestic work falling to the daughter, as a consequence of which, it was harder to study at home. The family owns a single android phone, which is used by the son to continue his online studies. On further conversation with Sushila, it was really sad to know that the daughter might never be able to return to the school, which would eventually harm her life and thereby entrench gender inequality.

Case 8

Aditya (Class VI) and Avni (class II) are the two children of a vegetable vendor, Hari ram and Savita. They had sold the fields and

other property of their village to earn in the city. But the misfortune kept knocking their door and Hari ram could not find a proper work in the hustles of the city. He bought a one room house with the money he had and invested the left amount in 2-3 business which did not flourish. At last, he started selling the vegetables to run the family and was easily able to make the ends meet. He did not make his wife work, as he held the mentality that women should always remain behind the walls. He made Aditya and Avni go a nearby English- Hindi medium school and was able to fund their studies well.

Nevertheless, the growing danger of contamination (due to pandemic) triggered the schools to move their courses online, which meant very little to Hariram and Savita and thousand others' who have only heard of the word "Google". The family did not own a single smart phone which could have lead to a complete loss of education from the family. Luckily, Aditya, soon found an alternative to the problem and would visit his friends to complete his online studies. He stayed at his friends place till late, and was able to mark himself present in every class. Avni, had to stay at home and help her mother at work. She was not allowed to visit her friend, nor had any other ways to catch up with her studies. Hariram did not avail the Smart phone because he is worried of the negative consequences of the freedom, it might bring to his children. Eventually her father made her year drop out (in that way he will not have to submit the fees in vain) and is hoping to make her go to school the next year.

Case 9

Tanu lives in Mavi Kalan village in Baghpat District of Uttar Pradesh. She is a 17 years old and studying in class XI in the Kanya Pathshala within the village. She hails from a farmer family. She has one brother studying in class XI studying in the near by city in Sarasvati Shishu Mandir school. Her father is a small marginal farmer. They have a small portion of cultivable land. Being the elder daughter Tanu has to perform lots of responsibilities at home to help her mother. With her daily routine she was managing her study in the school only. but now a days she is not attending school due to covid-19 pandemic. The only one mobile phone with internet facility is most of the time possessed by her brother. Tanu rarely get opportunity to use the mobile phone. She wants to complete class XII and dreams to get continue her higher studies. But she is not very optimistic about her future. Because her father wants that she should learn proper cooking and other households chores so that they can get her married. Her father is in a thought that

presently he can easily marry her daughter by spending less, because there is no compulsion to call all the relatives. When asked, why doesn't he wants her daughter to continue study? Surprisingly he replied that "Marriage is her fate and it is cheaper to get her daughter married during lockdown. Why to invest money on her education further. We will make our son to study as he will support us later when we get old". The girl cannot resist, and endorses this as the rule of the society.

Findings on the bases of case studies

On the basis of the above case studies, it is concluded that for their education girls are facing numerous constraints during Covid-19 pandemic. The highest negative impact is observed by the girls who belong to the lower socio economic sections of society. Some students being first generation learner do not get proper parental guidance due to large size of family and lack of favourable environment for education. Sometimes girls show carelessness regarding their studies because they do not understand the importance of education in their life. They do not resist to marriage before completion of school education also. Then some less educated parent believe that to invest money for the higher studies of their daughters' means resource wastage as they will become a member of their in-laws family. Feudalistic mentality of people also do not allow for initiatives to educate girls. Girls, who are by nature emotional, feel insecure because of the changing behaviour of their parents and lack of interest in their studies. Sometimes the preferential treatment of the parents towards their son makes the girls to feel inferior.

Some of the parents wish to get their child involved into online education but they are deprived of adequate resources. During the discussion with parents one thing also surfaced that the girls who are in the pre-primary or primary levels have a chance to continue their study after the COVID-19 be over or things will normalize but the girls who are studying in the upper primary and secondary levels do not have chances to get back their education system. Some of get married and some of will be involved in the households' chores or other activities to help their parents.

Conclusion

Less developed countries where getting an education is already a struggle, experience shows that crises often disproportionately affect girls and young women, exacerbating gender-based violence, exploitation and early marriage. This is especially the case as girls

are out of school. These are contexts of extreme poverty, economic vulnerability and crisis where gender disparities in education are highest. In India, where limited social protection measures are in place, economic hardships caused by the crisis will have externalities as families consider the financial and opportunity costs of educating their daughters. While many girls will continue with their education once the school gates reopen, others will never return to school. Education responses must prioritize the needs of adolescent girls' at the risk of reversing years of gains made for girls' education.

In this situation, the responsibly do not rests only with government but also on other non-government organisations to aware the families and also help them in their livelihood and encourage them to again enroll their daughters' to get back to school.

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