

10to19

DASRA ADOLESCENTS COLLABORATIVE



**ACTION**

**REACTION**

Understanding and overcoming  
backlash against girls'  
exercise of agency in India







## 10to19: Adolescents Community of Practice

The **10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative** is a high-impact platform that unites funders, technical experts, the government and social organizations to reach 5 million adolescents, and move the needle on four outcomes key to adolescent empowerment. These are:

- a. Delaying age at marriage
- b. Delaying age of first pregnancy/birth
- c. Completing secondary education
- d. Increasing agency

The **10to19 Adolescents Community of Practice (CoP)** was formed in 2017 as part of these efforts to drive adolescent health and well-being. It is a community of stakeholders across the country working to ensure that adolescents are educated, healthy and empowered to make positive life choices. The CoP includes non-profit organizations, funders, experts, academicians and adolescents themselves who work collaboratively to drive scalable impact for adolescents in India.

We are grateful to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation for supporting this study on understanding and overcoming backlash against girls' exercise of agency in India.

To learn more, write to us at [10to19community@dasra.org](mailto:10to19community@dasra.org).

# FOREWORD

---

Dasra believes that large-scale social change can only happen when stakeholders in a sector, including non-profit organizations, academics, technical experts, funders and government officials align on a common agenda to improve specific outcomes. To facilitate this alignment, Dasra has established the 10to19 Adolescents Community of Practice, a national network of individuals and organizations who work on issues affecting adolescents in India. The community's focus is on peer learning, effecting narrative change, and building a collective voice to engage with the government on effective policy and program implementation. This body has the ability to facilitate learning and sharing among organizations on topics that have been neglected for far too long. Through consultations and group discussions with the Community of Practice, a need emerged to better understand, study and document incidents and the implications of the backlash experienced by adolescent girls for expressing agency or attitudes that differ from traditional gender norms, as well as the backlash experienced by youth-serving organizations for implementing programs intended to empower adolescents. An online survey that probed organizations' familiarity with backlash was conducted, and over 70 adolescent-focused non-profit organizations have shared their experiences and insights.

The Community of Practice recognized that in most communities and cultures, working to change traditional or gendered socio-cultural norms and challenging the status quo comes with risks and challenges. Gatekeepers exist in every community – these individuals can be informal leaders with strong social influence, or those who have formal authority within the community. Gatekeepers play a pivotal role in creating either an enabling or a challenging environment for enhancing girls' exercise of voice and choice in their own lives. Working with these gatekeepers to sensitize them, and gain their acceptance for the intended program outcomes is an important step for non-profit organizations when working for adolescent health and wellbeing. We have seen time and again that as adolescents begin to develop the skills and agency needed to break out of restrictive social norms, their defiance of expected behavior can invite resistance or negative reactions from gatekeepers. Such negative reactions are often directed at both – the young

adolescents finding their feet and their voices, and at the adults (parents, teachers and non-profit staff) who support their choices.

Yet, this phenomenon is not well documented. Often seen as a failure of planning rather than a possible consequence of battling deeply entrenched social norms, incidents of backlash are rarely discussed openly, and the factors precipitating them and the strategies employed to prevent them remain poorly understood. Neither the experience of nor the strategies employed by non-profit organizations working to implement community-centric programming are well documented although these organizations have years of experience encountering a range of reactions to social and behaviour change programming. The aim of this report is to better understand the range and nature of incidents of backlash that affect adolescent girls on the one hand, and youth-serving organizations on the other, and to understand promising approaches emerging from these experiences, including those employed by non-profit organizations to prevent and address these incidents.

I am grateful to the 73 organizations that spent considerable time in responding to the survey questionnaire; their valuable insights are the core of this report. I am also grateful to Dr. Shireen Jejeebhoy (Senior Advisor to the 10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative) and the Dasra research team for conceptualizing the study and preparing this report.

We hope that this effort – the first of many contributions to documenting poorly understood issues, and sharing lessons for overcoming challenges associated with non-profit programming for adolescent empowerment – offers a space for reflection, helps create a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with adolescent programming, and is of practical value for practitioners and supporters of adolescent programs in India.

— Shailja Mehta  
Lead – 10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

The study has benefitted enormously from the contributions of many. We would like to acknowledge the David and Lucile Packard Foundation for supporting this study, and for their encouragement to probe an issue that is so important but about which so little is known.

Many individuals and organizations generously provided their time and expertise for various stages of this study. We would like to start by thanking all the members of the Dasra Community of Practice, and especially those attending its meeting in July 2018, for their ideas and inputs, that were very helpful in enabling us to design and implement the study.

Several individuals reviewed our draft questionnaire and provided crucial inputs that helped us refine and finalize the study's questionnaire. We are most grateful to Dr. Arun Kumar (Apnalaya), Dr. K.G. Santhya (Population Council), Krupa Palan (Vacha Charitable Trust), Naval Kishor Gupta (Restless Development), Dr. Rama Shyam (Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action), Dr. Rajib Acharya (Population Council), Rimjhim Jain (Centre for Health and Social Justice), Shweta Bankar (International Center for Research on Women) and Suchitra Rath (Ekjut) for their guidance on questionnaire finalization.

Dr. K.G. Santhya (Population Council), Dr. Rama Shyam (Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action), and Dr. Ravi Verma (International Center for Research on Women) reviewed earlier drafts of this report. We are most grateful to them for their insightful comments and suggestions, which we have incorporated into this report.

Finally, we would like to record our deep appreciation of the many organizations that took the time and effort to respond to the survey and shared their experiences and rich insights about how to prevent and address backlash against girls. We hope that our recommendations based on these insights and experiences will help shape both program efforts to avoid adverse reactions to expressions of agency by girls, as well as stimulate further research on the topic.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

## 01

### Introduction

4

- Objective
- Defining backlash against girls

## 02

### Background

7

## 03

### Methodology

9

- Study design
- Questionnaire and variables
- Analysis
- Response rates

## 04

### Results

11

- Background characteristics
- Backlash against girls
- Backlash against organizations that conduct programs intended to bring about social change

## 05

### Limitations

40

## 06

### Way Forward

41

- Summary
- Recommendations

## 07

### References

47

## 08

### Appendix

48

# INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women and girls is not only their entitlement, but also a key factor underlying national development, poverty alleviation and success in reaping the demographic dividend, and in ensuring family health, equitable family dynamics and the health and wellbeing of the next generation. In India, over the last several decades, both civil society organizations and the national and state governments have made special efforts to empower girls, that is, ensure that they are equipped with the agency – knowledge, power, voice, and self-efficacy for example – to ensure wanted outcomes. Civil society organizations, for example, have implemented gender transformative life skills education programs, life and livelihood skill-building programs and other programs intended to give voice to girls.

More recently, the Government of India and several state governments have also made many commitments to empowering girls, besides investing and implementing programs such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao program, the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA) and the Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) schemes. They have also introduced various conditional cash transfer schemes intended to keep girls in school and delay their marriage. The Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) is a comprehensive health focused program that informs adolescent girls and boys about health promoting practices and encourages informed decision making. There is growing evidence that these interventions, together with increasing educational opportunities, media exposure and access to new ideas have indeed been successful in building agency among girls, including their self-esteem, negotiation skills, and ability to exercise informed choice, and developing egalitarian gender role attitudes among them.

The pace of social change, however, maybe thwarted by the unintended adverse consequences of or backlash against attempts to challenge existing power structures and relations. **Backlash has been defined as a reaction by those who hold positions of power to attempts to change the status quo by those in less powerful positions. Such reaction could take the form of penalties on those who display non-conformist behavior or defy the status quo, known as “positive deviants”.**

Backlash has also been described as the unintended and perverse effects of development strategies (Agarwal and Panda, 2007). It implies the use of coercive power, including the threat of sanction and the use of force or threat or any action that makes others do what they would not otherwise do (Lipset and Raab, 1978; Mansbridge and Shane, 2008). Backlash helps to preserve gender stereotypes and encompasses subtle forms of coercive power such as ridicule, stigmatization, ostracism, and character assassination, and overt forms such as beating, rape and other forms of violence.

Unfortunately, the literature on backlash against expressions of agency by women is sparse globally, including in India, and that on backlash against girls, even more so. Thus, what is known about the extent and kind of unintended adverse consequences, or backlash, that girls face in their path to empowerment comes almost entirely from media reports and anecdotal narratives. Without a good understanding of the manifestations of backlash, it is difficult for programs aimed at empowering girls to anticipate and mitigate likely risks that girls may face as they break away from traditional norms and practices.



## OBJECTIVE

The aim of this paper is to better understand the adverse consequences, or backlash, faced by girls who express agency or defy traditional norms of femininity, and by organizations that implement programs intended to empower them, and to draw conclusions about ways of overcoming such backlash. For girls, behaviors inviting backlash may include, for example, remaining in school in late adolescence, delaying marriage and selecting one's own husband, accessing new livelihood training and economic opportunities, expressing opinions freely, exercising freedom of movement, or demanding gender equal socialization and treatment.

We first review available theories of backlash and offer an operational definition of backlash against girls that guides our work, and briefly review the global and Indian literature relating to backlash against women and girls who deviate from traditional unequal gendered practices. We note that because of the absence of evidence on backlash faced by adolescent girls, this section focuses almost entirely on what is known about backlash against adult women. We then report findings from a pilot study intended to explore the situation from the perspective of youth-serving organizations in India on the extent and nature of backlash experienced by girls and the organizations themselves. Although boys and parents of girls expressing agency or defying gender norms are also subjected to adverse consequences, we focus here on the backlash experienced by girls in particular and by the organizations that serve the needs of the young.

# DEFINING BACKLASH AGAINST GIRLS

Several theories of backlash exist in social science literature, and all agree that empowering women may at times challenge the unbalanced social structure of and power equation within the household, the workplace or the community, and invite backlash from those holding positions of power. Several theories have discussed how the fear of and experience of backlash limit women's exercise of agency.

---

**The Backlash Avoidance Model** describes how fear of backlash not only limits aspirations but also imposes self-administered curbs on expression of new behaviors (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick and Phelan, 2012).

---

**The Male Backlash Model** argues that men retaliate – perpetrate intimate partner violence – when they perceive that the power base in the household has been destabilized or the husband's masculinity has been threatened, for example, through increased economic opportunities for women relative to men. Thus, when a woman acquires greater economic potential or resources than her husband, her husband will use force and violence to reassert his power and control over her (Bueno and Henderson, 2017).

---

**The Backlash and Stereotype Maintenance Model** argues that those who violate behavior expectations or cross gender stereotypes suffer backlash so that the status quo remains uncontested.

Manifestations of backlash vary. Theories of backlash have largely focused on force and violence as a form of backlash experienced by empowered women within the home; in the workplace, this could take the form of discrimination in hiring and promotion practices against women who display “male” attributes, such as assertiveness and self-advocacy (Rudman, Phelan, 2008). These theories have not addressed the forms of backlash that may be experienced by girls and young women, in particular.

In this paper, we define backlash against girls and young women – those aged between 10 and 24 years – broadly. Included in our definition are any negative consequences that have resulted from the exercise of agency or the expression of attitudes and behaviors that deviate from established traditional gender norms as well as actions taken to limit girls' deviation from traditional norms and expectations for fear of or in order to ward off potential negative consequences.

With particular reference to gender hierarchies in India, we define backlash broadly to include, apart from physical violence, such practices as forced withdrawal of girls from school because of potential or observed contact with boys, forced marriage of a girl who has formed a relationship with a boy of her choice, withdrawal of girls from programs that may expose her to new ideas about gender equity, forced seclusion within the home for fear of adverse comments made against girls who move around or play outdoors freely or participate in public spaces or events, or any other action that is taken against a girl because she expresses choice or even because she may question traditional norms and expectations.

In the same vein, youth serving organizations may face backlash in the form of threats, verbal abuse, physical violence or forced withdrawal from a community for their work on empowering girls.

# BACKGROUND

In India and other developing country settings, what is available focuses largely on married women, and largely on how increasing women's access to and control over financial resources or participating in women's groups tends to exacerbate marital violence. In this section, therefore, we focus on what is known about backlash against adult women and infer from this evidence that may be relevant for the young.

Several empirical studies, almost all focused on adult women, have identified unintended negative consequences of empowerment. For example, a review of 30 studies from 41 sites that explored the effects of empowerment on women's experience of intimate partner violence found mixed results. Empowerment here is defined as employment, engagement in credit programs, ownership of land or property, control over her resources or exercise of decision making power. Women's involvement in income generation has been found to increase their risk of experiencing intimate partner violence, i.e., backlash effect, in about half the studies (6 of 11) in which the association was probed, including in India (Vyas and Watts, 2009). Likewise, multi-country studies, including in India (Kishor and Johnson, 2004), Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2011) and Haiti (Gage, 2005) observed that women who made financial decisions independently were more likely to face physical, sexual and emotional violence than those who made decisions jointly with their partner. Mixed findings were also observed in a study exploring the links between women's claim on family property and empowerment in India. In this study, while most of those who asserted their right to inherit family property did indeed experience an improvement in agency, several women did report backlash (ostracism, violence, censure) or fear of backlash (reluctance to claim rights for fear of loss of natal family support in the future) (Chowdhry, 2011). Others have suggested that property ownership protects women from violence (Agarwal and Panda, 2007).

A qualitative study in Bangladesh found that credit programs for women had mixed effects; some women reported that it protected them from violence, raised their value within the home and reduced poverty-related stress while others reported that conflicts erupted over control of assets and earning and resulted in an exacerbation of violence (Schuler et al., 1998). Studies from both Bangladesh and India have found that within each of these countries, backlash against women displaying agency is far greater among women residing in conservative settings characterized by rigid norms relating to women's roles and gender relations than in less patriarchal settings (Koenig et al., 2003; Jejeebhoy, 1998).

Unintended negative consequences have also been observed in India among women exposed to gender transformative reproductive health and leadership programs. A prospective study of married young women in Bangalore interviewed before and after exposure to a reproductive health intervention found that even in this urban setting, those who worked or started working during the inter-survey period were significantly more likely than others to face violence (Krishnan et al., 2010). An evaluation of an intervention to reduce marital violence among members of self-help groups (SHGs) in Bihar by exposing them to a participatory gender transformative and rights-based education and financial literacy program found that, when confounding factors were controlled, more women in groups exposed to the intervention than those in the comparison groups experienced emotional violence; slightly fewer experienced physical violence, and about as many in both groups had experienced sexual violence. Findings highlight that programs intended to empower women and encourage them to exercise their agency and defend themselves against violence may actually result, at least in the shorter term, in putting women at greater risk of experiencing one or more forms of violence (Jejeebhoy, Santhya, Acharya et al., 2017).

Although these negative consequences are typically experienced by women, men too face backlash for behavior that does not conform to traditional norms and expectations. For example, the ‘gharjamai’ [man who resides with his wife’s natal family] has been taunted in India for co-residing with his wife’s family; men who experience equitable and nonviolent relations with their wife are taunted for their lack of masculinity and termed their wife’s slave and men who request family leave may face backlash in terms of stigmatization in the workplace, and even penalties such as denial of promotions or increments (see Chowdhry, 2011; Jejeebhoy, Santhya, Sabarwal, 2013). However, backlash against men appears to be less frequently observed, and is observed for fewer violations of traditional expectations than backlash against women.

While there is a considerable body of social theory and empirical evidence regarding backlash against women, and some related to backlash against men, there are few studies that have explicitly addressed backlash against adolescent girls (Fraser, 2012). What is known about manifestations of backlash among girls and young women, therefore, are drawn from media and anecdotal reports for the most part. Honor killings of young women and men who exercise their right to select their own life partner, and rape of girls who exercise their right to move about freely are well known measures of backlash, but are the tip of the iceberg. Anecdotes abound about girls who are withdrawn from school, forced into a hasty marriage, isolated within the home or otherwise denied their rights because they defy traditional norms of femininity. A review of media reports on the incidence of backlash in the form of violence against girls who express agency or exercise their right to move around freely, highlights moral policing; for example, against girls attending pubs and cafes, threats and violence during Valentine’s Day, and honor killings (Rural Women’s Social Education Centre (RUWSEC) and Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), 2016).

Parents and families who may otherwise have supported girls to exercise agency can also face backlash, such as taunts and comments about the girl’s character or social ostracism of parents whose daughter opts to delay marriage or pursue an education or career away from home. A qualitative study in Rajasthan observes that parents whose daughter did not marry at a young age faced taunts from the community, and reported they were unable to withstand the social pressure to conform. For example, the study

quotes the father of a married girl as saying, “Everyone knows that getting married at an early age is bad. But even then, everyone does it. People are scared to violate this custom... If anyone tries to violate this, then he will be despised by the community”(Santhya et al., 2006). Likewise, a qualitative study exploring attitudes to comprehensive sexuality education in Tamil Nadu found that the fear of backlash in the form of social rejection and stigma were cited as reasons by parents who were privately open to the idea of love marriage, to oppose inter-religious marriage for their children (RUWSEC and ARROW, 2016).

Program implementers may also face backlash for conveying new ideas to girls and communities, and adverse reactions may extend from stopping girls from attending program activities, to driving the organization out from the village. Extreme examples of incidents of backlash against programs in India include the gang rape in 1992 of an ANM in Rajasthan by higher-caste men who opposed her efforts to prevent a child marriage in their family. More recently (2018), five women, working with an NGO, who were conducting programs to raise awareness about migration and trafficking in a village in Jharkhand, were raped at gunpoint by a group of at least five men.

There is some evidence suggesting that backlash effects are observed more among asset-poor than asset-rich women (Bueno and Henderson, 2017), among women residing in more patriarchal than other settings (Koenig et al., 2003; Jejeebhoy, 1998), and among those for whom gains in economic power are in transition than those who have long-established their economic power (Fraser, 2012). Only when empowerment has reached a critical level – when parents and other gatekeepers are convinced of the value of enabling girls to exercise agency or hold egalitarian norms – will its benefits outweigh these risks (see, for example, Jewkes, 2002; Blumberg, 2005). Empowerment programs, likewise, that disturb the status quo may unleash backlash against the program and affect the sustainability of interventions unless communities are convinced of their value. Questions arise about the extent to which backlash may be a relatively short-term reaction to disruptions in the status quo in the family and community, affecting mostly those at the early stages of programs and settings in which opportunities for empowering women have recently become available, and whether it dissipates in socio-cultural contexts that place greater value on the empowerment of women and girls.

# METHODOLOGY

## STUDY DESIGN

The need for a better understanding of backlash was discussed by members of Dasra's Community of Practice, a national network of adolescent-focused non-profit organizations from across 25 states in India, whose goal is to encourage peer learning and knowledge sharing, support capacity building of organizations, and build a collective voice to engage with the government for effective policy and program implementation. At its meeting held in July 2018, members of the Community of Practice identified backlash as an issue of importance about which there is little understanding in terms of magnitude, forms or promising mitigating strategies.

Because there is such a paucity of research on incidents of backlash faced by adolescents, we believed it premature to conduct an investigation directly with adolescents. Rather, as a first step in better understanding the phenomenon, we opted to explore the issue through the perspectives of youth-serving organizations, and more specifically to synthesize incidents of backlash against girls, boys and parents that may have come to the attention of the organizations and incidents of backlash against the youth-serving organization itself. Thus, an online survey was conducted among organizations that worked anywhere in the country, that were engaged in activities intended to empower adolescent girls and/or boys, enhance their awareness of health-promoting matters, support schooling outcomes, including continuation and learning outcomes, link girls to livelihood training opportunities and build employability, and delay child and early marriage and childbearing.

Sampling was opportunistic. The online survey questionnaire was sent to 121 youth-serving organizations listed in Dasra's database. It was sent to organization heads (or program heads), with a request to incorporate in responses the experiences of others who may have more daily interaction at a community level. Responding organizations were asked to share with Dasra the names of other youth-serving organizations, and hence a snowballing technique was effected for those not on Dasra's list. In the introduction to the survey, we informed respondents about our objectives and procedures, and requested them to participate in the survey; we also highlighted their right to refuse, and the confidentiality of their responses. Several strategies were incorporated into our design to avoid the generally low response rates associated with online surveys. Two online reminders were sent out to all organizations, and following this, Dasra staff members followed up with those who had not responded with one telephonic contact in which they requested a telephone interview to confirm whether their organization had experienced any backlash incident, and if so, an attempt was made to conduct a telephone interview at a convenient time.

## QUESTIONNAIRE & VARIABLES

Our questionnaire comprised four sections. We first sought information on the background of the responding organization, including thematic and geographic focus areas, the number of adolescents served, their demographic characteristics (age, sex, schooling status, marital status) and the kinds of other stakeholders, if any, that are addressed. Backlash against girls (and to a lesser extent boys), and restrictions imposed on them for fear of backlash was assessed through specific questions on whether the negative consequences of behavior that did not conform to traditional norms and expectations had come to their attention. These included consequences such as, for example, discontinuation from school, social ostracism, prevention from participating in social groups or NGO programs, violence, starvation, or early or forced marriage. Backlash against parents or families was measured through questions about familiarity with incidents in which parents who supported their daughter's agency restricted her activities for fear of adverse community reactions, or in which a parent who had permitted their daughter to behave in a non-conformist way (travelling away for college, attending a livelihood program, marrying late or to someone of her choice)

had experienced backlash in the form of social ostracism, gossip, or violence. Responding organizations that had observed any such incident were asked to provide a rough idea of the approximate number of girls about whom they were reporting and an open-ended question seeking details of the incident.

In addition, we inquired about backlash at the organization level, namely negative community reactions to the presence of the organization or the content of its programs by way of threats, verbal or physical abuse of frontline program implementers, or adverse publicity in the local media or social media, as well as the number of such incidents experienced, the details of these incidents, and the strategies, if any, for preventing or mitigating such incidents. At the same time, we sought information about the organization's familiarity with a large social movement, laws and policies that may have been thwarted by backlash.

Given the probing nature of our investigation, we did not apply any reference period for the reporting of incidents.

## ANALYSIS

The analysis is entirely descriptive. It sheds light on the extent to which incidents of backlash, or action taken/not taken for fear of backlash have come to the attention of responding organizations, the extent to which responding organizations or their field-level program implementers have themselves faced any form of backlash, and the kinds of backlash experienced.<sup>1</sup>

Although we recognize that boys and parents of girls who express agency or defy social taboos also face backlash, and although our survey comprised questions that elicited information on backlash against these groups, in this paper, we have restricted our analysis to backlash reported among girls themselves and among youth-serving organizations.

## RESPONSE RATES

In general, response rates for online surveys are lower than those obtained in surveys conducted via face-to-face interviews. Indeed, some authors have reported response rates for online surveys in the range of 30-50%. Of the 121<sup>2</sup> organizations contacted, we received completed interviews from a total of 73 organizations, giving a response rate of 60%, somewhat higher than that typically obtained in online surveys.

Even so, we recognize the likelihood of selectivity bias, i.e., those organizations that had experienced unintended negative consequences are more likely than others to have responded to the survey. Hence, it is necessary for readers to keep in mind that the magnitude of unintended adverse consequences may be somewhat inflated.

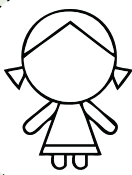
<sup>1</sup> Survey data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data, that is, responses to open-ended questions, were analyzed thematically, focusing on key manifestations of backlash

<sup>2</sup> In addition, Dasra had tried to reach 12 organizations that reported they were ineligible (did not run youth-serving field programs) and the email ids for another nine were wrong and neither correct email ids nor telephone numbers were available

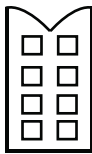
# RESULTS



## 01 BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS



## 02 BACKLASH AGAINST GIRLS



## 03 BACKLASH AGAINST ORGANIZATIONS THAT CONDUCT PROGRAMS INTENDED TO BRING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE

### BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

All but one organization reported that they worked directly with young people aged 10-24,<sup>3</sup> and 71 of 73 (97%) worked specifically with adolescent girls aged 15-19. Fewer worked with boys, girls older or younger than 15-19, or married girls. Even so, more than half of the organizations reported working with each of these groups. In contrast, just 15% of reporting organizations worked with children and 23% worked with the general population. We asked representatives of responding organizations to estimate the number of girls and/or boys they served, and it is clear that responding organizations served large populations. Half of all organizations reported that they served 1,000-10,000 girls, and 36% served more than 10,000 girls (Table 1).

As many as four in five organizations reported that they worked with rural populations (80%) and a similar proportion reported that they worked with urban (or peri-urban) populations (82%).

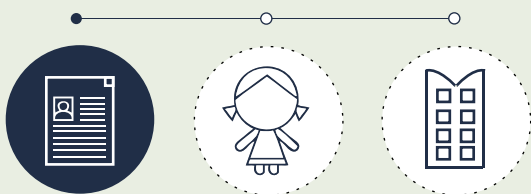


## TABLE 01

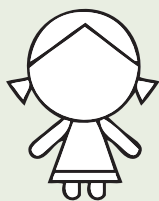
### Characteristics of adolescent and youth-serving organizations surveyed

	Percentage
<b>Sub-populations of young people with whom organizations work</b>	
Adolescent and young married and unmarried girls	97.3
Girls aged 10-14	78.1
Girls aged 15-19	97.3
Young women aged up to 24	74.0
Married girls (up to age 24)	64.4
Adolescent and young boys	80.8
Boys aged 10-14	58.9
Boys aged 15-19	76.7
Young men aged up to 24	57.5
Young people (10-24)	98.6
<b>Number of girls served</b>	
None	2.7
<1,000	11.0
1,001-10,000	50.7
10,001-50,000	13.7
50,001-100,000	5.5
>100,000	16.4
<b>Other sub-populations with whom organizations work</b>	
Children (0-9)	15.1
General population (including Adult women 25+)	23.3
<b>Areas in which organizations work</b>	
Rural	79.5
Urban (including peri-urban)	82.2
<b>Total number of responding organizations</b>	<b>73</b>

<sup>3</sup> We use the United Nations definitions of adolescents and youth loosely; the UN defines adolescents as those aged 10-19, encompassing younger (10-14) and older (15-19) adolescents, youth as those aged 15-24, and young people as the entire age range 10-24.



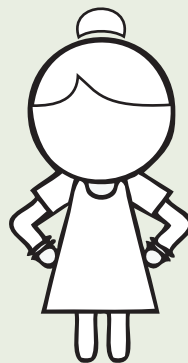
## Sub-populations of young people with whom organizations work



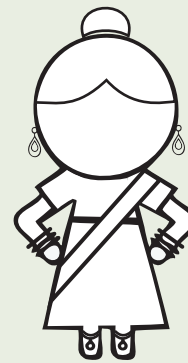
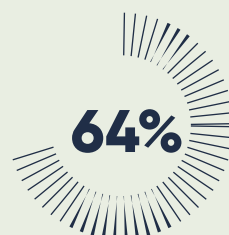
Girls aged 10–14



Girls aged 15–19



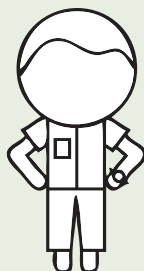
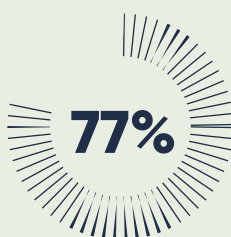
Young women  
(up to age 24)



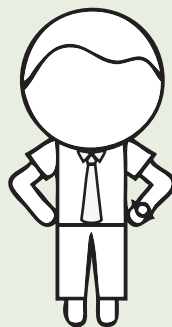
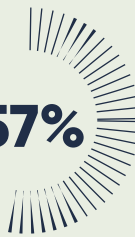
Married girls  
(up to age 24)



Boys aged 10–14

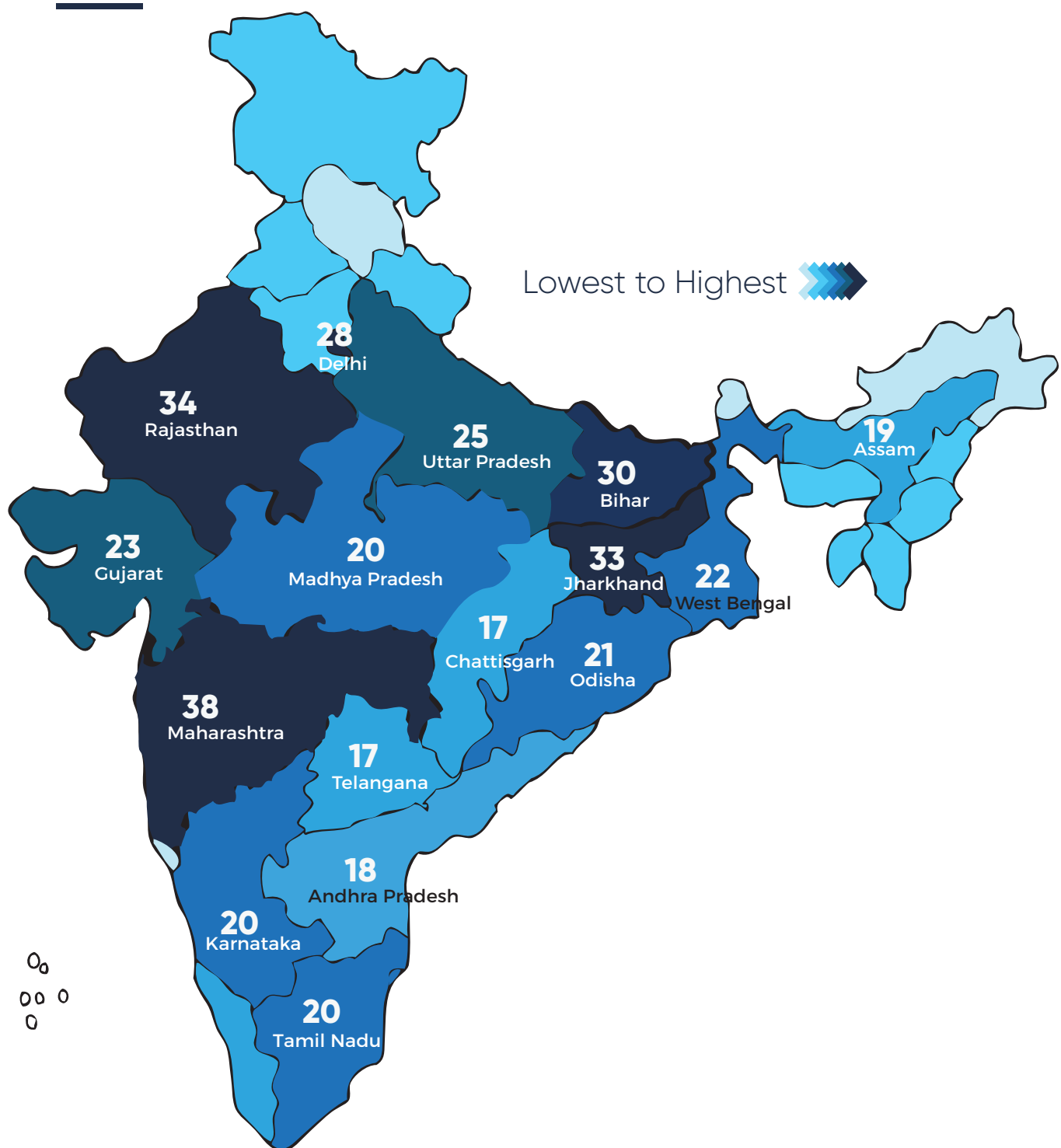


Boys aged 15–19

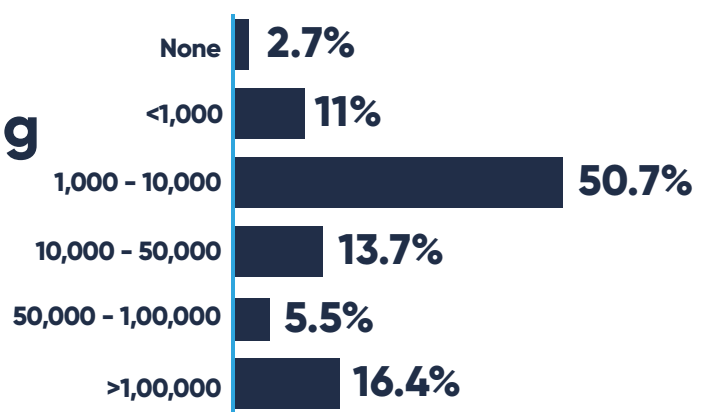


Young men  
(up to age 24)

## States in which responding organizations implement programs<sup>4</sup>



## Number of girls served by responding organizations



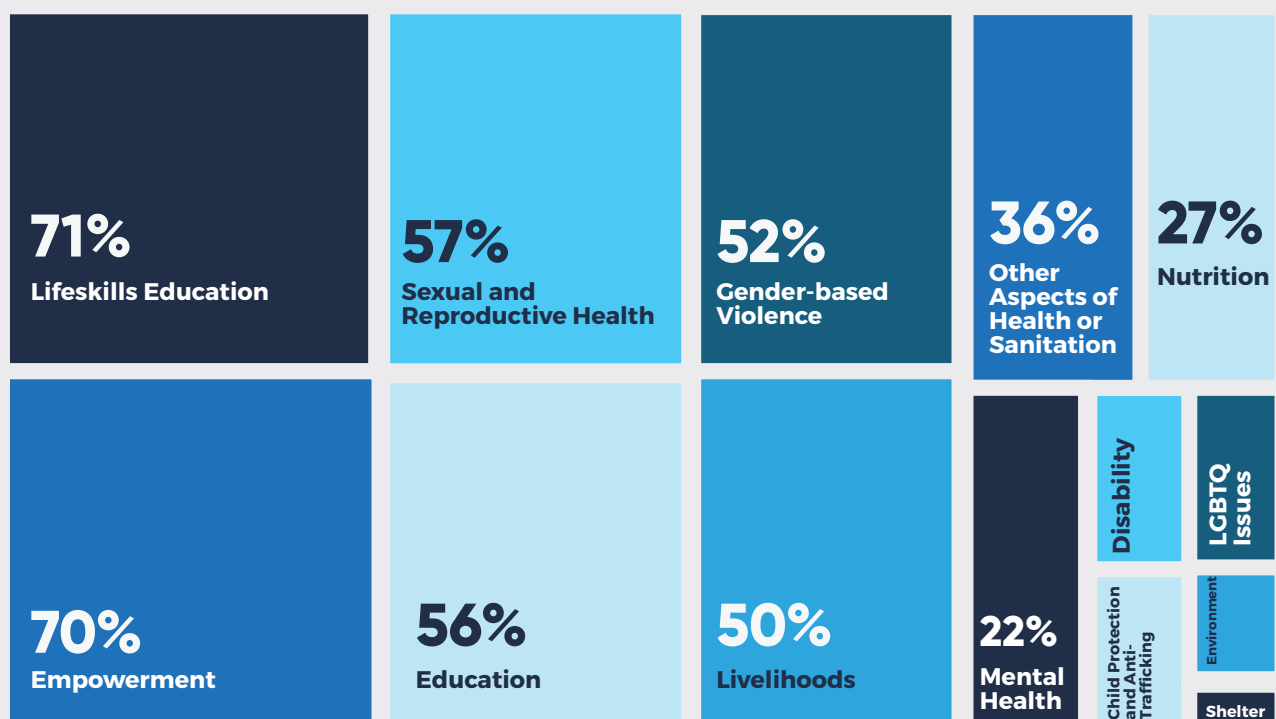
<sup>4</sup> The diagram only indicates how many responding organizations (out of 73) implemented programs in the respective states, and is in no way representative of the geographical coverage or scale of those programs.



Table 2 presents the distribution of organizations by both their key program focus and the kinds of programs implemented for adolescents and youth. The focus of the large majority of organizations that responded to the survey was on building life skills including financial literacy, and empowering the young, largely girls (70-71%). About half to three-fifths reported a specific focus on sexual and reproductive health, education, gender based violence and livelihood skill building. Somewhat fewer – between one-fifth and two-fifths – reported that they worked on other aspects of health or sanitation, nutrition and mental health. Finally, 10% or fewer reported that their organization focused its activities on disability, LGBTQ issues, child protection and anti-trafficking, environment and shelter.

Organizations working with adolescents reported that they implemented a range of activities for the young. The large majority provided gender transformative life skills education and leadership skill building activities (83%). Somewhat fewer – 72% – conducted activities relating to the provision of health promoting information or sexuality education and 68% reported establishing group based activities and safe spaces for girls. In contrast, half of all organizations reported providing livelihoods training or facilitating such training (50%), or supporting adolescents with schooling benefits and coaching (36%). Other activities listed in Table 2 were reported by about one quarter or fewer.

## Overall program focus of responding organizations



## TABLE 02

### Overall program focus and activities conducted with adolescents and youth served

	Percentage
<b>Overall program focus</b>	
Life skills education (including financial literacy)	71.2
Empowerment	69.9
Sexual and reproductive health	57.5
Education	56.2
Gender-based violence	52.1
Livelihoods	47.9
Other aspects of health or sanitation	35.6
Nutrition	27.4
Mental health	21.9
Disability	9.6
LGBTQ issues	9.6
Child Protection and anti-trafficking	6.8
Environment	5.5
Shelter	2.7
<b>Total number of responding organizations</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Activities conducted with adolescents and youth</b>	
Life skills, rights based education/gender transformative education/leadership/mentorship	83.3
Health promoting information/Sexuality Education/Adolescence Education	72.2
Safe spaces, organize adolescent/youth groups	68.1
Livelihoods, vocational training/Work readiness training/Facilitation of livelihoods training, including career fairs	50.0
Schooling Benefits/Extra Coaching	36.1
Teacher Training	31.9
Health Services and linkages to Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC)	25.0
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	4.2
Child Protection, shelter homes, childline services, awareness of child rights, linkages to CPC	4.2
<b>Total number of responding organizations</b>	<b>72<sup>5</sup></b>

<sup>5</sup> One organization did not work directly with adolescents



Most organizations also engaged gatekeepers. The large majority engaged parents in activities pertaining to their adolescent children (Table 3). Notably, many organizations also conduct programs for teachers (68%), frontline health workers (43%), counsellors and other healthcare providers (31-33%), and community leaders (25%).

## TABLE 03

### Gatekeepers engaged by organizations implementing programmes for adolescents and youth

	Percentage
<b>Gatekeepers</b>	
Their parents (mother, father, both)	79.2
Teachers	68.1
Frontline health workers (ASHA, AWW, ANM)	43.1
Counsellors, others in Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (AFHC)	33.3
Other healthcare providers	30.6
Other community stakeholders such as local or religious leaders, elected representatives, government officials etc.	25.0
<b>Total number of responding organizations</b>	<b>72<sup>6</sup></b>

<sup>6</sup> One organization did not work directly with adolescents

**In summary, the selectivity of our sample, and the wide-ranging activities reported by responding organizations hint that respondent organizations may not be representative of adolescent and youth-serving organizations in general. They tend to serve large numbers of adolescents and youth, work in both rural and urban areas, work on many dimensions of adolescent life, and involve adult gatekeepers. This likely lack of representativeness must be borne in mind while interpreting findings relating to backlash.**

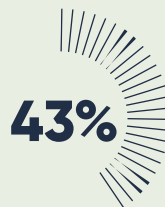




# GATEKEEPERS



PARENTS



FRONTLINE HEALTH WORKERS



OTHER HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS



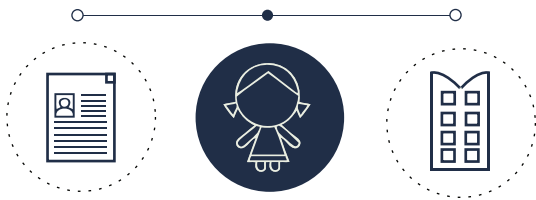
TEACHERS



COUNSELLORS



OTHER COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS



## BACKLASH AGAINST GIRLS

### A. Denial of entitlements

### B. Punishment for developing friendships with boys

### C. Experience of violence, denial of food, or forced seclusion for defying traditional norms

We inquired from each organization about its familiarity with incidents of various forms of backlash. While almost all organizations (62 organisations, that is 85 percent of responding organizations) reported that they were familiar with at least one incident of some form of backlash against girls, the number of incidents that had come to their attention was relatively small. For example, almost three in five organizations, including those serving large populations of girls, reported familiarity with fewer than ten such incidents (not shown in table). We emphasise that though reported incidents of backlash represented a small minority of the girls served by these organizations, that there exist incidents of backlash is a cause for concern.

## A. DENIAL OF ENTITLEMENTS

The most commonly reported form of backlash was withdrawal from school, programs or outdoor sports, or punishment and denial of money or access to communications media (mobile phone or social media). As Table 4 shows, **as many as 61 organizations - 84% - were familiar with at least one incident in which a girl experienced this form of backlash.** Textual responses to open-ended questions shed light on specific experiences.

1. Withdrawal from school because of fear of untoward incidents and resulting loss of family reputation
2. Withdrawal from school because of relationship with a boy
3. Refused permission to participate in outdoor sports because of potential harassment, formation of relationships with boys, affecting family honor
4. Denied money, access to internet or social media
5. Refused permission to attend programs

# 1.

## Withdrawal from school because of fear of untoward incidents and resulting loss of family reputation:

More than half (56-60%) were aware of a girl who had been harassed by a boy on the way to school and had been withdrawn from school because of parental fear of loss of reputation,

or of a girl who acquiesced silently and against her will to family pressure to discontinue her education because she feared adverse consequences. Some textual responses are provided below:

“

*We know of a girl who was withdrawn from school because she was teased and harassed by boys on her way to school. When our counsellor met with her mother to discuss her re-enrollment, she shared - Being a mother of a grown up girl is very scary as the situation in our village is not good. I had to ask my elder daughter to discontinue her studies because I felt anxious when I heard about her being harassed on her way to school. She is interested in studies but she is a grown up girl and I am worried that somebody might do something wrong to her.*

”

[ID-4,<sup>7</sup> programs implemented in Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and others]

“

*We know of a girl who resisted the decision of parents to not allow her to go school due to fear of her safety and security. They were not convinced at any cost and finally she had to give up her education.*

”

[ID-52, programs implemented in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh]

# 2.

## Withdrawal from school because of relationship with a boy:

Several organizations – 44% – were familiar with an incident in which a girl was forced to discontinue her education by her parents and brothers because she was friendly with a boy. Textual responses suggest the following:

“

*One of the female students from an ITI in Delhi was in a relationship with a boy, and they eloped as the family was against the relationship. The parents and brother blamed the institute and even threatened the trainer. Neither the family nor the trainer supported the girl, and she was expelled by the institute and could not complete her education. In another incident, 3-4 girls were expelled from college for having a video call with boys. I saw these girls and their parents pleading with the Principal but nothing happened.*

”

[ID-55, programs implemented in Assam, Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Gujarat, Jharkhand and others]

“

*Two girls had to drop out from school because they were in a relationship with boys.*

”

[ID-72, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

<sup>7</sup> The responding organizations were assigned numbers to maintain their anonymity, denoted as ID-number in this report



### 3.

## Refused permission to participate in outdoor sports because of potential harassment, formation of relationships with boys, affecting family honor:

Traditional norms dictate that once puberty is reached, girls must remain indoors, and those who continue to play outdoors or engage in sports invite community censure and even teasing from boys. **Half of all responding organizations (51%) have related incidents in which a girl was refused permission to participate in outdoor sports** for fear of adverse community reactions or likely teasing from boys, or was reprimanded for participating in sports events. Narratives support this perception.

“

*In some villages, girls were stopped by male members of their family and community from playing Kabaddi in the open spaces in the village [because it would invite the formation of relationships with boys].*

”

[ID-44, programs implemented in Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and others]

“

*At least 20 girls in our programs across various panchayats have been stopped by their parents and others in their village from playing, as they feel that once girls reach puberty and are seen playing outside, the family would lose its honor ('ijjat') and men will exploit and molest them.*

”

[ID-24, programs implemented in Rajasthan]





## 4.

### Denied money, access to internet or social media:

Others reported other forms of punishment for displaying agency or straying from conventional norms include **denial of money (33%), denial of access to the internet and social media (55%).**

Some examples are given below.

“

*One of our beneficiaries was caught by her parents in a restaurant with a boy. They forcibly took her away, and at home, her mobile phone was confiscated and she was told to stop indulging in such activities.*

”

[ID-58, programs implemented in Maharashtra]



# 5.

## Refused permission to attend programs:

Fears that raising girls' awareness about sexual and reproductive health, even menstrual health and hygiene will lead girls 'astray,' and fears that program content intended to build girls' agency will result in girls defending their rights dissuade parents from permitting their daughter to attend programs discussing these issues. Indeed, **60% of responding organizations reported that they were aware of a girl whose parents had denied her permission to attend their programs** because the programs teach "useless" or "dirty" things, or because the programs put modern ideas in her head, as the quotes below show.

“

*Once a woman came to drop her daughter to one of our gender training sessions. She disapproved of the leadership and empowerment content of the program and feared it would encourage her daughter to be empowered. Her parents then decided to discontinue her studies and married her off as a punishment.*

”

[ID-45, programs implemented in Delhi (NCR)]

“

*The girl's brother did not allow the girl to attend the training program because of the perception of "dirty things" being taught in the training.*

”

[ID-14, programs implemented in Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan]

“

*One girl was not allowed to travel outside the community to attend an internship opportunity provided by the organization. Her father and brothers strictly restricted her mobility, did not give her money to travel to the program, and beat her up when she tried to negotiate... Yes the backlash she faced was the result of the organization's attempt to follow up with her to enroll in the internship learning opportunity.*

”

[ID-67, programs implemented in Delhi (NCR), Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana]

“

*Many families and communities thought that the empowerment and SRHR sessions we ran were not good for girls. Our team members were asked to leave the village, and girls were made to drop out in the middle of the program in several instances.*

”

[ID-6, programs implemented in Jharkhand]

“

*We have come across girls who have told us that they have not been allowed to participate in our programs as their families believe that we teach them "useless" and "dirty" things. In a village, eight participants from our women and youth group were prohibited from attending our group meetings by other young men and the girls' mothers, saying that we take girls out and teach them things that they do not need. They said that our activities have a bad influence on girls, that girls had begun to demand more time to study, take up work of their choice, marry a husband of their choice and do less housework and, therefore, they stopped these girls from attending.*

”

[ID-24, programs implemented in Rajasthan]

Fears that program attendance would provide opportunities to interact with, and possibly develop relationships or even elope with a boy were other reasons why parents refused to allow their daughter to attend the programs of responding organization. Indeed, almost three in five organizations (59%) reported awareness of at least one case in which a girl was restricted for this reason. The narratives expand on these incidents.

“

*A few adolescent girls from this community were restrained from attending our program as parents felt that if their girl meets boys at workshops, they might elope. Most parents strictly prohibit girls from attending residential training programs.*

”

[ID-3, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*In one of the programs in Rajasthan, a community based female mentor who had resisted marriage after joining our program was stopped by her brother from attending a gender training program that was organized for all the mentors of the program. She reached the training venue crying. Her brother followed her to the training venue, called her out, threatened her, and intimidated her into returning home.*

”

[ID-44, programs implemented in Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and others]

“

*Because one girl from this community had developed a relationship with a boy, another girl from her class, living in the same community, was not allowed to go out, attend our program or take up an internship.*

”

[ID-32, programs implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi (NCR), Gujarat and others]





## TABLE 04

### Denial of entitlements:

Percentage of programs reporting familiarity with incidents of withdrawal from school, programs and outdoor sports, and punishment and withdrawal of permission

	Number of organizations	Percentage
<b>Withdrawal from school</b>		
Removed from school because she became friendly with a boy	32	43.8
Withdrawn from school/ prevented from going to college when harassed by a boy on the way to school or because she was married/about to be married because of parental fear of loss of reputation	41	56.2
Withdrawn from or herself withdrew from school for fear of, or when she experienced, harassment from boys on the way to/from or at school	42	57.5
Made to discontinue her education against her will, but did not protest (tell teacher, argue back with parents, seek help from anyone else, etc.) because she feared adverse consequences (violence, withholding of food, resources, freedom...)	44	60.3
<b>Withdrawal from programs and outdoor sports</b>		
Told not to participate in sports or games outside the home because people would say bad things about her or was reprimanded for participating in sports events	37	50.7
Told not to attend your program because you teach "useless" or "dirty" things, or because you put modern ideas in her head	44	60.3
Prevented from participating in youth groups/events/activities because boys would be present	43	58.9
<b>Punishment, withdrawal of permission</b>		
Punished for or prevented from using social media/mobile phone/computer for fear that she would be exposed to "wrong" things and people (e.g., boys)	40	54.8
Refused money (e.g., for pocket money, local conveyance, mobile recharge) as a punishment for displaying any form of agency	24	32.9
Any of the above	61	83.6
Total number of organizations	73	





## B. PUNISHMENT FOR DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIPS WITH BOYS

Backlash in the form of punishment for social mixing with boys, in addition to withdrawal from school, was also reported (Table 5). **As many as three in four organizations reported familiarity with an incident of backlash against girls who had a romantic partner or was even rumored to have a romantic partner.** Backlash was observed in the form of forcible seclusion and forced marriage. In addition, many organizations were aware of a girl who withdrew from a relationship with a boy for fear of stigmatization, violence or forced marriage, as elaborated in the following narratives.

“

*One of our beneficiaries was caught by her parents in a restaurant with a boy. They forcibly took her away, and at home, her mobile phone was confiscated and she was told to stop indulging in such activities. Another girl wanted to go out of the city to pursue further education, but her parents did not allow her. They even tried to talk her into marriage with a prospective boy. She had to speak to the boy and express her wish to cancel the marriage.*

”

[ID-20, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*In another case, a teenage girl eloped with a 22-yr old boy from the community and returned after a few weeks because of a missing person complaint lodged by the girl's family; the boy was charged and jailed for violating POCSO, and the girl's family abandoned the girl.*

”

[ID-3, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*One girl in our program was forcibly married off, as she was in a relationship with a boy and said that she wanted to marry him.*

”

[ID-57, programs implemented in Rajasthan]



## TABLE 05

### Forced separation from a romantic partner or opportunities for social mixing

Percentage of programs reporting familiarity with incidents in which a girl withdrew from, or was secluded or married off because of a relationship with a boy

	Number of Organizations	Percentage
Forcibly secluded/not allowed to mix with friends when parents heard that she had been seen talking to a boy	43	58.9
Married off too early or to someone the parents found when her parents found out that she was friendly with a particular boy	42	57.5
Withdrew from a relationship with a boy because she feared adverse consequences (stigmatization, violence, forced premature marriage, etc.)	46	63.0
<b>Any of the above</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>75.3</b>
<b>Total number of responding organizations</b>	<b>73</b>	



## C. EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE, DENIAL OF FOOD OR FORCED SECLUSION FOR DEFYING TRADITIONAL NORMS

Backlash in the form of physical violence, the threat of physical violence, denial of food, or forced seclusion was also observed by three in four reporting organizations (Table 6). Familiarity with a range of incidents was reported. For example, 36-37% of responding organizations reported familiarity with an incident in which a girl was beaten because she refused to run chores for her brother or demanded more time for school-related homework or studies. **More than half of responding organizations reported familiarity with an incident in which a girl was beaten or denied food for refusing to marry against her will or for making attempts to gain livelihood skills or pursue a career.** Other reasons for violence or denial of food included wearing “unacceptable” clothes, expressing opinions contrary to traditional norms, demanding rights, or refusing to do housework (mentioned by 45-49%). Incidents of violence were described as follows, and suggest that violence, while largely perpetrated by family members, can also be perpetrated by community members.

**TABLE  
06**

### Violent Reactions:

Percentage of programs reporting familiarity with incidents in which a girl experienced physical violence or denial of food for expressions of agency

	Number of Organizations	Percentage
Beaten/threatened by her brother because she refused to do work for him (bring him food, wash his clothes)	27	37.0
Beaten/threatened by her brother because she wore jeans, spoke to a boy etc.	35	47.9
Beaten/denied food/not allowed to go out when she expressed her views rejecting traditional norms and expectations to her parents	36	49.3
Beaten/denied food/not allowed to go out when she demanded to be allowed to continue school	34	46.6
Beaten/denied food/not allowed to go out when she refused to marry against her will	39	53.4
Beaten/denied food/not allowed to go out when she demanded more time for school-related homework or studies	26	35.6
Beaten/not given food/not allowed to go out when she refused to do housework	35	47.9
Beaten/denied food/not allowed to go out when she tried to negotiate career aspirations, enroll in skills training programs, go out with friends	42	57.5
Any of the above	55	75.3
Total number of responding organizations	73	

“

*Two sisters were beaten by their father for spending more time studying than doing housework. Both sisters are afraid that because he does not think girls should be educated, he will not allow them to continue their studies.*

”

[ID-57, programs implemented in Rajasthan]

“

*A girl started questioning the drinking habits of her father and asked him to reduce the volume on the television when she was studying. She was beaten mercilessly.*

”

[ID-65, programs implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh]

“

*Her younger brother makes her cook the food he likes to eat. He sometimes comes back after 12 am and wakes her up to cook for him and if she refuses, her mother beats her.*

”

[ID-55, programs implemented in Assam, Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Gujarat, Jharkhand and others]

“

*One girl who ran away and had a love affair was killed by her brother. Now, other brothers use that as an example when threatening their sisters: "Us bhai ne jaise kiya, waise hi karenge, kaat daalenge" (we will do what that brother did, knife you).*

”

[ID-21, programs implemented in West Bengal]

“

*At least two girls have told us that they were beaten up by their brothers for wearing jeans...Several girls have told us that if they refuse to do housework, they are beaten and starved.*

”

[ID-24, programs implemented in Rajasthan]

“

*When a visitor asked girls about equality in school and at home, one girl said that after she had attended a session, she was slapped by her mother because she talked back to her. Another girl who lived in a joint family in which girls were made to cover their heads said she was badly beaten up when she argued that covering heads was a form of discrimination.*

”

[ID-42, programs implemented in Haryana, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh]

“

*Exposure to our programs resulted in girls raising question about the fairness of division of work in the household, and several of them were reprimanded and even beaten for becoming too vocal.*

”

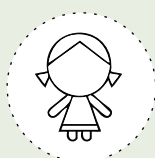
[ID-17, programs implemented in Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan]

“

*An adolescent girl who joined our citizenship course received negative reactions – her parents were rebuked by religious leaders at a common gathering and the girl was physically assaulted by religious leaders and parents in the community.*

”

[ID-3, programs implemented in Maharashtra]



## BACKLASH AGAINST ORGANIZATIONS THAT CONDUCT PROGRAMS INTENDED TO BRING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE

- A. Forced exclusion of sensitive topics from program curricula
- B. Refusal of entry, threats, verbal abuse and physical violence
- C. Backlash through adverse use of media

Organizations that conduct programs intended to bring about social change may face backlash from several constituencies – the parents and gatekeepers of girls and the communities in which programs are introduced, by constituencies that hold differing ideologies (not addressed here) and so on. Responding organizations had also faced backlash for their attempts to empower girls in general, and more specifically, for building girls' leadership skills, informing them about sexual and reproductive health matters, emphasizing the need to complete their education and seek income generation opportunities or delay marriage. **Altogether, 66% of responding organizations reported at least one of these forms of backlash (Tables 7-8) in the form of denial of entry into various communities until program content was modified, threats and/or experience of violence, and adverse media reports**

## A. FORCED EXCLUSION OF SENSITIVE TOPICS FROM PROGRAM CURRICULA

**Almost two in five (36%) organizations opted to exclude sensitive topics from the curricula, or were denied entry into various communities and were thus forced to modify program content in order to initiate their programs**

(Table 7). One quarter (25%) had deliberately excluded sensitive topics such as boy-girl relations, women's inheritance rights, livelihood training options and sexuality, pregnancy and condoms before they entered certain communities in order to gain access to girls residing in those communities.

“

*We have had to postpone discussing topics such as sexuality, love, relationships, etc., out of fear of parental opposition and outrage.*

”

[ID-58, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*There have been times when we have had to modify our program for adolescent girls. This has not been because the organization has been forced to censor its program content, but rather because the organization has always been keen to the need to approach these culturally taboo topics with sensitivity...*

”

[ID-70, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*Recently, we were developing a peer educator curriculum in Bihar, and some program managers insisted that it should be modified to avoid backlash from families of young peer educators.*

”

[ID-25, programs implemented pan-India]

Almost one in three organizations (30%) had actually included these topics in their programs but was forced to drop these activities or curriculum modules because of reprisals from community members. Qualitative data suggest that typically, it was topics such as sexuality and sex education that organizations were forced to drop from their activities or curriculum, and the perpetrators of these adverse reactions included parents, teachers, and even local, district and/or state governments.

“

*Programs in school were told not to include information on sexuality, sexual acts and contraception. In another incident, parents have confronted school teachers demanding that information regarding puberty and body changes should not be shared.*

”

[ID-17, programs implemented in Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan]

“

*In the life skills education, there was a huge hue and cry from the villagers on showing a movie. Even though we explained that it was a normal movie, we were not permitted to show it to the boys' batch, and it was only shown to the girls' batch.*

”

[ID-26, programs implemented pan-India]

“

*In a school where we were implementing our comprehensive adolescence education modules, one of the senior teachers overheard a Class 9 session on family planning and he got so angry that he fought with the head master, and we were not allowed to implement this part of the program.*

”

[ID-47, programs implemented in Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan]

“

*In Haryana, we wanted to include the topic of sexuality in our curriculum but the government did not want to include anything associated with the topic.*

”

[ID-42, programs implemented in Haryana, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh]



## TABLE 07

### Percentage of organizations reporting that they had been forced to modify program content in order to gain entry into communities

	Number of Organizations	Percentage
Organization has at least once deliberately excluded topics that it wanted to include in its program/curriculum/activity (e.g. avoided reference to boy-girl relations, inheritance laws, livelihood training opportunities/access, condoms, pregnancy, etc.) for fear that the program would be adversely affected	18	24.7
Organization has been forced to modify content, drop modules on sensitive topics (sexuality, child marriage, laws on inheritance, domestic violence) because it angered community members	22	30.1
Either of the above	26	35.6
Total number of responding organizations	73	



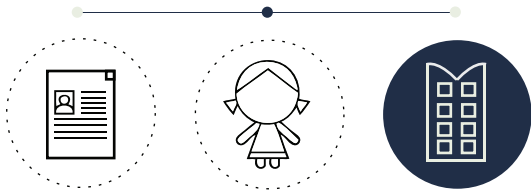
## B. REFUSAL OF ENTRY, THREATS, VERBAL ABUSE AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

As stated above, several organizations reported the experience of backlash to programs addressing sexual and reproductive health matters, prevention of child sexual abuse and/or early marriage, and encouragement of education for girls. They also reported that program implementers at the field level, including frontline workers and teachers, were threatened by families of adolescents (including parents, brothers, husbands) and community members. The forms of backlash reported included blocking a team's entry into a community, threats and verbal abuse; a few organizations had also experienced physical violence to project implementers and property. **In total, 56% of organizations had experienced at least one of these forms of backlash** (Table 8).

1. Denial of entry or threats of closing down programs
2. Verbal abuse and threats of violence
3. Experience of violence



Photo Credit: Suraj Katra



# 1.

## Denial of entry or threats of closing down programs

Several organizations had been denied entry into a particular village because of the content and objectives of their programs (15%), and several reported that communities, local authorities and politicians had threatened action against them for conducting programs for girls (10%).

“

*As part of our program in Rajasthan, one of our female field facilitators who dared to marry a boy of another caste was not allowed to enter some villages to conduct sessions with girls as the news of her marriage caused a furor in the community. Fears were expressed that their girls would also get a wrong message through our programs and would defy social norms and marry outside their caste. The program was stalled in those villages for about a month and we had no choice but to bring in another facilitator and shift this facilitator to another program.*

”

[ID-44, programs implemented in Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and others]

“

*Most commonly, we are asked to stick to ensuring children play, and not get into matters that are 'none of our business' [asked to focus on safe issues such as play rather than on sensitive issues such as rights and sexual and reproductive health matters]. In some instances, we have been asked to stop programming [life skills education with leadership and sexual and reproductive health content] with immediate effect.*

”

[ID-54, programs implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi (NCR) and others]

“

*Local authorities had objected to our efforts to empower women earlier. While we have reconciled our differences and currently receive support from the local government to work together on public health initiatives, there have been instances where conservative political as well as governmental pressure aggressively suggested curtailing the program for adolescent girls due to our comprehensive approach to empowerment. At the time, the organization was threatened by being told that there would be a cost to continuing our curriculum...*

”

[ID-70, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*Our organization has faced backlash by way of threats of being shut down if we continued our work on sexual and reproductive health for girls.*

”

[ID-53, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*Our program on citizenship, which includes topics such as gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights, has frequently been disagreed with and has faced disapproval by families, community residents and religious leaders.*

”

[ID-3, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*The empowerment program and SRHR sessions were considered to be bad for girls by many community members and families. So our team members were asked to leave the village, some girls were not allowed to attend our training sessions and other girls were made to drop out in the middle of the program.*

”

[ID-6, programs implemented in Jharkhand]

## 2.

## Verbal abuse and threats of violence

Efforts to prevent child marriage, implement programs on women's empowerment, violence against women and girls, raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health matters or intervene in sexual harassment or abuse incidents evoked violent reactions – generally verbal abuse, but also threats of violence.

**Almost one quarter (23%) of responding organizations had received threats of violence. Besides, one-third of organizations reported that field level program implementers (33%) and frontline workers and teachers associated with their programs (34%) had been verbally abused by community members.** Their descriptions of their experiences are detailed below.

“

*The counsellor for our prevention of violence against women and children intervention has been threatened time and again by community residents; the threats were mostly received in terms of POCSO cases.*

”

[ID-3, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

“

*Once, after we had enacted a skit in a village on property rights for women, we were having discussions with women. A group of 4 or 5 drunk men came and stood behind us and started asking questions. We were not able to satisfy them with our answers. They started using abusive words and immediately, we stopped our discussion and went to the panchayat office, informed them about the incident.*

”

[ID-39, programs implemented in Tamil Nadu]

“

*An adolescent girl in one village was eager to enroll in school and requested us to counsel her family members to let her pursue her education. A worker who visited her home to counsel her parents was threatened and asked to leave the premises... Doors have been closed on the face of the workers; they have also been considered anti-social and labelled as those taking information from adolescent girls for their own benefit.*

”

[ID-59, programs implemented in Rajasthan]

“

*There was an incident where girls had been taken somewhere by a pastor on the pretext of education, and were sexually abused by him. We registered an FIR against him and faced a lot of backlash from the community when we did so, as he was an important and highly respected figure in the community. In another incident, one of our frontline workers reported a case of child marriage, after which the team got involved to stop the child marriage. The community figured out which frontline worker had reported the incident and threatened her.... Our rescue and legal team (who work on trafficking and child protection) have also received telephonic threats.*

”

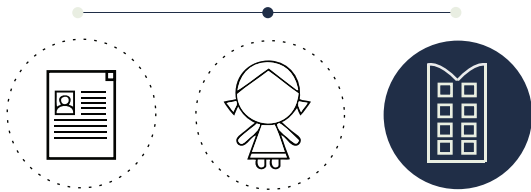
[ID-37, programs implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Delhi (NCR), Jharkhand, Manipur, Meghalaya and others]

“

*Our case worker was threatened and abused for intervening in child sexual incest cases.*

”

[ID-52, programs implemented in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh]



## 2. Verbal abuse and threats of violence

“

*In one of our programs in the community, a girl who had come forward to educate girls and women about menstrual health and hygiene faced a lot of bullying and verbal abuse from others in the community, people made fun of her...*

”

[ID-73, programs implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Delhi (NCR) and others]

“

*In 1999, some community members used a false pretext, gathered outside our office, and started threatening our workers. The workers were locked inside, they could only get out at midnight when the police arrived.*

”

[ID-24, programs implemented in Rajasthan]

“

*In some villages, community members abused implementers who were discussing plans to enroll girls in our training programs. Some ASHAs who work with the organization also faced this type of abuse when they raise issues of preventing child marriage, or relationship with boys or the mobility of girls.*

”

[ID-24, programs implemented in Rajasthan]

In some instances, narratives suggest that even parents of girls willing to permit their daughter to attend programs of the responding organization face backlash from the extended family and community.

“

*For our programs in Jharkhand, we recruit change agents from within the community (to enable safe migration). There was a girl whose family was willing to support her to become a change agent, they were happy that she was becoming a part of such a movement, but they faced backlash from certain factions of the community.*

”

[ID-37, programs implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Delhi (NCR), Jharkhand, Manipur, Meghalaya and others]

“

*In one incident, where a family was trying to marry off their daughter who was approximately 11 years old, our peer educators intervened and convinced the parents to delay her marriage. The marriage proposal had come through their relatives. Once the parents agreed not to conduct the child's marriage, these relatives started criticizing them. The relatives who had brought the proposal cut off their relationship with the family.*

”

[ID-47, programs implemented in Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan]

“

*Sometimes, parents of our girls have been afraid to support their daughters because of threats from the community and the backlash that they would have to face.*

”

[ID-53, programs implemented in Maharashtra]

### 3. Experience of violence

A few organizations reported their staff members had been subjected to physical violence or their property damaged (Table 8). Four organizations reported that their field staff had actually experienced violence perpetrated by community members because of the content of their programs (5%) and eleven organizations (15%) had experienced damage to office premises because communities objected to their programs. Unfortunately, just one of these organizations opted to describe the event.

“

*In one incident when we tried to stop a child marriage, community members threatened our program implementers and damaged our office. We had to close our office in the area for a month.*

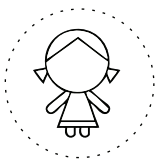
”

[ID-21, programs implemented in West Bengal]

**TABLE  
08**

**Percentage of organizations reporting backlash in the form of denial of entry, threats, verbal abuse and physical violence because of activities intended to empower girls**

	Number of Organizations	Percentage
<b>Refusal of permission to conduct programs</b>		
Program was denied entry into a particular village by communities fearing that these programs will “spoil” girls	11	15.1
Local authorities (municipal officers, panchayat members, police, local politicians) had objected to or threatened action against members of the organization because of work on girls’ empowerment	7	9.6
<b>Verbal abuse, threat of violence, and experience of violence</b>		
Community members have verbally abused program implementers	24	32.9
Frontline workers (such as ASHA, AWW, ANM) or teachers working through the program have faced negative reactions for efforts to prevent early or forced marriage, keep girls in school, provide girls information about puberty and sexual and reproductive health matters	25	34.2
Community members have threatened violence against program implementers if they continued their work	17	23.3
Organization has faced damage to office premises or personal threats because of work with girls’ empowerment/sensitive topics	11	15.1
Community members have committed violence (slapped, beaten, raped) against a program implementer because of his/her work	4	5.5
<b>Any of the above</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>56.2</b>
<b>Total number of responding organizations</b>	<b>73</b>	



## C. BACKLASH THROUGH ADVERSE USE OF THE MEDIA

A few organizations (five organizations, 7% of responding organizations) had faced backlash through adverse use of the media or adverse media coverage of their activities. Backlash comprised trolling, messages that went viral on social media, and articles published in the print media criticizing the work of the organization (Table 9). A few examples are given below.



*We received a large amount of online trolling regarding the feminist adaptation of a Tamil movie song.*



[ID-42, programs implemented in Haryana, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh]



*Several Whatsapp forwards have been seen in these communities that talk about religious and household traditional norms, which can be very oppressive, enforced on women. The impact of such Whatsapp forwards can truly hinder social change movements. For instance, there was a Whatsapp forward regarding the evils of unmarried girls – which scared parents into forcing their daughters into an early marriage.*



[ID-10, programs implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi (NCR), Gujarat, Jharkhand and others]



*Backlash against sexuality education started in 2007 in many parts of the country and the same happened in Jharkhand as well. Local dailies posted content out of context and accused our organization and the government of teaching sex. We worked with the Government of Jharkhand to deal with the backlash, and due to these efforts, the backlash turned into support and we got positive news coverage.*



[ID-71, programs implemented in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha]

**TABLE  
09**

**Percentage of organizations that experienced community backlash by way of adverse media reports**

	Number of Organizations	Percentage
Organization has experienced negative articles, publicity, etc., from the media about work with girls	3	4.1
Rumors have spread through social media (WhatsApp, etc.,) about the “bad” things a program is advocating	3	4.1
<b>Either of the above</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6.8</b>
<b>Total number of responding organizations</b>	<b>73</b>	

# LIMITATIONS

We emphasize that our study is an exploratory exercise, and draw attention to several limitations.

01

For one, we acknowledge the likelihood of a selectivity bias. Several organizations among whom the survey was canvassed did not respond, despite three or more contacts. While our response rate of 60% is somewhat higher than those obtained in online surveys in which no incentive is offered, there is a concern that the resulting profiles may not be an accurate reflection of backlash, and the responding organizations may be self-selected and confined to those familiar with incidents of backlash.

02

Second, we note that insights about backlash against girls that we report come from third-party reporting. Hence, while we do present information on the number of organizations reporting an incident of backlash, the number of girls about whose backlash experience the organization was aware of, and numbers of girls covered in the program, we caution that the resulting magnitude of backlash indicated are no more than rough estimates. It is also likely that the extent of

backlash has been either underestimated as information about incidents of backlash may not all reach program implementers, or overestimated given the possible selectivity bias discussed above.

03

Third, we note that a girl who faces adverse reactions for displaying agency in one aspect of her life – for example, for refusing to marry or for attending a livelihood training program away from home – may not face adverse reactions in other aspects of her life, for example, for continuing school or enrolling in college away from home. By focusing our attention on just the incidents of backlash, we may have overlooked positive changes in the same girl's exercise of agency in other dimensions of her life.

04

Fourth, there is always the possibility that a responding organization's reported awareness of an incident, such as violence, was not backlash, that is, not triggered by expressions of agency or deviation from traditional norms. This could include, for example, violence perpetrated by the father while drunk or typical actions taken to control girls' sexuality in a patriarchal setting, irrespective of whether the girl expresses agency or attitudes that deviate from traditional norms and expectations. We have tried to counter this possibility by including an additional open-ended question in which we requested respondents to outline the specific incident, and have excluded any incident that was not specifically an adverse reaction to a display of agency or expression of attitudes challenging the status quo by girls, or a fear of behaviors and attitudes challenging the status quo. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that backlash may be overestimated if there is failure to interpret descriptions accurately.

05

Finally, our survey was general, and did not permit us to shed light on rural-urban differences, or differences in the experience of backlash by educational status and other background characteristics of households. Nor were we able to assess the perspectives of different categories of gatekeepers, such as, for example, locally elected representatives, teachers and health care providers or the experiences of the girls who had experienced backlash, or who had experienced backlash and overcome it.

**For all these reasons, we acknowledge that the percentages reported in this report are illustrative and not conclusive. The findings should not be interpreted as reflecting the proportion of adolescents reporting a particular adverse reaction; what is reported is simply the percentage of responding organizations that were aware of at least one girl or family who had experienced a particular form of backlash. Nevertheless, the wealth of textual information provided by responding organizations gives confidence that backlash is pervasive.**

# WAY FORWARD

## SUMMARY

Although concerns have often been raised about the backlash experienced by women and girls whose behavior or attitudes deviate from traditional gender-stratified norms and expectations, few studies, including those from India, have explored experiences in depth. Those that have done so have focused largely on one form of backlash experienced, violence, and note that violence is likely to be the tip of the iceberg. However, the focus on violence may have diverted attention from other forms such as social censure, threats of loss of entitlement, and forced isolation. Moreover, studies of backlash have focused entirely on adult women, and not at all on the kinds of backlash that girls face. Available studies have observed that backlash is characteristic of highly patriarchal settings, and that in the form of violence, it is experienced by considerable proportions of women displaying agency in terms of economic activity, access to resources, access to group support and so on. Some studies have also suggested that backlash is most likely to be experienced by the pioneers – those who are in the forefront of questioning traditional norms – and dissipates as communities adjust and accept new forms of behaviors among women.

Recognizing the scarcity of evidence from India, the gap in understanding the backlash faced by girls, and the relatively narrow definition of backlash employed in available literature, an exploratory study was undertaken to better understand the experience of backlash against girls who express agency and gender egalitarian attitudes (and to a lesser extent, against boys and parents of such adolescents, not reported here) and against organizations that work for social change. Given the lack of precedents in the literature, we opted for a survey of youth-serving organizations, whose field presence would expose them both to direct backlash, as well as to information about incidents of

backlash experienced within the communities they serve. The questionnaire comprised a number of open-ended questions and thus, findings are enriched by textual data describing incidents of backlash with which organizations were familiar or had directly experienced. 73 organizations of a total of 121 who were invited to participate responded to a self-administered questionnaire and hence, we acknowledge the possibility that our sample was selective of those organizations that had experienced backlash and that our findings may have artificially inflated the extent of familiarity with experience of backlash. It is important to note that while almost all organizations were familiar with incidents of backlash, they agreed that these incidents took place among no more than a small minority of the girls that they served.

Findings suggest that 85% of responding organizations were familiar with at least one incident of backlash against girls who display agency or defy traditional hierarchical norms of masculinity and femininity. Backlash was experienced in the form of ostracism, forced seclusion, withdrawal from school, forced marriage and violence. Backlash was widely experienced by youth-serving organizations whose activities focus on building leadership and life skills among the young, expose adolescents to information about sexual and reproductive health and rights, and build the communication and negotiation skills of adolescents. Backlash was reported by two-thirds of responding organizations (66%), and ranged from community refusal to allow the conduct of programs in their village to threats of violence, to actual violence in the form of destruction of property and violence perpetrated against program field staff.



Photo Credit: Suraj Katra



Photo Credit: Suraj Katra

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we synthesize findings from our survey, drawing also on the strategies employed by responding organizations, to make recommendations for youth-serving organizations in India. We reiterate that backlash effects are strong and can have a far-reaching influence on inhibiting gender egalitarian attitudes and practices and limit the extent to which the young can achieve their potential. What is needed is an environment that supports – or at least does not thwart progress toward – a breakdown of traditional hierarchical gender norms and expressions of agency among girls. Several strategies for doing so emerge.

- 01. Responding organizations stress the importance of engaging parents, communities and government authorities more generally as a strategy to prevent backlash.
- 02. Presence of champions and positive role models may allay community fears.
- 03. Programming for boys – in and out of school – is important for changing perceptions of masculinity as well as preventing backlash against girls.
- 04. Strategies for mitigating backlash when it occurs include holding dialogues with community members and providing one-on-one support to girls and families who experience backlash.
- 05. Strong backlash management strategies should be in place from the time of program inception.
- 06. Media engagement and familiarity with programs go a long way in promoting positive attitudes and countering misinformation.
- 07. Research is needed that focuses directly on girls and draws insights on factors protecting girls from backlash.

**Responding organizations stress the importance of engaging parents, communities and government authorities more generally as a strategy to prevent backlash**

Generally, implementing organizations build rapport with some but not all stakeholders prior to and in the course of project implementation. Our findings suggest the importance of reaching the entire range of stakeholders at the family, community and institution levels. At the family level, given that the backlash experienced by girls is perpetrated largely by parents, the need to engage parents cannot be undermined; however, as our findings have shown, brothers and husbands of married girls have also placed obstacles in girls' way and must also be engaged. **Seeking consent from parents, informing them about program content, explaining the rationale for including sensitive topics and the advantages of empowering girls, allaying fears and concerns, as well as allowing parents to attend sessions, and providing them opportunities to observe their daughter's progress** are useful strategies, described by several organizations. This may both prevent parents from inhibiting their daughter's agency, and facilitate parental support for girls who experience backlash from others. Whatever the approach, direct and continuous interaction with parents is essential.

While parents are key in preventing backlash, so too are key community influentials, ranging from frontline health workers to teachers and school management committees to women's groups, religious leaders and locally elected representatives, as several organizations note. **Several organizations have described activities for involving community leadership, including religious leaders** and note that such activities serve as an important means of preventing backlash, and supporting girls and programs if adverse incidents take place.

In addition, organizations have unanimously underscored the importance of engaging with the authorities, and several have described their associations with the police, and with government representatives ranging from the

Chief Medical Officer to the District Collector and state level authorities. Organizations have not only informed the authorities of proposed programs, but have engaged the authorities in program activities. For example, **those in authority have been invited as speakers in program events and have demonstrated their support for empowering girls.** Likewise, girls participating in programs have made exposure visits to police stations, collectors' offices and health centers to become better acquainted with services to which they are entitled. These associations can go a long way in preventing backlash.

Another strategy to prevent backlash that was reported by responding organizations was the **inclusion of field staff from the community itself.** Qualitative data confirm that such a strategy promotes a sense of project ownership by the community, and can reduce suspicion and mistrust, but that it must be accompanied by a clarification of values and the generation of commitment to empowering the young.

Establishing rapport with the community leadership is indeed time consuming and must be undertaken both prior to implementing programs and to avoid backlash in the course of implementation. Training and orientation programs for frontline workers, teachers and locally elected representatives would go a long way in enabling them to become champions for empowering girls, and opposing hostile reactions from parents or others in the community. Given the patriarchal and gender-stratified context in which programs are implemented, and the fact that both community members as well as community influentials adhere to traditional gender norms, a sustained period of time during which inroads are made would be ideal.

## 02

### Presence of champions and positive role models may allay community fears.

The inclusion of champions and role models – girls and boys who have successfully deviated from traditional norms and expectations, and parents whose children have done so – can allay fears of the adverse consequences of breaking social norms. When champions and role models present their experiences in community settings, **they demonstrate that delaying marriage, achieving higher education or making their own life choices have not hurt their family's reputation**, but have instead brought prestige, economic support and additional opportunities to families.

## 03

### Programming for boys – in and out of school – is important for changing perceptions of masculinity as well as preventing backlash against girls

While empowering girls and changing their gender role attitudes is essential, it is equally important to reach boys and develop among them new notions of masculinity and femininity. On the one hand, boys exhibiting egalitarian gender roles also face backlash. Yet, as many narratives have suggested, the brothers and husbands of married girls often play a role in the backlash experienced by girls, and communities justify the seclusion of girls because of perceptions of potential harassment by boys. **Exposing boys to gender transformative ideas plays an important role in both changing their attitudes, as well as enabling them to perceive girls/sisters as equals, to take on roles previously considered female**, such as, for example, doing household chores, fetching water and so on, and to support girls facing backlash in any form. Of course, gender transformative life skills education programs for boys will have to be designed to be of interest to boys, and a simple replication of programs implemented for girls may not be acceptable to boys.

## 04

### Strategies for mitigating backlash when it occurs include holding dialogues with community members and providing one-on-one support to girls and families who experience backlash.

Strategies for addressing backlash when it occurs are generally similar to those advocated for prevention. Where it takes place against girls at the family level, immediate steps to hold discussions with parents, dispel misconceptions and draw parents into their daughter's activities may be helpful. Where it takes place against the parents of girls who exhibit agency or deviate from traditional norms of femininity, discussions must be held with neighbors and community members who pass negative comments, ostracize the family or react negatively in other ways. Where efforts at direct interaction are unsuccessful or where community level backlash takes place, engaging in a discussion with community members has proved effective in enabling understanding; support of local and state government authorities has also been an effective means of overcoming resistance to change. Several organizations have described these measures: **grievance redressal meetings, workshops for men, community meetings addressed by community leadership as well as block and district level authorities and addresses by girl and parent champions** can support program efforts to counteract adverse perceptions and reinforce the importance of empowering girls.

Program and community leadership support to those experiencing backlash is also important. **Several organizations have described how field staff supported girls who had been ridiculed or censured for expressing agency**, and educated families about how the positive features of girls' agency outweighed the negative reactions of community members. Community leadership, including **women's groups, local elected representatives and religious leaders also play an important role in supporting** positive deviant girls and families. The voice and presence of program staff members who are themselves from affected communities also serves to mitigate incidents of backlash.

05

### Strong backlash management strategies should be in place from the time of program inception

In order to be prepared to mitigate backlash when it occurs, investment in strong mitigation strategies from the time of program inception is critical, as many organizations have pointed out. **Procedures to recognize and address backlash when it occurs as well as measures that should be taken to address the backlash must be outlined**, and program implementers should be given orientation about these procedures. Important recommendations by responding organizations include the **adoption of a safety protocol to safeguard the physical security of field staff** and property, as well as a means of reporting and documenting incidents when they occur.

06

### Media engagement and familiarity with programs go a long way in promoting positive attitudes and countering misinformation.

The media can play an effective role in quashing misinformation that may lead to a backlash. Responding organizations have recommended that strong links be developed with the media, and that the **media be encouraged to report on local programs and their goals and impact**. So too, efforts to counter adverse, misleading and potentially dangerous messages via social media are needed. The media can also play an important role in developing social and behavior change communication strategies that promote positive attitudes and highlight the need for a supportive environment for adolescents.

07

### Research is needed that focuses directly on girls and draws insights on factors protecting girls from backlash

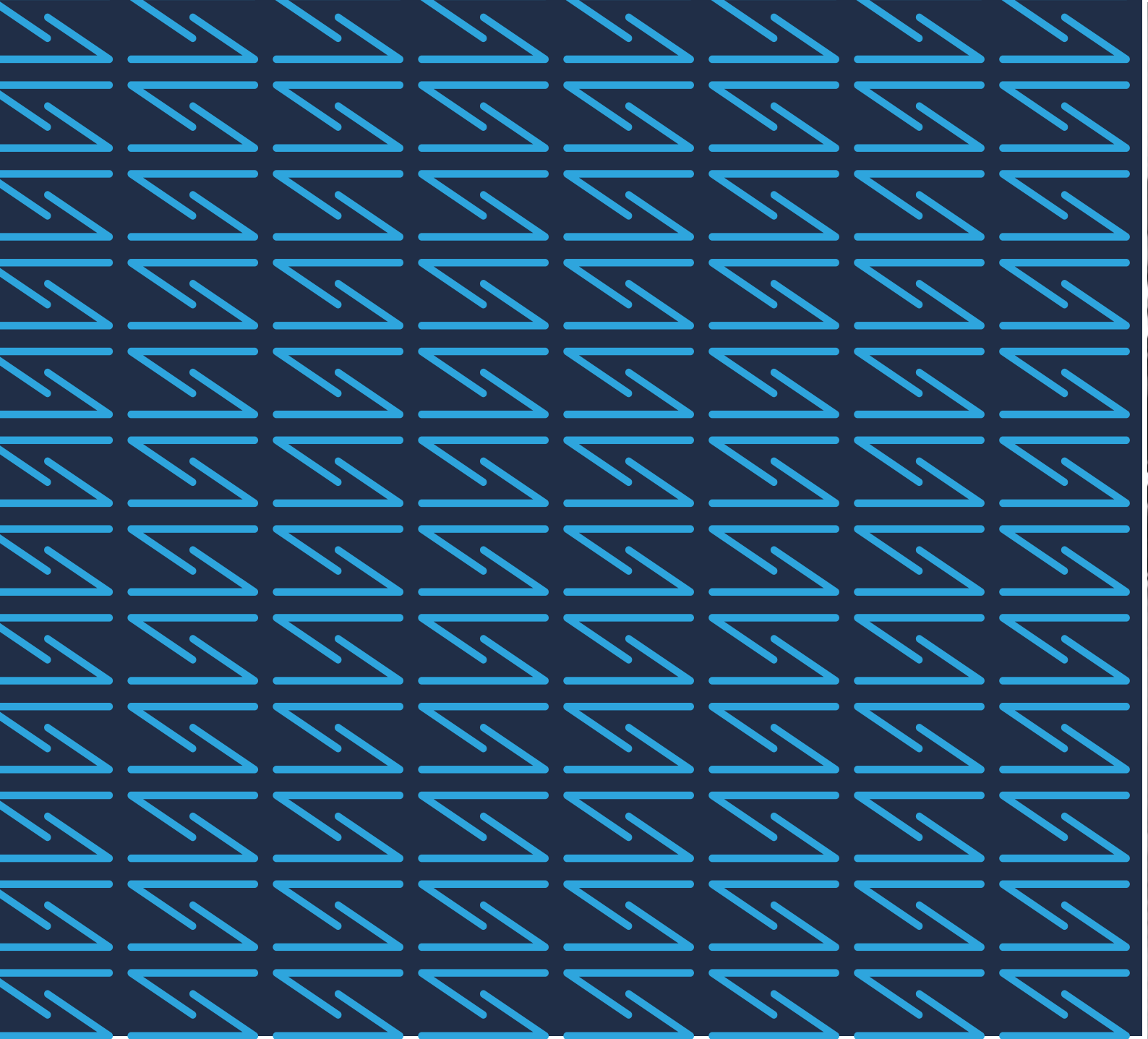
More rigorous research needs to be undertaken to build on these preliminary findings, and to shed light on the risk and protective factors surrounding the backlash against girls. Surveys and qualitative studies that address the situation and needs of the young, and **evaluations of programs serving the young should ideally include modules that explore the unintended adverse consequences of expressions of agency**, identify those most at risk of experiencing backlash, coping strategies, and the support systems that enable some girls to over-ride adverse consequences.

**In conclusion, this exploratory study has confirmed that youth-serving organizations are familiar with incidents of backlash perpetrated against girls. While the numbers of such incidents are typically a small fraction of the populations served, the forms of backlash reported to have been experienced by girls were diverse, severe and life-compromising. Youth-serving organizations themselves were subjected to backlash, mostly in the form of withdrawal of permissions and verbal abuse. While exploratory and descriptive, our findings have highlighted the pervasiveness of backlash against girls and youth-serving organizations, and call for more program and research attention to understanding and implementing strategies to prevent and address it.**

- Agarwal, Bina, Pradeep Panda. 2007. Toward freedom from domestic violence; the neglected obvious. *Journal of Human Development*, 9(3): 359-88.
- Blumberg, R. 2005. Women's economic empowerment as the 'Magic Potion' of development? Unpublished paper presented at the 100th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Philadelphia.
- Bueno, Cruz E. Caridad and A. Henderson. 2017. Bargaining or backlash? Evidence on intimate partner violence from the Dominican Republic. *Feminist Economics*, 23(10):1-27.
- Chowdhry, Prem. 2011. Reduction of violence against women: Property ownership and economic independence in rural Haryana. New Delhi: UN Women.
- Fraser, Erika M. 2012. Helpdesk Research Report: Economic Empowerment and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). Governance and Social Development Resource Centre. London: DFID.
- Gage, A. J. 2005. Women's experience of intimate partner violence in Haiti. *Social Science and Medicine*, 61(2): 343-364.
- Jejeebhoy, Shireen, K. G. Santhya, R. Acharya et al., 2017. Empowering women and addressing violence against them through self-help groups (SHGs). New Delhi: Population Council.
- Jejeebhoy, Shireen, K. G. Santhya and S. Sabarwal. 2013. Gender-based violence: A qualitative exploration of norms, experiences and positive deviance. New Delhi: Population Council.
- Jejeebhoy, Shireen J. 1998. Wife beating in rural India: A husband's right? Evidence from survey data. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(15): 855-862.
- Jewkes, Rachel, J Levin and L. Penn-Kekana. 2002. Risk factors for domestic violence: findings from a South African cross-sectional study. *Social Science and Medicine*, 55(9): 1603-1617.
- Kishor, Suneeta and K. Johnson, 2004. Profiling domestic violence: A multi-country study. Calverton, Maryland: ORC Macro.
- Koenig, M. A., S. Ahmed, M. Hossain et al., 2003. Women's status and domestic violence in rural Bangladesh: Individual and community level effects. *Demography*, 40(2): 269-288.
- Krishnan, Sunita, C. Rocca, A Hubbard et al., 2010. Do changes in spousal employment status lead to domestic violence? Insights from a prospective study in Bangalore, India. *Social Science and Medicine*, 70(1): 136-143.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin and Earl Raab. 1978. *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mansbridge, Jane and Shauna L. Shames. 2008. Toward a Theory of Backlash: Dynamic Resistance and the Central Role of Power. *Politics and Gender*: 4(4): 623-634.
- Rahman, M., M. Aminol Hoque and S Makindoda. 2011. Intimate partner violence against women: Is women empowerment a reducing factor? A study from a national Bangladeshi sample. *Journal of Family Violence*, 26(5): 411-420.
- Rudman, Laurie A., Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, Peter Glick et al, 2012. Reactions to vanguards: Advances in backlash theory. In P.G.Devine and E. A. Plant (Eds.). *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. New York: Academic Press, pp. 167-227.
- Rudman, Laurie A and Julie E. Phelan. 2008. Backlash effects for disconfirming gender stereotypes in organizations. In A. P. Brief and B. M. Staw (Eds). *Research on Organizational Behaviour*. New York: Elsevier, pp. 61-79.
- Rural Women's Social Education Centre (RUWSEC) and Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW). 2016. Religious Fundamentalism and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in South India. Kanchipuram and Kuala Lumpur: RUWSEC and ARROW.
- Santhya, K.G., Nicole Haberland and A.K. Singh. 2006. 'She knew only when the garland was put around her neck': Findings from an exploratory study on early marriage in Rajasthan. New Delhi: Population Council.
- Schuler, S., S. Hashemi and S. Badal. 1998. Men's violence against women in rural Bangladesh: Undermined or exacerbated by microcredit programs? *Development in Practice*, 8(2): 148-157.
- Vyas, S. and C. Watts., 2009. How does economic empowerment affect women's risk of intimate partner violence in low and middle-income countries? A systematic review of published evidence. *Journal of International Development*, 21(5): 577-602.

Dasra would like to extend its sincere thanks to all organizations listed below who made invaluable contributions to this report.

Akshara Centre	International Center for Research on Women
Antarang Foundation	Ipas Development Foundation
Apnalaya	Jabala Action Research Organization
Auroville Village Action Group: Eco Femme	Jan Sahas Social Development Society
Avasara Academy	Jhpeigo
Azad Foundation	Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences
Bhartiya Kisan Sangh Ranchi	Karnataka Health Promotion Trust
Breakthrough	Kherwadi Social Welfare Association
Bright Future (New Resolution India)	Learning Links Foundation
Center for Catalyzing Change	Lend-A-Hand India
Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research	Magic Bus
Child in Need Institute	Mahila Housing Trust
Child Rights and You	Mentor Together
Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group	Milaan Foundation
Comprehensive Rural Health Project, Jamkhed, Maharashtra	Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra
Corstone	Naz Foundation
CREA	Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support
Development Consortium: Love Matters	Plan International (India Chapter)
Doosra Dashak: Foundation for Education and Development	Population Foundation India
Dream a Dream	Pravah
Educate Girls	Praxis
Ekjut	Protsahan India Foundation
Ekta Resource Centre for Women	Quest Alliance
Engender Health	Restless Development
Equal Community Foundation	Saath Charitable Trust
ETASHA Society	SAHAJ
FXB India Suraksha	SEWA Bharat
Gramalaya	Shelter Associates
Gramin Evam Nagar Vikas Parishad	Snehalaya
HAQ Center for Child Rights	Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action
Health And Education Alternative Development Studies	Swayam
Ibtada	Tathapi
Impact India Foundation	The YP Foundation
Institute for Reproductive Health	Udayan Care
Institute of Health Management Pachod	Vacha Charitable Trust
Integrated Development Foundation	Vikramshila Education Resource Society
	Vishakha




# 10to19

DASRA ADOLESCENTS COLLABORATIVE



[www.dasra.org](http://www.dasra.org)

 /company/dasra

 [info@dasra.org](mailto:info@dasra.org)

 @dasra

 /dasra

Registered as Impact Foundation (India), 80C, AAAT14223, FCRA 083781025, CIN No.: U91110MH2001NPL130603  
Address: Fl, 1st Floor, Opposite G5A, Laxmi Woollen Mills Estate, Shakti Mills Lane, Off Dr. E. Moses Road, Jacob Circle, Mahalaxmi  
(West), Mumbai 400011, Maharashtra | Ph: 022 6120 0400. | Website: [www.dasra.org](http://www.dasra.org) | Email: [info@dasra.org](mailto:info@dasra.org)