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PLAN-IT GIRLS
EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Understanding the Influence of Plan-It Girls and the Lived Experiences of Program Participants | A Qualitative Inquiry

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
BMGF	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
DEO	District Education Officer
DoE	Directorate of Education
EVGCB	Educational, Vocational, Guidance and Counseling Bureau
GBSSS	Government Boys Senior Secondary Schools
GEMS	Gender Equity Movement in Schools
GGSSS	Government Girls Senior Secondary Schools
GNCT	Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi
HOSs	Heads of Schools
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
NSDC	National Skill Development Corporation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
P.A.C.E.	Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement Program
P.A.G.E.	Planning Ahead for Girls' Empowerment and Employability
PRIs	Panchayat Raj Institutions
RD	Restless Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHGs	Self-help Groups
SMCs	School Management Committees
YFs	Youth Facilitators
YRC	Youth Resource Center

Adolescent girls attending the career fair in Jharkhand schools as part of the program

Executive Summary

Women's labor force participation is recognized as both a critical driver and an outcome of economic growth and development with lasting dividends for families, communities, countries and women (Verick, 2014). The declining rate of female labor force participation in India has been attributed to inequitable gender norms, poor access to quality education and skilling opportunities and poor linkages to the labor market. Despite improvements in school enrolment rates, girls are left out of economic participation, which is pivotal to achieving empowerment and gender equality.

Studies indicate a connection between self-efficacy, agency, social norms, and labour force participation and economic decision-making (McKelway, 2018; Menon, et al., 2019). Similarly, literature around interventions with adolescents suggests that life skills and gender-equitable attitudes build women's agency (Chang et al., 2020). Furthermore, interventions that engage multiple stakeholders including families, schools and communities, shift gender norms and ensure that girls have access to education and the skills necessary to obtain and retain quality employment. A study by Nanda et.al., (2013) reinforced the need to integrate a gender lens and create an enabling ecosystem in adolescent programs.

Plan-It Girls: Empowerment and Employability for Adolescent Girls

Plan-It Girls is a multi-level and multi-stakeholder program that seeks to build agency of adolescent girls and promote gender equality to support their aspirations. The program design accounts for the ecosystems of girls' social environments, including their peers, families, schools and broader communities and places the girls themselves at the center. Over a two-year period, girls in Classs 9 and 11 were equipped with a gender perspective and life and employability skills to help them transition from school to work. Stakeholders including male peers, parents, teachers and community members were engaged with to create an enabling environment for girls to reach their potential. The program was implemented in ten secondary schools in Delhi and in ten schools in two districts of Jharkhand— Deoghar and Pakur. The diversity of these sites allowed testing the model for impact in both urban and rural setting.

A mixed-method evaluation study was conducted by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to assess the impact of the Plan-It Girls' program both in Delhi and Jharkhand. A younger cohort of girls from Class 9–10 and an older cohort of girls from Class 11–12 were enrolled for the quantitative study which comprised a baseline and endline survey conducted with enrolled girls from both program intervention schools and comparison schools.

Study Design

The differential impact on the girls by age group and location that was observed in the impact evaluation study needed to be unpacked further. A qualitative research study was therefore undertaken to further inform and supplement the findings of the quantitative study. This qualitative study helped understand the effects of the program on the girls, boys, parents, teachers and community members who participated. It also intended to gain an understanding of the involvement of the participants, their experience of participating in the program, feedback and recommendations on if or how the program could be improved for future implementation and scale-up.

Research Objectives: The qualitative research study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How did the Plan-It Girls program influence the lives of program participants including adolescent girls, boys, parents, teachers and community members?

- What was the experience of participating in Plan-It Girls activities — for program participants and the youth facilitators who implemented the program?

Research Respondents and Research Methods

In order to understand the effectiveness of the program and the experience of the program participants, the study was aimed at all the participant stakeholders. A combination of group-based data collection methods (focus group discussions and workshops) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with selected participants was employed for data collection.

With adolescent girls, workshops were chosen as the method to gain insights into their experience of participating in the Plan-It Girls program. The workshops gave girls the platform to critically reflect on the content, method, lessons and influence the program had on their lives through fun activities like drawing, ranking and storytelling. To garner detailed insights into the barriers and enablers to girls' aspirations and their plans for the future and the influence of the program on their lived realities, the workshops were further complemented with in-depth interviews. IDIs were also conducted with the male peers of the girls, youth facilitators who transacted the program and teachers and heads of schools who participated in the program. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with mothers in Delhi and community members in Jharkhand to gather insights into their perspectives and opinions about the program, and their support for girls' education and employability.

A total of 43 girls participated in Delhi and 44 girls in Jharkhand, 12 boys each in Delhi and Jharkhand, 44 mothers in Delhi, 127 community members in Jharkhand,

10 teachers in Delhi and eight teachers in Jharkhand, six YFs in Delhi and eight YFs in Jharkhand participated in the study activities. A total of 115 respondents in Delhi and 199 respondents in Jharkhand participated in the study.

Study Findings

The study findings for both Delhi and Jharkhand highlighted that the adolescent girls who participated in the program had shown improvement in their confidence to negotiate for choices, felt more comfortable with puberty and bodily changes and were able to locate gender discrimination in the context of patriarchy. However, the younger girls in Delhi and older girls in Jharkhand showed greater inclination toward career and financial independence with varied motivations based on their context.

While other program participants — boys, mothers and community members — articulated that girls should be educated, the main reason remains entrenched in gender norms that prioritize marriage for girls.

Despite the wide contextual variation in Delhi and Jharkhand, the gendered realities of the girls remain similar. Girls are expected to be the beacons of family honor and all the critical decisions of their life are tied to it. Most stakeholders in the girls' ecosystem do not see her as an economic entity and conceive of women working only in 'dire scenarios' when the girl should be able to use her education if required.

The primacy of marriage across the urban-rural spectrum and its linkage with family honor is a critical barrier for girls to pursue education or a career. While girls have initiated negotiations within the family for allowing them to continue their education and delaying marriage, it may not immediately translate into girls entering the labor force, despite having acquired the skills that are required to enter the workplace.

Education was perceived as an essential quality deemed useful for finding a 'good match' and in the case of single

or working women in Delhi and rare cases in Jharkhand, parents were more supportive of girls' education and for them to work and be financially independent.

The adolescent girls who participated in the program had never had the opportunity to think of having an identity of their own, irrespective of the location. The program curriculum that was transacted helped them develop an understanding of **self-identity**, improved their **self-esteem** and gave them **confidence** to interact with people around them. The program also equipped them with the conceptual understanding of gender, power and patriarchy. It was observed that these terms became part of the girls' vocabulary. Across program sites, girls referred to **gender**, *satta* (power) and *pitrasatta* (patriarchy) as being responsible for the discrimination they face within their families and in the community. While girls were always aware of the differential treatment of girls and boys, and accepted these practices, the newly acquired language and knowledge helped them recognize the root of discrimination and thus challenge the prevalent practices.

In Delhi, while most of the adolescent girls want to work, the opportunities that older girls see for themselves are still limited to 'traditional' skills that have greater possibility of being pursued from home even after marriage, which for most of them is an impending reality. In contrast, since marriage is not an immediate life event for younger girls, they aspire to engage in professions that they are interested in and have a clearer understanding of the plan.

In Jharkhand, during the qualitative study, it was observed that both younger and older adolescent girls felt that it was necessary to be economically independent in order to ensure that they are not controlled by and entirely dependent on their in-laws. Older girls were able to identify and had decided their career choices like teaching, police force and nursing and were in the process of identifying how to apply and what

to study for it. This was also driven by a sense of urgency and a greater conviction in using education as a tool to negotiate delay in marriage. Younger girls, however, had a generic idea about wanting to 'be something' but were unclear about the steps to be undertaken to fulfill their aspirations. They were also aware of the limited support from the parents.

In Jharkhand, the school climate showed significant improvement. The teachers, community and the girls confirmed that the program was able to improve the school environment for girls.

The need to start earlier has again been emphasized by the findings of the study in both Delhi and Jharkhand. While in Delhi, younger girls showed greater change, in Jharkhand it was evident that younger girls needed more support and input to be able to aspire and plan for their future.

Teachers, both in Delhi and Jharkhand, suggested that it would be best to provide relevant inputs to girls at a younger age. This would make it easier to shape their attitudes and also give them a longer window of opportunity to be able to plan their future and negotiate their choices.

The study underscores the need for a comprehensive ecosystem approach for enhancing the agency of adolescent girls, amplifying their voice and building employability skills. It is critical to create an enabling environment by fostering equitable attitudes and providing support to access opportunities for girls to be able to translate their efforts into gainful and dignified employment.

The key considerations for future programming focusing on empowerment and employability of adolescent girls are as follows:

Implications for Adolescent Programming

1. As investment in adolescent girls is gradually increasing, it needs to be recognized that these programs not only equip girls with knowledge and skills, but also create an enabling environment for them.

2. Greater investment is required to create behavior change among boys and men as it is evident that an understanding of privileges among boys and men does not always translate to them giving up their privileges and creating an equitable environment.

3. There is a need for an ecosystem approach especially when the agenda is to shift the norms. Greater inputs need to be provided to all the critical stakeholders to address structural inequality, along with equipping individuals with the required information and skills. Further, investment in research and programs must be made with the intent to shift norms.

4. As part of the ecosystem approach, it is essential to develop and promote the school as a safe space for adolescents. Teachers could also become greater allies in creating an equitable and safe space within schools.

5. Aspirations to educate girls and the dream to attain better socioeconomic status could provide an opportunity to further the cause of girls' engagement in work outside home.

6. Mothers could be potential allies as they seem to have a more favorable attitude towards their daughters. Women's collectives could be leveraged along with intergenerational programming to create allies for adolescent girls.

Girls on their way to class in a school in Delhi

Section 1:
Setting the Context

Adolescents (10–19 years) form 20.9 percent of the total population in India[1] of which 52.7 percent are boys and 47.3 percent are girls. This age group is considered critical as it marks the developmental transition from childhood to adulthood socially, economically, biologically and sets the stage for adult life. India has a unique opportunity for economic growth owing to this demographic dividend, which can be utilized only if adolescents are equipped with the technical skills, education and attitude to accelerate economic growth.[2]

In 2004–2005, the gross enrollment ratio[3] (GER) for secondary school girls (Class 9–10, 14–15 years) was 45.3 percent as against 57.4 percent among boys (Figure 1). This number increased to 81 percent for girls and 79.2 percent for the boys in 2015–2016. Similarly, for senior secondary school (Class 11–12, 16–17 years), the GER increased to 56 percent for both girls and boys in 2015–2016 from 24.5 percent for girls and 30.8 percent for boys (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio for Senior Secondary School (9-10), 14-15 years
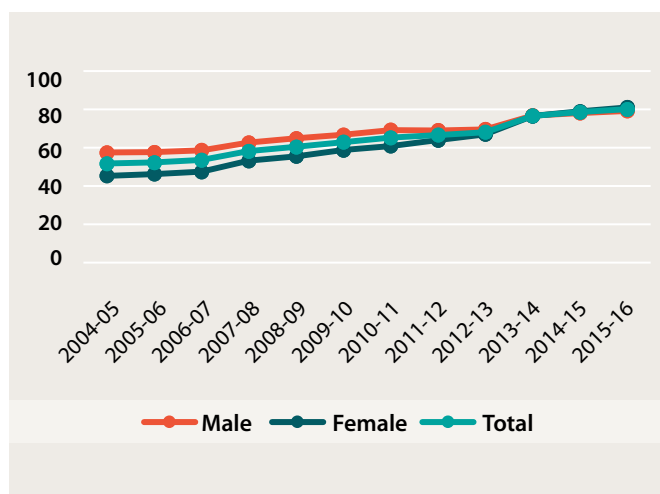
Figure 2: Gross Enrollment Ratio for Senior Secondary School (11–12), 16–17 years

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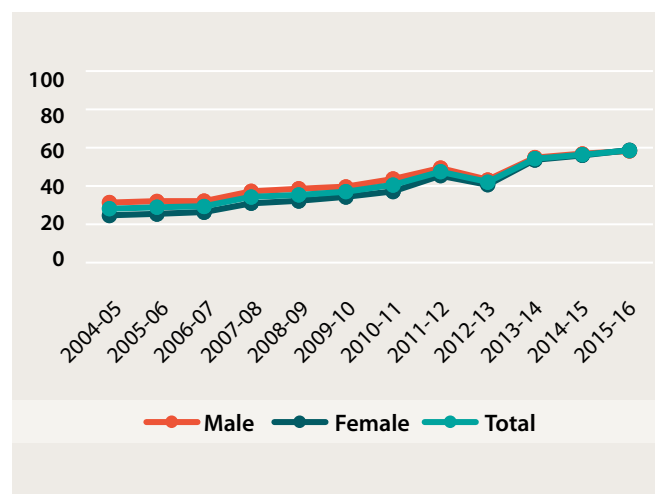
1 Table C-13, Single Year Age Returns by Residence and Sex: Census of India 2011
2 UNFPA India. Ninth Country Programme Highlights — India Country Office at a Glance. Retrieved from https://india.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Profile_combined.pdf
3 Gross Enrollment Ratio is defined as 'Number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education. For the tertiary level, the population used is the 5-year age group starting from the official secondary school graduation age.' Please refer to UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Glossary. Gross Enrolment Ratio. UNESCO. Retrieved from: http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/gross-enrolment-ratio

While the GER for higher education (18–23 years) has also seen an increase during this period, it still remains at 25 percent for boys and 23.5 percent for girls.[4] It was also observed that the work participation rate (WPR) of adolescents (10–19 years) declined from 19.2 in 2001 to 14.9 percent in 2011 (Figure 3).[5] The increase in GER and decline in WPR of adolescents indicates that more adolescents are opting to continue education. The WPR in the age group of 15–24 years (Figure 4) also saw a decline in the same period (42.4 percent in 2001 to 36.9 percent in 2011).

However, it is striking that while the GER for females is marginally low across categories, the gender disparity in WPR for the 15–24 age group is significant: 47.5 percent males vs. 25.4 percent females.[6] The downward trend for female labor force participation in India has been attributed to various factors including lack of employment opportunities and lack of access to skills.

Due to deeply entrenched gender inequalities, women and girls have poor access to education and receive few opportunities for acquiring skills that could facilitate their entry into the labor market. Low education and skills among women often translates into 'distress driven' work to support families.[7] They often take up work in the informal economy, which is primarily unskilled, poorly paid and lacks both benefits and opportunities for advancement.[8] Therefore, it is not enough to get women into work. It is important to be able to intervene during adolescence and give girls the education and skills they need to obtain and retain quality employment.[9]

Longitudinal studies have established that aspirations during adolescence in combination with educational attainments, identity formation including agency and skills, and an enabling environment have an impact on occupational development of young people (Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Bynner, 1998; Kashefpakdel & Percy,

Figure 3: Work Participation Rate among 10-19 Yrs
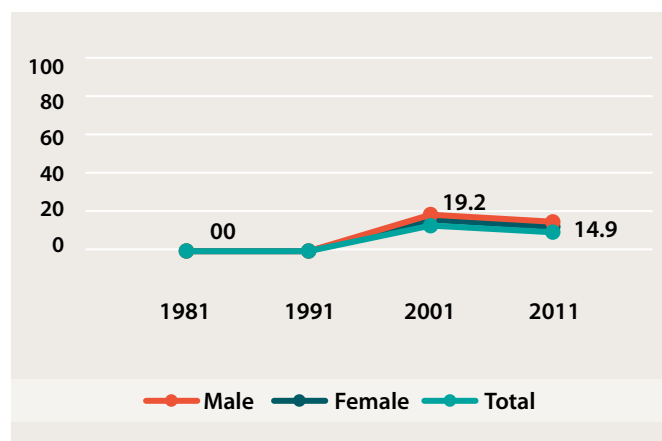
Figure 4: Work Participation Rate among 15-24 Yrs
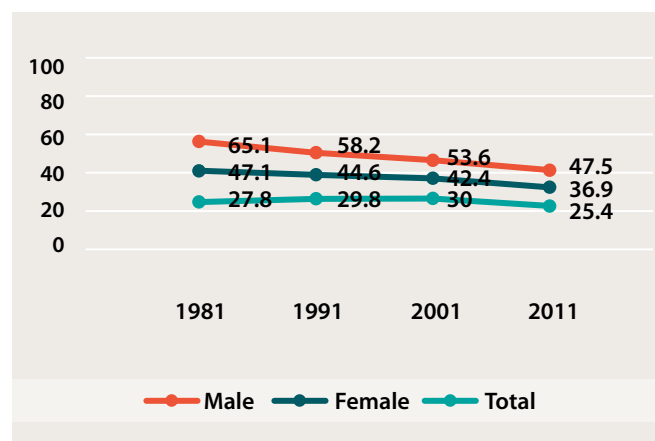
4   Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). (2018). Educational statistics at a glance. Government of India. New Delhi: Department of School Education & Literacy, Statistics Division. Retrieved from: https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/ESAG-2018.pdf

5   UNFPA India. A profile of adolescents and youth in India. Available at: https://india.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pubpdf/AProfileofAdolescentsandYouthinIndia_0.pdf.

6   Ibid.

7   Chaudhary, R. & Verick, S. (2014). Female labor force participation in India and beyond. ILO Asia- Pacific Working Paper Series. ILO. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_324621.pdf

8   Verick, S. (2014). Female labor force participation in developing countries. IZA World of Labor. DOI: 10.15185/izawol.87.

9   Ibid.

Girls lining up for assembly at the start of the school day- Delhi

2016; OECD, 2018).[10] A World Bank study in Jharkhand found that almost all girls want to complete higher secondary education and 86 percent girls want to work for pay outside home. The analysis established that girls' educational and employment aspirations are determined by their self-efficacy and mental health, which are considered critical elements of 'human capital'. The study also found that an enabling and supportive environment is an important correlate of self-efficacy.[11]

ODI's 2016 report identified ten enabling or constraining factors for economic empowerment of women including education, skills development and training, access to quality decent work and gender norms.[12] The literature establishes that self-efficacy, aspirations, skills and an enabling environment are key to economic empowerment of adolescent girls. ICRW's 2013 scoping study also revealed that programs for adolescent girls need to integrate a gender lens and create an enabling ecosystem along with ensuring market linkages to be able to create livelihood opportunities.[13]

10   Schoon, I. & Parsons, S. (2002). Teenage Aspirations for Future Careers and Occupational Outcomes. Journal of Vocational Behavior. Volume 60, Issue 2, Pages 262-288. Retrieved from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0001879101918676; Bynner, John. (1998). Education and Family Components of Identity in the Transition from School to Work. International Journal of Behavioral Development. 22. 29-53. 10.1080/016502598384504. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232444408_Education_and_Family_Components_of_Identity_in_the_Transition_from_School_to_Work; Kashefpakdel, E. T., & Percy, C. (2017). Career education that works: An economic analysis using the British Cohort Study. Journal of Education and Work, 30(3), 217-234.DOI: https://doi.org/1.1080/13639080.2016.1177636; and Mann, A., Denis, V., Schleicher, A., Ekhtiari, H., Forsyth, T., Liu, E. & Chambers, N. (2020). Dream Jobs? Teenagers' Career Aspirations and the Future of Work. OECD. Retrieved from: https://www.oecd.org/berlin/publikationen/Dream-Jobs.pdf

11   Roy, S. & Morton, M. H. & Bhattacharya, S. (2016). Hidden Human Capital: Psychological empowerment and adolescent girls' aspirations in India. Policy Research Working Paper Series. 7792. The World Bank. Retrieved from: https://ideas.repec.org/p/wbk/wbrwps/7792.html

12   Hunt, A. & Samman, E. (2016). Women's economic empowerment— Navigating enablers and constraints. Research report. Overseas Development Institute. Retrieved from: https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/10683.pdf

13   Nanda, P., Das, P., Singh, A. & Negi, R. (2013). Addressing Comprehensive Needs of Adolescent Girls in India: A Potential for Creating Livelihoods. New Delhi, International Center for Research on Women.

Section 2:
Plan-It Girls: Empowerment and Employability for Adolescent Girls

Plan-It Girls was designed as a multi-level, multi-stakeholder intervention aimed to build agency of adolescent girls in the age group of 14–17 years, to equip them with life and employability skills and to create an enabling environment. The program intended to create a pool of adolescent girls who had the 'life skills and employability skills' to make the transition from school to work. Evidence suggests that equipping girls with skills is necessary, but not sufficient for this transition as gender inequities limit their choices and opportunities. This implied that a program like Plan-It Girls must intervene not only with adolescent girls but with all the stakeholders who influence their choices and make decisions for them, thus creating an enabling environment.

As a gender transformative program, Plan-It Girls postulated that a gender integrated life skills and employability skills personal advancement curriculum for adolescent girls—P.A.C.E. for Adolescents curriculum[14]—will improve self-esteem and self-efficacy and foster a gender equitable attitude along with greater involvement in decision-making, seeking parental support and aspirations for being an economic entity. The curriculum has two key domains –Empowerment that includes two modules on 'Self' and 'Self-Efficacy' and Employability that comprises two modules on 'Resourcefulness' and 'Employability.'

P.A.C.E. curriculum is a 34-hour curriculum focusing on two domains:

Empowerment

- Self – Identity and Awareness, Gender, Power and Patriarchy, Body Integrity, and Emotions and Relationships.

- Self-Efficacy – Communication, Power and Relationship, and Understanding Violence.

Employability

- Resourcefulness – Gender and Aspirations, Aspiration Mapping and Goal Setting, and Skills.

- Employability – Preparing for Work, Work Management, and Entrepreneurship.

It was expected that the curriculum would equip girls with life and employability skills so that they could plan and achieve their aspirations and learn financial management and skills to conduct themselves in the workplace. The girls would also be provided information and platforms to create linkages with locally available opportunities. To support self-transformation in girls and a smooth

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14 The first draft of P.A.C.E. Curriculum for Older Adolescent Girls was developed by ICRW as part of an intervention research project 'Planning Ahead for Girls Empowerment and Employability' (PAGE) supported by MacArthur Foundation. The curriculum was revisited and reviewed through learning circles with Youth Facilitators. The curriculum was further adapted for Gap Inc.'s P.A.C.E. for Adolescents Curriculum by ICRW. ICRW is a licensed partner of Gap Inc. and used the curriculum as part of Plan-It Girls program.

school-to-work transition with an enabling environment, gender relations in family and school would also need to be influenced, along with structural changes in the community and institutions. This integrated approach of equipping girls with life and employability skills, information about linkages and an enabling environment was expected to improve their perception of self, gender roles, gender division of labor and family support, and reflect in their aspirations and belief in their ability to pursue their dreams.

2.1 PROGRAM SITES AND REACH

The Plan-It Girls program was implemented in partnership with Restless Development and Pravah in 20 secondary schools (ten girls' schools and ten boys' schools) in Delhi[15] and in ten co-educational secondary schools in two districts of Jharkhand – Deoghar and Pakur. The diversity of these sites allowed for testing the model in both an urban and a rural setting. Plan-It aimed to reach out to 10,000 girls and their male peers; therefore government schools that catered to both girls and boys were considered for program implementation.

Urban site: Delhi is the capital of India and is primarily urban. Rapid growth and urbanization in Delhi provide opportunities for livelihood. According to Census 2011, Delhi receives the second largest number of migrants and 10 percent of Delhi's population lives in slums.[16] The literacy rate is 86.3 percent with female literacy at 80.93 percent.[17] Delhi has 26 universities and close to 200 institutions of higher learning, thus providing immense opportunities for higher education. Also, the emphasis on strengthening the school education system has seen great investment in both school infrastructure and human resources.

Figure 1: South East District, Delhi

South East District, Delhi

In Delhi, government schools where girls and boys studied in the same premise, but in different shifts, were considered. In consultation with the Directorate of Education, it was decided to select one education zone that had at least ten schools. Only two education zones in Delhi had ten or more such schools. Based on the data available from the Directorate, ten sets of girls and boys schools in the South East District (Figure 5) were randomly selected for implementing the program.

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15 Government Girls Senior Secondary Schools (GGSSS) and Government Boys Senior Secondary Schools (GBSSS) run in shifts in the same school premise and use common school building. Plan-It Girls was implemented in 10 GGSS schools and their corresponding 10 GBSS schools, thus being implemented in 20 schools in Delhi.

16 Census of India. (2001). Data Highlights — Migration Tables (D1, D1 (Appendix), D2 and D3). Retrieved from: http://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Data_Highlights/Data_Highlights_link/data_highlights_D1D2D3.pdf

17 Census of India. (2011). Chapter-6 —State of Literacy: Figures, Maps, Tables, Statements. Retrieved from: https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf

The schools that were selected in the South East District were located in Zone 29 which comprised slum and resettlement localities like Madanpur Khadar, Molarband, Badarpur and Jasola. This zone is part of the South Delhi constituency, which has one of the lowest sex ratios—868 per 1,000 males in Delhi—despite the female literacy rate being 80 percent. Over 15 percent of the population belongs to the scheduled castes.

Rural site: Jharkhand was identified as the state for rural implementation. It was crucial to select specific districts for implementation of the program. In consultation with the implementation partner Restless Development, two districts (Figure 6) were selected based on available data. Both Deoghar and Pakur are primarily rural districts but Pakur has a higher tribal population. Female literacy is at 51 percent in Deoghar, while in Pakur, it is as low as 40 percent. In both the districts—Deoghar (61 percent) and Pakur (40 percent)—the percentage of women married before 18 years of age is higher than the state average of 38 percent.

Restless Development formed the decision based on their understanding of the enrollment in government schools, accessibility, communities around these schools, availability of resources for higher education and employment. It was also suggested that these are non left-wing extremism (LWE) affected districts and thus implementation of the project will be feasible.

Before the program was initiated, the teachers in most intervention schools reported that the girls do not attend school regularly. This was attributed to the distance of the schools. This claim was substantiated by the baseline

Figure 2: Rural Site – Jharkhand

survey where girls reported that they missed school on an average of 14 days in a month because of household work, health issues and distance.

Plan-It Girls was intended to be implemented over a period of two years (Table 1). It was expected to be initiated with girls in Classes 9 and 11, to be followed through Classes 10 and 12 respectively.

Table 1: Number of Girls and Boys who Participated in the Program

Program Sites	Year 1: 2017			Year 2: 2018		
	Class 9	Class 11	Total	Class 10	Class 12	Total
Delhi: Girls	4,520	2,601	7,121	2,272	1,978	4,250
Delhi: Boys	-	-	-	2,312	1,338	3,650
Jharkhand: Girls	-	-	-	997	497	1,494
Jharkhand: Boys	-	-	-	1,047	556	1,603

The program reached a total of 5,744 girls and 5,253 boys across Delhi and Jharkhand in Year 2. In Delhi, when the program was initiated in the girls' schools, the total number of enrolled girls was 7,121. However, it was observed that the failure rate of girls in Class 9 was as high as 50 percent and close to 30 percent in Class 11. Hence, only 50 percent of Class 9 girls and 70 percent of Class 11 girls could progress to Classes 10 and 12 respectively.

2.2 PLAN-IT GIRLS: PROGRAM DESIGN AND STRATEGIES

Based on the ecological approach, the program leveraged a gender-integrated life skills and employability skills personal advancement curriculum—P.A.C.E. Curriculum for Older Adolescents—tailored for girls in Classes 9 and 11. It also engaged principals and teachers, parents, male peers, community members, business leaders and policymakers to create an environment to support girls and their aspirations.

A multi-level and multi-stakeholder program, Plan-It Girls was conceptualized as an integrated model that provided inputs to girls, along with their male peers in the classroom separately, while simultaneously engaging with all the other critical stakeholders to create an enabling environment (Figure 7 Plan-It Girls: Program Stakeholders and Activities).

Table 2 details the specific program activities along with the similarities and differences in the type and frequency of activities undertaken in Delhi and Jharkhand. While the overall strategy remained similar, the activities undertaken in Delhi and Jharkhand varied owing to the contextual and geographical differences. For instance, in Jharkhand, the program was implemented in co-educational schools, unlike Delhi where the girls and boys studied in separate shifts, necessitating transaction of the P.A.C.E. curriculum with girls and the GEMS curriculum with boys in separate classrooms. Similarly, in Delhi the focus was on engaging with the mothers of the girls who participated in the program, which was not found feasible in Jharkhand.

Target Stakeholders

- COMMUNITY & LOCAL INSTITUTIONS
- TEACHERS
- PARENTS
- ADOLESCENT BOYS
- ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Key Activities

- Career fair for adolescent girls
- Jharkhand: Meetings with community members
- Jharkhand: adolescent-led campaign
- Delhi: Monthly sessions with teachers
- Jharkhand: Teachers' workshops
- Delhi: Four meetings with mothers
- GEMS curriculum
- P.A.C.E. curriculum

Table 2: Site-Specific Program Activities

Stakeholders	Activities in Delhi	Activities in Jharkhand
Girls	1 session per week. Career fair in every school.	2–3 sessions per week. Career fair in every school.
Boys	2-hour workshop per fortnight.	2–3 sessions per week.
School-based activities with girls and boys	-	Debate competition and skit competition.
Parents' engagement	• Formation of mothers' groups (30–40 mothers per group) for 4 weeks: weekly meetings were held on education of girls, early and child marriage, aspirations of mothers for their daughters, joint sessions with mothers and daughters to discuss daughters' aspirations. • Sessions with parents during Parent-Teacher meetings.	One-on-one meetings, group meetings in the community
Community engagement	Meetings with school management committee (SMC) members.	• Community meetings with local representatives, frontline health workers, community leaders, parents. • Door-to-door campaign, wall paintings and community rallies led by adolescents. • Role plays in the community.
Teachers	• Orientations for principals/heads of schools (HoS) and teachers. • In Year 1, monthly meetings with 10–15 teachers per school who teach Classes 9–12. • In Year 2, monthly meetings with 3–5 teachers who were identified as Gender Champions, followed by action projects. • Gender board in school. • Felicitation of Gender Champion teachers.	• Orientations for principals/HoS and teachers • A series of 3 workshops (2 days each) with teachers from intervention schools and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) teachers at the district level on: 1. Adolescence Sensitization 2. Gender Perspective 3. P.A.C.E. Curriculum

Therefore, in Jharkhand, community engagement and adolescent-led community campaigns were conducted.

The teacher engagement also varied across the two sites. In Delhi, the number of teachers per school was higher and the feasibility of holding workshops for teachers was ruled out after discussions with the heads of schools (HoS) and teachers. Also, formative discussions held with teachers revealed that they have attended gender sensitization annual workshops conducted by the Delhi State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT). This was unlike Jharkhand where the number of teachers per school ranged from 1–15 with very few women teachers and gender was not a topic of engagement in any of their trainings. Therefore, in Jharkhand, after consultation with the District Education Officer, it was decided to conduct district-level workshops with selected teachers who could become gender champions within the school.

One of the aims of Plan-It Girls was to provide information and platforms so girls could access further education or employment opportunities. The curriculum, therefore, focused on building their identity, their understanding of gender, power, patriarchy and developing their self-efficacy, communication skills and negotiation skills. It also aimed to increase their ability to recognize and deal with violence and discrimination in their lives, instill confidence in their own worth and in their own abilities

to succeed in specific situations. The Employability module of the curriculum provided an understanding of why it was important for women to work and how work is gendered. It helped them identify their aspirations and goals and prepare a pathway to achieve those goals while providing them with exposure to various opportunities for training and employment through career fairs. The career fairs were organized for all the intervention schools to provide information and expose girls to available training and job opportunities that are non-traditional and locally available. They also provided information and input from sector experts.

Along with the inputs to the girls, the school became a site of change where girls explored their identity and dreams, supported by their male peers and other critical stakeholders including parents, teachers and community leaders. In Delhi, mothers were engaged through group meetings and one-on-one meetings.

In Jharkhand, community-level meetings were organized. As part of the community engagement strategy, a series of meetings were conducted with panchayat leaders, where stakeholders like school teachers, representatives from Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) and Childline were also invited to provide information. The program team facilitated the discussion to help them identify and commit to possible actions to promote education and employment opportunities for girls and

prevent child marriage. This strategy also helped in creating a link between community, government and other NGOs.

The Youth Facilitators (YFs) who implemented the program were in the age range of 18–25 years and selected from similar communities and backgrounds to create a pool of young people who could build rapport, relate better and be more comfortable with sharing and discussing certain topics and issues. Both male and female YFs underwent rigorous training through the program period, which included building gender perspective, curriculum training and facilitation skills training. These trainings did not only provide inputs and knowledge, but also provided a safe space for trainers to share and reflect on their own stories, challenges and successes of the

program. The YFs became confidants and role models for the program participants.

The program tested an institution-based development model that, if successful, will ensure that girls enrolled in government schools gain the skills, competencies and linkages to make choices and fulfill their potential as they stand at the cusp of adulthood.

2.3 PLAN-IT GIRLS: THEORY OF CHANGE

The Theory of Change (Figure 8 displays the path adopted by Plan-It Girls to achieve the program outcomes through an integrated model using an ecological framework.

Figure 8: Theory of Change
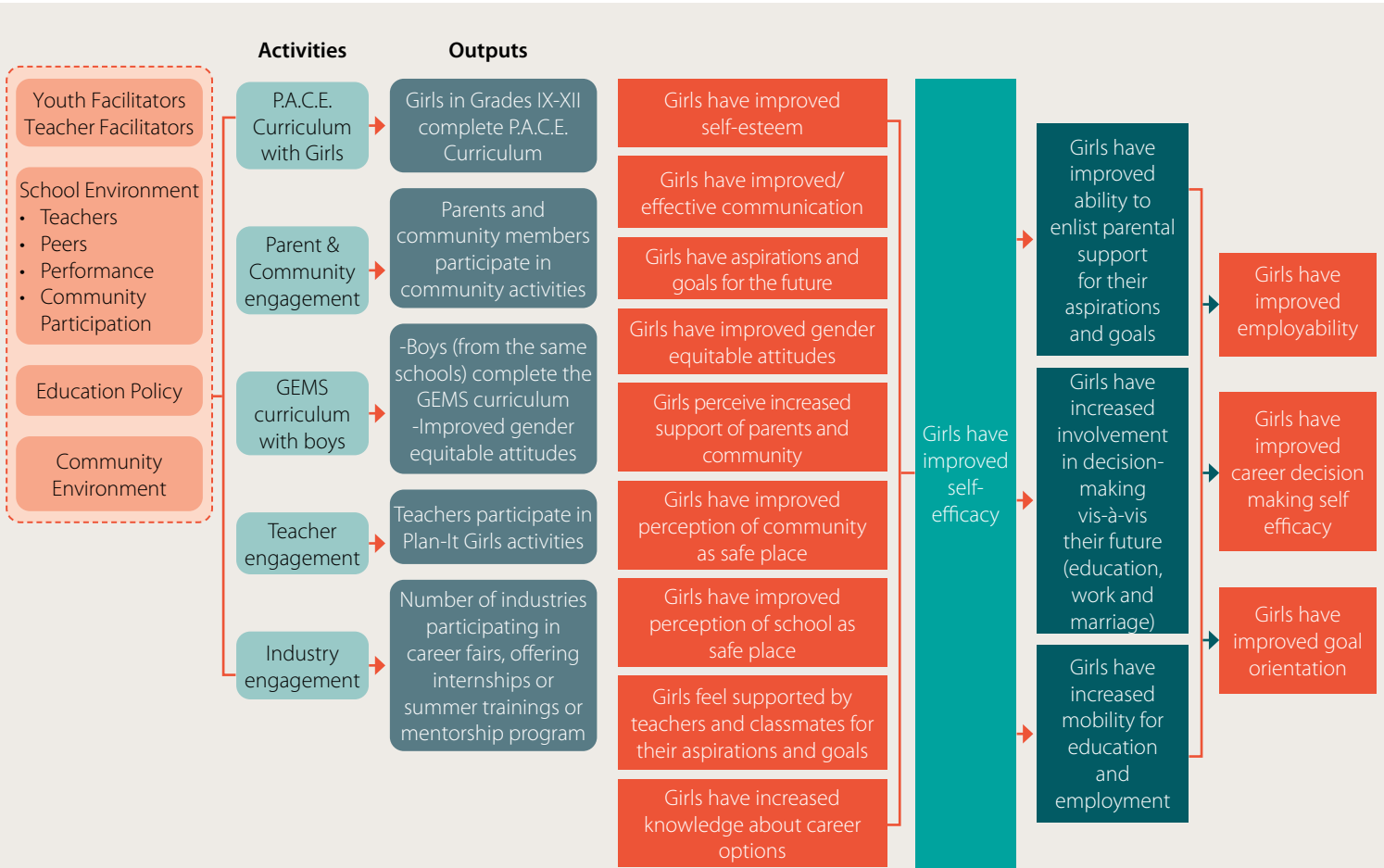
Figure 9: Evaluation Design
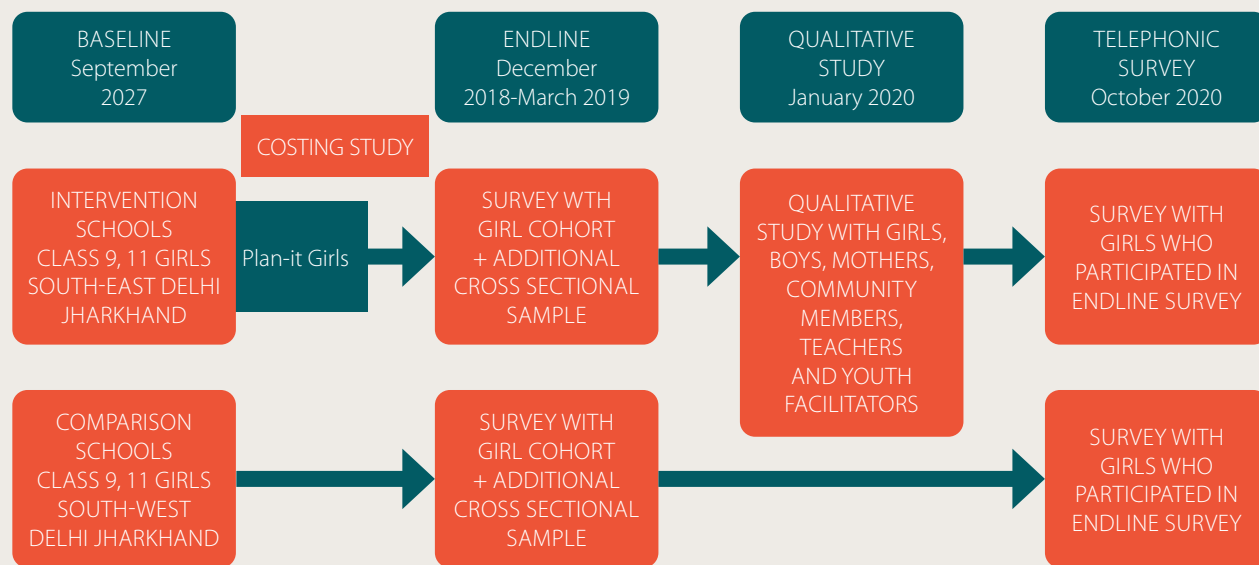
The underlying assumption was that in an integrated model, once a girl goes through the curriculum, she gains knowledge, perspective and skills that positively influence her attitudes, improve her self-efficacy and enhance her aspirations. Simultaneous inputs to the boys, parents, community and teachers create an enabling environment that builds greater involvement of the girl in the decision-making processes about her future and allows greater mobility. The exposure to local trainings, skill development courses and job opportunities improve her career related self-efficacy.

2.4 PROGRAM EVALUATION

To understand and assess the effect of the Plan-It Girls program, a quantitative evaluation study was conducted along with the additional components of a qualitative study and a program costing study (Figure 9). The impact evaluation was designed to measure the change in empowerment and employability indicators for girls along with their perception of their ecosystem, using the quasi-experimental longitudinal design, following two cohorts of girls – a younger cohort from Class 9 through Class 10 and the older cohort from Class 11 through Class 12.

The impact evaluation findings revealed that the program had differential impacts on girls from the younger and older cohorts and the impact varied by location. In Delhi, a significant positive shift was observed in self-esteem, gender attitudes and family support of both younger and older girls. However, only the younger girls showed a significant impact on employability indicators—economic self-efficacy and preparation to work in the future. In Jharkhand, it was observed that among the younger girls, self-esteem and self-efficacy improved significantly, while in the older cohort no significant shift was observed in self-esteem. Also, among the older adolescent girls, a significant positive change was observed in self-efficacy, career decision making self-efficacy and school climate.

Since the quantitative survey focused on measuring the change in key empowerment and employability indicators for girls as a result of participating in the program, it was supplemented with a qualitative study that was conducted after completion of all activities that were undertaken with other stakeholders.

Section 3:
Understanding the Effect of Plan-It Girls and the Lived Experiences of Program Participants

The differential impact on the girls by age group and location that was observed in the impact evaluation study needed to be unpacked further. A qualitative research study was therefore undertaken to further inform and supplement the findings of the quantitative study. This qualitative study helped understand the effects of the program on the girls, boys, parents, teachers and community members who participated. It also intended to gain an understanding of the involvement of the participants, their experience of participating in the program, feedback and recommendations on if or how the program could be improved for future implementation and scale-up.

3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The qualitative research study aimed to answer the following research questions:

• How did the Plan-It Girls program influence the lives of program participants including adolescent girls, boys, parents, teachers and community members?

• What was the experience of participating in Plan-It Girls activities – for program participants and the youth facilitators who implemented the program?

3.2 RESEARCH RESPONDENTS AND RESEARCH METHODS

In order to understand the effectiveness of the program and the experience of the program participants, the study was aimed at all the participant stakeholders. It assessed the following two aspects:

1. **Process-driven** – The influence of the program activities, including the content of the curriculum modules and the method of implementation for girls and boys.

2. **Experiential** – The effect of the program since its implementation in terms of subjective retention, understanding, feelings, attitudes, application, behaviors and value derived from the experience of participating in the program.

The study also delved deeper into understanding the reasons for the differential impact by age group and location on adolescent girls, as highlighted by the impact evaluation study. The attempt was to generate insights for both the rural and urban contexts. Various research methods (Table 3) were employed to achieve these objectives.

Table 3: Research Methods by Respondents and Sample Size

Respondents	Objective	Method
Adolescent Girls Age group 14–22 years who completed either Class 10 or 12 and participated in the Plan-It Girls program.	• To learn about their experience of participating in the program. • To understand the influence it has had on their lived realities. • To understand the barriers and enablers to girls' aspirations and plans for the future.	• Workshops with adolescent girls who attended the program in Delhi and Jharkhand. • In-depth interviews (IDIs) with girls.
Adolescent Boys Age group 14–22 years who completed either Class 10 or 12 and participated in the Plan-It Girls program.	• To learn about their experience of participating in the program. • To understand the influence this has had on their lived realities.	• IDIs with boys.
Youth Facilitators	• To understand the experiences of the youth facilitators, including the barriers and enablers in transacting the P.A.C.E. Curriculum with adolescent girls and the GEMS curriculum with adolescent boys in both program sites of Delhi and Jharkhand. • To document the challenges and lessons learnt.	• IDIs with youth facilitators (male and female).
Teachers/Heads of Schools who participated in teacher engagement activities.	• To understand the experiences of teachers who participated in the program. • To document the challenges and lessons learnt so as to strengthen the program.	• IDIs with teachers and heads of schools.
Mothers and Community Members **Delhi:** Mothers of the adolescent girls who participated. **Jharkhand:** Community members who participated in community engagement activities.	• To understand the perspective of mothers and community members regarding the Plan-It Girls program and the support it provided to the girls.	• Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with mothers in Delhi. • FGDs with community members, including panchayat members, parents of program participants, SHG group members and frontline workers in Jharkhand.

Detailed discussion guides developed by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) were used to capture the context, attitudes, perceptions, behavior, environment and outcomes pertaining to all the stakeholders. A combination of group-based data collection methods (Focus group discussions and workshops) and IDIs with selected participants was employed for data collection.

With adolescent girls, workshops were chosen as the method to gain insights into their experience of participating in the Plan-It Girls program. They were organized in two cohorts – girls who participated in the program when they were in Class 9/10 and those who were in Class 11/12. The workshops gave girls the platform to reflect critically on the content, method, lessons and influence the program had on their lives through fun activities like drawing, ranking and storytelling.

To garner detailed insights into the barriers and enablers to girls' aspirations and their plans for the future and the influence of the program on their lived realities, the workshops were further complemented with IDIs. In addition to direct questions, the IDI guides used projective techniques such as word association and mapping the timeline of a girl's life (third person technique) to delve deeper into attitudes and motivations that participants often do not articulate while responding to direct questions. IDIs were also conducted with the male peers of the girls, youth facilitators who transacted the program and teachers and heads of schools who participated in the program.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with mothers in Delhi and community members in Jharkhand to gather insights into their perspectives and opinions about the program, and their support for girls' education and employability.

3.3 SAMPLING AND RECRUITMENT

A qualitative study follows the guiding principle of saturation, i.e., till new data yields repetitive or redundant information. Since in a qualitative study, sampling is purposive, the Plan-it Girls' team attempted to select the respondents in a way that allowed for 'confirming and disconfirming'[18] 'maximum variation' and 'typical cases'. The team thus ensured that while sampling, most characteristics that could influence the heterogeneity of perspectives were accounted for each of the respondent categories across the two study sites. For instance, to ensure a geographical spread in Delhi as well as Jharkhand, a detailed sample plan was chalked out in consultation with the implementation partners. Schools were identified based on the level of support the program received from the school administration, to ensure that a range of schools were covered. Similarly, attempts were made to ensure that there were participants with different socioeconomic characteristics. However, it is critical to specify here that the team was only able to reach the respondents who were available at the time of the study. This implies that the girls who could have been married and were not living with their parents were not able to participate in the study.

Recruitment of the participants for the study was undertaken by Restless Development. A three-step procedure was followed wherein the Restless Development team identified participants based on the criteria specified and invited them to participate using a recruitment script. This was followed by a detailed procedure of parental/guardian consent and assent (in case of respondents below 18 years) or respondent consent (for all above 18 years) sought by the research team (moderators). A copy of the consent form was provided to the respondent and their guardians to refer to at any point during the interview or later.

18 Moser, A. & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24:1, 9-18. DOI: 10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091.

3.3.1 SAMPLE SIZE

A total of 109 activities – workshops, IDIs and FGDs (Table 4) were undertaken as against 110 that were planned. In Delhi, three workshops with younger girls were planned, but only two could be organized due to unrest in the neighborhood.[19]

A total of 43 girls participated in Delhi and 44 girls in Jharkhand, 12 boys each in Delhi and Jharkhand, 44 mothers in Delhi, 127 community members in Jharkhand, 10 teachers in Delhi and 8 teachers in Jharkhand, 6 YFs in Delhi and 8 YFs in Jharkhand participated in the study activities. A total of 115 respondents in Delhi and 199 respondents in Jharkhand participated in the study.

As specified in the IRB[20] approved protocol, no identifiable information of the participants including their socioeconomic and demographic information was collected. The team recognizes that the sample may not be representative, but the attempt of the qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of the program participants.

3.4 FIELD PREPARATION AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before starting the fieldwork, the moderators and interviewers participated in a series of two-day and three-day trainings to align themselves with the ethics, ethical procedures, child safeguarding policies, objectives of the program, its broader modules, information transacted and understanding of the discussion guides. Mock sessions were held to identify challenging and sensitive areas and work on them prior to the fieldwork.

Table 4: Sample Proposed and Achieved

Activity	Particulars	Delhi	Jharkhand	Planned	Achieved
Workshop with 14–17 year-old Girls	8–10 participants	3	2	5	4
Workshop with 18–22 year-old Girls	8–10 participants	3	2	5	5
IDI with Girls		12	14	26	26
IDI with Boys		12	12	24	24
IDI with Teachers/ HoS		10	8	18	18
IDI with Youth Facilitators		6	8	14	14
FGD with Mothers	8–10 mothers	6	0	6	6
FGD with Community Members	8–10 parents/ guardians/ community members	0	12	12	12
TOTAL SAMPLE		**52**	**58**	**110**	**109**

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19 Anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (Bill) protests were ongoing during the field work period in the area of the intervention schools (South East district Zone 29).

20 Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews and monitors research involving human subjects.

School assembly in progress- Delhi

In both Delhi and Jharkhand, pilot activities were conducted with all the stakeholders to identify any gaps, challenging areas and modifications required in the discussion guides and interview techniques, and improvements were made accordingly. The recommended changes involved:

- Modifying certain questions to enable ease of comprehension and response.

- Improving the method of administering projective techniques like the 'Timeline for a teenage girl's life'.

- Introducing probes and lines of inquiry about program-related information shared by the respondents.

- Modifying the sequence of questions.

The interviews, workshops and focus groups were conducted by moderators of the same gender as the respondents across all the sessions. The discussions and interviews were conducted in Hindi and audio was recorded after taking prior approval and consent from the participants. Daily debriefing sessions were conducted with the team of moderators to synthesize and collate field notes and observations. Audio-recorded field memos were also created by the moderators post the interviews, workshops and focus group discussions to capture top-level insights.

The research protocol along with tools and consent forms was developed, reviewed and approved by ICRW Institutional Review Board (IRB) in India. The research team underwent ethical training and training on child safeguarding policy to safeguard the interests of the study participants.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

In a qualitative study, data analysis and interpretation entails identifying similarities, differences and themes. This process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data is termed as thematic analysis.[21] Based on the theory of change, the data was analyzed using the key outcomes for the girls following their participation in the program, to understand any shifts in terms of comprehension, perspective and behavior of all the participants. The effect on other stakeholders was mapped against the key outcomes for the girls. While reading the transcripts, the team also carefully explored for themes emerging from the data. The following themes—a mix of pre-identified and emerging themes—were identified for analyzing the data:

1. Identity, Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy

2. Gender Equitable Attitudes

3. Marriage: Perspective and Choice

4. Aspirations: Education and Employability

The thematic analysis helped in identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing and reporting themes found within the data set. This also helped in identifying cross-references between the evolving themes and the entire data set. The thematic areas also helped in answering the research questions that aimed at understanding the influence the program had on the lives of program participants and their experience of participating in Plan-It Girls activities.

3.6 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This study report has separate sections for Delhi and Jharkhand, as these were separate pilots of the Plan-It Girls program and were conducted in context of urban and rural locations respectively.

Since adolescent girls were the primary recipients for the program curriculum, the effect of participation on each of the themes is understood through their context, perceptions, feelings and experiences, followed by an understanding of the other stakeholders i.e., adolescent boys, mothers, the community and teachers.

The report also captures the journey of the youth facilitators who transacted the program.

21   Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3, 77–101.

Section 4:
Study Findings – Delhi

The qualitative study was conducted in the early months of the year 2020; almost a year after program completion in schools. This implied that the older adolescent girls were expected to be out of school and the younger cohort was still in school. The study, therefore, was able to capture the girls at a point of transition where they were expected to be in the process of planning for their future. As discussed earlier, the findings of the study are located in the context of the national capital of India. Delhi has seen increasing government investment in education and is a hub of education and training institutions, thus providing relatively greater exposure.

The girls who participated in the study come from mostly nuclear families with three or four siblings and their fathers mainly engage in small businesses such as selling vegetables, running a tea stall, running *kirana dukans* (everyday needs stores) or sweet shops, tailoring or working in garment factories while their mothers don't work; except a few who engage in some work at the hospital or in tailoring work. There are multiple government schools in each of these localities and each school caters to a large number of students. This could be demonstrated by pointing out that the ten implementation schools had 7,121 girls cumulatively in just Classes 9 and 11.

4.1 IDENTITY, SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-EFFICACY

The younger and older adolescent girls articulated and appeared to have internalized a clear understanding of 'self-identity'. On being asked what they remembered and liked the most about the program, both older and younger girls explicitly recalled the program module that talked about their 'identity'. The program sessions on 'self-awareness' and 'identity' helped them observe that girls and women are identified by the names of their fathers, and once they are married, by the names of their husbands. Many girls shared that after participation in the program, they recognized that a girl can have her own identity beyond that of her father or husband and her own individual academic and professional achievements could lend her a unique identity and a sense of pride.

"Earlier I used to think that this is my name and my name is my identity, because I thought of myself as only a daughter. Now, I know I can be a teacher or a lawyer and my identity can be according to my work." – Older adolescent girl

"They taught us topics like 'meri pehchaan' ('My Identity') and how we should earn our name in society. We need not be known only by our parent's name." – Younger adolescent girl

Learning about self also included identifying strengths and weaknesses. Both the younger and older girls demonstrated the ability to reflect on and express their strengths and weaknesses, exhibiting a clear understanding of their own temperament, behavioral traits, preferences and habits. They repeatedly cited the activity 'pat on the back' that helped them recognize the good qualities or achievements of their friends, thus helping them 'appreciate good qualities in themselves and others' and 'avoid judgment'.

"Didi (female YF) told us that we should appreciate good things about our classmates and not hurt their feelings. There is a girl I know who failed (an exam). Earlier, I would have made fun of her. But after that session, I felt like calling her to tell her not to worry and that she can try again next year." – Older adolescent girl

Girls felt that the program sessions helped them develop self-confidence. They reported having a heightened confidence in their ability to interact with others with respect to different situations in their lives. They stated that confidence is key while negotiating for increased mobility at home, for continuing their education, and in working toward academic and career-related goals.

"…we should keep our confidence on a higher level in self-development because when we go out and have to introduce ourselves, we can get very nervous." – Younger adolescent girl

Older adolescent girls acknowledged that while the threat of sexual harassment is a part of their lived reality, being confident has given them the ability to overcome the fear of going out of their homes without a male chaperone who is usually a family member.

"We should be confident. We shouldn't fear (sexual harassment). We should be able to handle it if something like that happens." – Older adolescent girl

Girls also expressed greater comfort with their bodies. Both groups stated that earlier they felt uncomfortable and awkward about their changing body. The sessions on bodily changes during the program made them uncomfortable at first, but as the sessions went on, they felt more comfortable with the bodily changes they had experienced. The sessions on body mapping and discussions on menstrual hygiene were cited as the reason for girls recognizing that there was **no shame in experiencing these changes.** These sessions helped in **normalizing bodily changes that they recognized 'happened to every girl.'**

"Didi made a body map on the board and told us to name the parts. Everyone pointed out other parts but no one wanted to name the personal parts. Everyone knew but they were feeling shy. Didi told us to make eye contact and made us label them." – Older adolescent girl

"Other kids were laughing when didi was speaking about periods but she explained it very well – how we should live (maintain hygiene) in those days. She also talked about (the myths) how people tell us not to go to the temple, not to touch pickle etc." – Younger adolescent girl

Elimination of shame associated with changing bodies, increased social interaction, speaking up and putting forth their opinions within and outside the family are among the most explicitly and emphatically highlighted changes in the lives of girls. The program seems to have given the girls a platform to share their experiences and the opportunity to discuss their questions and concerns and challenge taboos. Girls also shared that the idea of attraction to the opposite gender was normalized after the sessions.

Mothers' perspective

Mothers corroborated the new-found sense of confidence amongst girls citing that those who had participated in the program seemed to be able to confidently communicate with their families and with people in the community.

"Girls these days have become very confident – they can say what they feel like to us. We are like friends. In our childhood, we could never imagine talking so freely to our parents. Girls want to study more, and they want to have a say in their future."

They also pointed out that girls are now negotiating with parents for the things they wish to do or achieve like wanting to continue education after school or delaying their age of marriage. They reported that girls seemed to have found ways to navigate discussions without losing composure and seemed to handle disagreements with their parents better – by avoiding escalations and conflict and focusing on negotiation instead.

"There is some change in the behavior of the girls. Earlier, my daughter used to get irritated and angry, but now she has become more patient. She listens and understands what we say and then tells us what she feels without fighting."

Most mothers found it acceptable that their daughters had developed greater confidence and were articulating their needs openly. However, this was only acceptable as long as they had the comfort

of knowing that their daughters would ultimately comply with the parents' wishes. In the absence of this compliance, being able to articulate their opinion was referred to as being outspoken and outgoing which are seen as qualities that would make a girl disobedient.

Mothers also shared that after having engaged in meetings as part of the Plan-It Girls program, they now feel better equipped to manage conversations around menstrual hygiene with their daughters. They understand that mothers need to be accessible to have these conversations for the sake of the good health of their daughters.

Mothers realized that parents should not restrict their daughters. They should be friendly with them so that their children could open up to them. However, they still hold on to the idea of the 'good girl' who is obedient.

Adolescent boys' perspective

The adolescent boys who participated in the program claimed to have developed an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, associating them with their capabilities in academics and extracurricular activities. In terms of identifying weaknesses, they were largely related to acknowledging a volatile temperament, identifying the need to manage their aggression or impatience, and being patient with those around them. This was a result of the sessions on understanding violence in the GEMS curriculum that was transacted with the boys.

"Earlier, I used to shout and fight in school but now all that has reduced. I try and stay calm and away from all these things." – Younger adolescent boy

For older adolescent boys, their self-perception is determined by their ability to complete their education and secure a job to provide for their family.

"I used to go to work with my father, so I had money in my piggy bank. I used to spend a lot of money on useless things but I don't spend much now. Earlier, I used to keep changing phones. Now I have been using the same phone for some

years. I understand the financial situation of my family." – Older adolescent boy

The sense of 'being responsible' is a likely outcome of the familial and societal expectations. The boys are subjected to the pressure of contributing financially to their family in order to ease the burden on their fathers and to become eligible for marriage. This is stated to be a predominant pressure that drives their perception of self.

Teachers' perspective

The teachers in Delhi seemed to acknowledge and understand the lack of support from parents for girls' education. They stated that the emotional and mental well-being of girls and boys is the responsibility of the parents, but parents do not have the time or inclination to fulfill this responsibility, given that they are occupied with making ends meet. As teachers who are aware of the lack of emotional support available at home for girls, they articulated that as part of their work, they are invested in catering to these needs. They reported that they are committed to helping students identify their strengths individually and collectively, wherever possible. It is critical to remember here that the teachers who participated in the program were the ones who were nominated by the Head of School and were recognized as being self-motivated.

The teachers shared that they work with the girls to strengthen their abilities for better prospects for higher education and upskilling (for future employability) and also try to counsel their parents to ensure that the girls are able to continue their education.

Post-program, teachers reported that they observed a marked improvement in the teacher-student relationship. They attributed this to the sessions that helped them build a better understanding of managing and catering to the varied needs of students in their classrooms. A few of them were also able to recall activities that required them to reflect on their own lives and on the value

of appreciating one's qualities, and further correlated this with the need to appreciate their students as well. Most teachers said that the conversations during the teachers' sessions made them more aware of the nuances of the problems faced by adolescents and how they could be more approachable for students to share their emotional, physical or other issues with them.

Along with this, the teachers felt that the girls were now more confident and could discuss and raise the issues they faced. They also felt that girls were now more focused on studying and had the motivation to plan for a future, including aspiring for future work.

"They are a lot more confident…I won't say all. They like speaking their mind. I have seen the difference. Initially students would not say a word against the teacher, but now if they don't like something, there will be a few who raise their voice – I do not like this or I do not like that, why is this not happening…so they're a lot more confident."

"There was a girl in my class who wanted to study but failed. She built confidence in herself and repeated the class. She is now junior to her friends but is performing well now."

4.1 IDENTITY , SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-EFFICACY

GIRLS exhibited a greater sense of their own identity, improved self-esteem arising from confidence in their capabilities; with growing recognition of their own needs for expression and belief in their capabilities, as well as the ability to articulate their journey of self-awareness. Girls cited instances of exercises from the program module which enabled them to reflect upon and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Many of them stated that identifying their strengths made them feel more confident about their own ability to take action to negotiate and navigate through various domains in their lives.

BOYS felt that it was necessary to identify their individual strengths and weaknesses. They were able to identify their qualities, personality traits and skills that required improvement in view of the larger goal of achieving professional success toward supporting their family. In Delhi, boys did not engage with girls in the program and thus were not expected to articulate their understanding of girl's self-esteem or identity.

MOTHERS recognized a growing sense of confidence in their daughters in terms of their ability to share their opinions and express their needs. They correlated this with emotional maturity (ability to deal with conflict calmly) as a positive outcome of girls' participation in the program. This appreciation however, was subject to girls' compliance with their parents' decisions for their lives. Mothers showed greater acceptance of girls negotiating previously non-negotiable events such as pursuing higher education and employment or delaying marriage.

TEACHERS who participated in the program expressed their intention to be invested in supporting girls through various means including classroom and inter-personal engagement. They recognized that Plan-It Girls has led to girls becoming more confident and comfortable in openly communicating their opinions and perspectives. They found that this has improved their relationships with the adolescent girls.

4.2 GENDER EQUITABLE ATTITUDES

Girls recognized and felt encouraged to speak up against gender-based discrimination in their immediate environment after participating in the Plan-It Girls program. While both younger and older girls were able to identify discriminatory practices and restrictions within their home and communities before the program, post-program they were able to understand that the discriminatory practices were rooted in the system of patriarchy (*pitrasatta*) and that the set of rules that applied to their male counterparts were different. They now articulate these restrictions as gender-based discriminatory practices based on gendered sociocultural norms and expectations. The recall and reference to '*pitrasatta*' and 'gender' is a new addition to their vocabulary and is evident of how the curriculum content on gender has been internalized among the program participants across age groups.

Participating in Plan-It Girls sessions has given girls both the context and the vocabulary, to understand, identify and articulate that the woman's role is expected to be largely restricted within the household, despite the examples of famous role models (policewomen, sportswomen, astronauts) whom they look up to and are inspired by.

Girls pointed out that the distinction between girls and boys becomes more prominent as they step into their teens. In this phase, girls are made to realize that they are growing up, that they must take on more work in the household, not be 'too outgoing' or socialize too much and must abide by a new set of rules, restrictions and expectations.

"When we are small, our parents allow us to talk to and play with boys but as soon as we grow up, they stop us from interacting with them. If interacting with boys is not good, then why did they allow us to play together?" – Younger adolescent girl

Girls articulated that the distinction between boys and girls translated into their male siblings not needing permission to stay out of the home and spend time with their friends, whereas girls' movements were restricted and monitored with strict time limits. A few girls also identified restrictions in terms of having access to mobile phones – boys were allowed to use their own phones, but girls mostly shared them with a sibling or the parent or their usage of social media and messaging applications was monitored by a male family member.

"Parents don't allow girls to go out and only send them if their brother is going. Boys are given all facilities and can get phones before Class 12 but girls don't get phones." – Younger adolescent girl

A few girls also identified unequal opportunities for education. They noted that boys are given preference when it comes to more expensive, English medium schools, while girls tend to be relegated to the home to contribute to domestic chores and are expected to balance their education with household responsibilities.

"Many parents enroll their boys in English medium schools and get their daughters to do house chores because they feel it will help them in the future. They need to understand that even a girl can make her career and do better in life. In my house, my brother is given a high protein diet, but the girls are not. When I asked my mother why, she said he needs it." – Older adolescent girl

In some cases, girls justify the restrictions placed on them as being in their best interest, as they feel that it can be unsafe for a girl to leave the house alone. In these cases, they reported negotiating with their parents by going out to school, college or for walks in the neighborhood, in groups. Girls also accept their role in managing household work as that of 'helping their mother to run the home'. They feel that girls are judged for being outgoing or having any interaction with their male peers. If they like dressing up or talking on the phone, especially with their male friends, they feel that their character is questioned by the community and their own family members.

"They keep telling me that I am continuously on my phone. They don't say anything to my brother. He is also continuously on the phone. This may be because I am a girl and he is a boy." – Older adolescent girl

Some girls, whose mothers are working or are from households being headed by single mothers, opined that they faced no gender-based discrimination in the household. A couple of girls in such situations cited that the discrimination faced by them was outside the household, and that they had their mothers' support when they were judged and questioned by community members.

Most girls felt that participating in Plan-It Girls introduced them to the concept of patriarchy, and they now understand that the unequal treatment is not fair. They reported having negotiated the restrictions in their households regarding being able to go out with their friends or having access to the same facilities as their male siblings or peers. This includes access to a mobile phone and being able to attend tuition classes, and in rare cases, pursuing extracurricular activities like sports and dance.

It is evident that the inputs from the curriculum on gender, patriarchy, power and its manifestation in their lives provided girls with a framework that helped them reflect on the discrimination they observed and experienced in their lives. This understanding enabled them to comprehend that the discrimination they face is not because they lack ability but because the structure provides privileges to boys and restricts their access to resources. While some of them were able to use this knowledge, and the skills they learnt to negotiate within the family, others are still trying to decode the restrictions that are positioned as 'issues of safety' and family's concern for their well-being. This shift in understanding was also reflected in the findings of the impact evaluation that confirmed that the girls across cohorts in Delhi showed significant positive change in their gender attitudes.

Boys' perspective

For adolescent boys, the curriculum module on gender discrimination was among the program topics that they most actively recalled. They reported that they were inspired to take action and break away from gender stereotypes that distinguished boys from girls. Beyond this, there was little recollection of the time, place and events that occurred throughout the program. For younger boys, the idea of ensuring gender equality appears to be idealistic and includes taking steps to try and uproot discrimination inside and outside the home. Boys reported taking steps like asking their parents to treat them and their sisters equally, including privileges or permission to go outside and meet friends.

"I was going out with my friends on 1st January and my sister wanted to go with her friends on 31st December. But my mother was not allowing her, even though she allowed me. I raised my voice against my mother (maa ke khilaaf aawaaz uthaayi) then my sister was also allowed." – Younger adolescent boy

This also included taking a protective stance and shielding girls from sexual harassment by other boys or men. In one case, a younger boy mentioned that he physically intervened when he witnessed a man make inappropriate physical contact with a girl during a bus journey.

Older adolescent boys, who seem to have greater interaction with their female peers, reported offering advice to them on self-defense or on resolving conflict peacefully with the family – with the belief that it is up to the girls to be able to do both; navigate conflict and protect themselves from harassment.

Boys also stated that the expectation for girls was to contribute to the household by helping the mother with chores, in contrast to boys who were expected to take up work that required them to step outside – in terms of making purchases for the home or having repairs done for household items. Some boys reported this division of labor to be an equitable distribution of responsibilities.

Adolescent boys also face gender-based expectations in terms of pressure to perform well in academics and contribute to the household income. They experience the paradox of being able to recognize gendered norms and yet harbor and fulfill gendered expectations. While the modules made them understand that gender inequity is regressive and is unfair on girls and prevents them from having the choice to study, work or marry, the boys don't see a way out of the expectations placed on them.

"Girls are taught that they have to go to someone else's house. You do household work, don't study, you are demotivated. Boys are told that they have to earn money by moving ahead, making efforts. If you do not work hard, then who will marry your sister? Both are demotivated but in a different way." – Younger adolescent boy

In homes where the mother and father are both wage earners, boys reported having a more hands-on understanding and a clearer articulation of equitable treatment of men and women in the household – with tasks being distributed equally and domestic contribution being demanded of male siblings too. For boys who did not have female siblings or working mothers, the experience of gender inequity for girls was seen in terms of societal treatment of girls. This included not allowing girls to fulfill their professional aspirations and the mistreatment they receive from their male peers. It was in these situations that boys expressed a deeply protectionist intent to take action – i.e., to stop other men from harassing girls or women.

While the boys understand that girls face greater restrictions and lack access to resources and opportunities, they are unable to navigate through the gendered expectations of being the 'bread earner' placed on them.

Mothers' perspective

Meanwhile, **mothers of adolescent girls who participated in the program cited 'safety' as the primary reason for imposing restrictions on girls in terms of mobility and socializing.** They stated that they do not expect their teenage daughters to understand this reasoning, but that they know what is best given that they have closely witnessed the threat that exists in terms of sexual harassment.

"We fear that boys will misbehave with her. In my daughter's school, some girls were forcing her to smoke and the school management and teachers were not saying anything to them. So how should we keep our children safe? That is why we have to be with them and don't let them go alone anywhere."

A need to protect boys was also expressed by mothers who participated in the program, but this was more toward ensuring that boys in the community do not fall into 'bad company' and indulge in substance abuse. Here too, the concern was that heading down the path of substance abuse and petty crime would divert them from using their education to secure a respectable job, which is the expectation from boys. **However, it is accepted by mothers that boys are difficult to control, so while they have such fears, the most they can do is reprimand them and hope that they do not stray. Mothers feel that they have more control over their daughter's mobility and actions as compared to their sons.**

The mothers articulated their concern for the safety of both girls and boys, but it is evident that the concern regarding girls' safety is linked with 'social reputation' which is delicate and needs to be maintained for family 'honor'. The mothers' sense of greater control over their daughters as against sons also seems to emerge from a sense of greater power over the lives and actions of their female children as against male children.

Teacher's perspective

Teachers are empathetic toward girls' backgrounds, the unstable home environment they often come from and the burden of household work that they have to bear. A very common problem that teachers reported across schools was that the fathers of their adolescent girl students tended to stray into alcoholism, leaving the responsibility of earning a livelihood on the mother. Therefore, the responsibility of the household chores automatically falls on the girls. Even when they continue to go to school, they are expected to weave their household duties into their routine. Teachers report that this often impacts their academic performance as girls are unable to concentrate on their studies anywhere except in school.

"60 percent of girl children have to do all the household work because their fathers do nothing and the mothers have to support the household by working outside. The father is drinking and sitting idle at home and all the work is done by the child in Class 5 or 6."

Many teachers reported being privy to the fact that girls are often physically or sexually abused in their own homes. They attribute this to hearsay and do not acknowledge dealing with this directly. Though they know that girls do not report these cases, they believe they can sense when a girl is in distress. **In this context, teachers felt that a program like Plan-It Girls could help in empowering girls and enabling them to recognize, assert and fight for their rights. A program like this could equip girls to navigate their familial and personal struggles and enable them to speak up and raise their voice**.

4.2 GENDER EQUITABLE ATTITUDES

GIRLS: The program sessions that focused on gender equitable attitudes had the most in-depth recall and resonated with both younger and older adolescent girls. Increase in self-confidence and recognition of the fact that opportunities and privileges accorded to boys are not extended to girls, has given many girls the ability to speak up, negotiate for and demand equal treatment.

BOYS recalled the curriculum on gender equitable attitudes and have acquired the vocabulary and understanding to identify discrimination between boys and girls owing to age-old conditioning. Some of them were compelled to act on this and ensure that there is fair treatment in terms of privileges accorded to both boys and girls. For a majority of them, the understanding of gender-based inequality extends to the role of boys protecting girls from harassment, and in many cases reprimanding other boys who mistreat their female peers. They expressed the paradox that boys too, are relegated to pre-created roles of being breadwinners and are often expected to stop their education and contribute to the household.

MOTHERS attributed the difference in treatment of girls and boys to the fact that girls were more vulnerable than boys. They felt that they would give girls the same freedom of mobility if this were not the case. However, they also worry about giving boys too much freedom. While girls tend to be obedient, boys are more likely to fall into bad company and indulge in activities like substance abuse. Mothers feel that it's their responsibility to protect their children, but especially the daughter, and have greater control over her life.

TEACHERS are aware of girls being restricted in their homes and not being given opportunities to study and pursue careers. They feel that while situations at home cannot be controlled, participation in the program sessions has reinforced the need for teachers to focus on helping girls with their education, vocational skills and counseling through the creation of an open channel of communication.

4.3 MARRIAGE: PERSPECTIVE AND CHOICE

Most adolescent girls stated that girls start getting married at the age of 18 in their communities, and only those with a good academic performance and consistent interest in academics and/or gainful employment, are able delay their marriage and are supported by the parents. Marriage is brought up soon after Class 12 but most parents are willing for their daughters to study until graduation. However, some parents do want to get their daughters married immediately after Class 12.

Older girls were far more emphatic about the need to delay the age of marriage. They attributed this to the program as it equipped them with the understanding that early marriage puts them under immense domestic pressure and limits the possibility of pursuing higher education. **However, for a few girls who had to be married soon, an educated husband seemed to be the one who would impose lesser restrictions than their own parents.** A few of the older girls were engaged to be married at the time of being interviewed. They were hopeful that their husbands would fulfill wishes which their parents did not; in terms of mobility, restrictions on access to a mobile phone and pursuing higher studies.

"Since my family has financial issues, my future husband said that if I want to do any courses, he will get me enrolled in them." – Older adolescent girl (engaged after passing out from school – referring to her fiancé as 'future husband')

Younger girls were more vocal about wanting to have a say in the choice of groom and reported that their families were likely to oblige them. However, this is based on a mutual understanding that the parents will allow them this privilege if they abide by the parents' choices for them.

"I want to marry a boy who earns well and is good looking and smart. One who is there with me in troubled times unlike boys these days who cheat on their partners. I will definitely have a say while choosing my groom, but I will still go with my parents' choice." – Younger adolescent girl

Girls understand that early marriage cuts off their access to education and employment. If she did not pursue higher education, a girl was likely to be married latest by 21 years of age. This was however, attributed to societal pressure. Older adolescent girls felt that they were in a position to negotiate a delay in their time of marriage. They stated during the interviews and workshops that the program helped them understand that early marriage places immense household responsibility on the girl's shoulders, and cuts off access to education and employment, thereby taking away the possibility of them being able to independently support themselves.

"Many girls are married by the age of 18. Then they have to work at home, take care of the house chores. The in-laws restrict them from going outside the house. Hardly any girl gets the opportunity to work or study after marriage." – Older adolescent girl

"Earlier, girls were married at the age of 14–16 years, but now they get married after 18 years. Sometimes the marriage is fixed beforehand but the actual ceremony takes place later. I will study till B.Sc. or B.Com(graduation), take up a job and get married at the age of 25 years." – Younger adolescent girl

Many older girls also felt that having a better education will mean securing a partner who is also better educated, therefore paving the way for a brighter and more prosperous future. This is based on their observations of girls in their community who got married earlier.

Girls have learned that education can be used as the bargaining chip to negotiate their age of marriage. Older girls who participated in the program cited that the sessions on planning for their future helped them realize the importance of education in making them confident, self-reliant and creating a unique identity for themselves. They stated that this made them think about delaying their marriage and having a say in the choice of groom. They are learning to do this by using the promise of academic excellence in return for an extension in age of marriage.

"In case my father and brother pressurize me to get married, I will try to say 'no' up to some extent and if it is unavoidable, then I will keep one clause that I have to complete my studies. So, if they allow me to complete my studies, then marriage is fine." – Older adolescent girl

Girls have developed the ability to articulate their desire to delay their age of marriage, though they still feel that choosing their partner would be a very distant possibility. Older and younger girls who participated in the program reported that they have developed closer relationships with their mothers after the program and feel comfortable sharing their needs and desires with them. They expressed that they feel capable of conveying their desire to delay marriage, and some of them said that they now have faith that their mothers will negotiate on their behalf.

"I can't say 'no' to a marriage proposal in front of everyone, but I may share it with my mother. Otherwise, a girl usually tells (only) her friends that she is not willing to marry." – Younger adolescent girl

In homes where mothers were reported to be either single parents and/or working mothers, the girls reported that their mothers were immensely supportive of their choice in terms of time of marriage and choice of groom.

It was observed that while younger girls understood that marriage was imperative after a certain age, they did not talk about it in terms of any pressure that they felt. This was unlike the older girls who cited instances where girls were forced to leave their education and get married. They were concerned about topics like marriage and dowry, which is still a prevalent practice, and cited instances of girls being thrown out of their marital home for lack of dowry.

Older girls were also aware of women who continued their education and went on to work. They were aware that this is only possible if the parents were supportive.

"If a girl is good in studies and capable of cracking the government exams, then her parents allow her to study after 18, else they get girls married. I have seen girls working and not married till the age of 30. I have also seen girls who were married after school." – Older adolescent girl

This distinction between the way younger and older girls expressed and articulated their thoughts on marriage is reflective of the stage of life they are in.

Boys' perspective

Both older and younger boys were aware of the social practice of boys marrying later than girls because they need to be financially settled so that they can provide for their family. **They felt that early marriage of both girls and boys is a way for parents with traditional thinking to carry on with 'old ways.**' While boys attribute this thinking to societal norms and state that girls and boys should both have an equal opportunity to study and work, they also see education as a benchmark for an 'ideal partner.'

For many older adolescent boys, the wife is expected to be a direct replacement for the role that their mother plays at home–one who takes care of the household and the family. But it is also expected that in this generation, their partner must be as educated as they are so that they can take better decisions for the household and be equipped to educate their children in the future. In addition, they expect that the girls' education will help in case the family faces a period of economic hardship. In such a case, her income will contribute to the family's 'upward mobility'. This is evidence of the barriers that girls face regarding engagement in the labor force, and also reflects the thought process that leads to the 'distress-driven' and informal work that women are often pressed to do.

"Boys have many thoughts about when they will get married, and the kind of girl they want. Even if they do not graduate or may have failed, their parents don't think they are bad. Their sons are always good for them even if they are very bad and always stay out. Even then they think (have high standards) that they want a girl who is a graduate and will work (be educated and employable) after marriage and give them her earnings." – Younger adolescent boy

This indicates that boys are aware of the privileges they are accorded in contrast to their female counterparts. The boys who participated in the program were able to recognize that marriage as a life event brings to fore the disparate gendered expectations from boys and girls. Older adolescent boys also seemed to have a greater choice and say in marriage. However, they felt that the final decision would be of their parents.

"Let me give you one example of my relative. He is much older, must be around 29 or 30 years old. He does not have any financial problems now and is capable, so he thinks he should get married. In the coming future, I think that if I don't have financial issues, only then I will get married. If I am not capable enough to earn my bread and butter, how will I be able to handle my family?" – Younger adolescent boy

It is evident that boys continue to subscribe to the gendered roles and responsibilities despite recognizing that these are 'traditional ways of thinking'. The need

'to earn and be financially settled' emerges from the masculine notion of 'being the responsible man' for their family. The expectation from their partners is also limited to and gendered in the role of a caregiver. This explains why boys express the need to marry later than the girls.

Mothers' perspective

Mothers see marriage as the ultimate goal for their daughters. However, many of them no longer feel the urgency to get them married as soon as they finish their schooling. They feel that these days girls choose to marry later as a better education may help them secure a better match (more educated groom), and therefore a better life for themselves.

After participating in the program, mothers felt that whilst a delay is acceptable until a girl completes her education (typically until graduation), marriage remains the ultimate aspiration that parents have for their daughters. However, the reason for this was attributed to societal pressure to get girls married, since their identities are defined by the kind of husband they find, and the family they marry into. A few mothers also opined that some girls are interested in household chores rather than studying, so their parents marry them off early.

"There are many girls who do not want to study. Even if parents want them to study, they don't go to school, so then it is better to get them married."

A daughter's marriage is also linked with family pride and honor. Mothers also spoke about dowry still being a big problem as far as girls' marriage is concerned. They discussed dowry rates as being completely dependent on the job profile of the groom – the better the profile of the groom, the higher the dowry expectation.

"The demand for dowry is as per the job of the boy – 20 lakhs, 25 lakhs,30 lakhs. If a boy has a government job, then the rates are even higher. This amount is negotiable, if the girls are educated and beautiful, but dowry is something which we have to give. After marriage, the girl will help her mother-in-law at home."

Dowry poses an economic burden that mothers feel can be offset by their daughter's education clubbed with their 'appearance'. This again links with their concept of education as essential to secure a 'good match'.

The mothers who participated in the program seemed to believe that the mother-daughter relationship in this generation is friendlier. They felt that there is a propensity for mothers and daughters to share friend-like relationships that allow girls to be comfortable sharing their desires and aspirations, thus according them greater involvement in decisions related to their marriage. This also reflects in their belief that unlike their own marriages, boys and girls nowadays are asked for their preference even though the bride or groom may be chosen by the parents. Mothers' aspirations for their daughters also seem to have moved from marriage alone to education and marriage.

"My eldest daughter got married (before completing her education), the three younger ones (daughters) are studying. One is in B.A., one is in 12th and the third is in the 10th this year. If they study, they will move ahead in their life. I have gotten one daughter married, but now I will not get the others married until they complete their education."

However, the mothers expect their daughter to be a 'good girl,' which implies that the girl will comply with parental choices and expectations. A 'good girl' is defined as one who "respects her family and does as her parents expect of her; does not interact with boys and does not engage in any relationship before marriage thereby eliminating the risk of eloping which could bring dishonor to the family." This often includes marrying a groom of their choosing, who belongs to a community that parents deem acceptable, and getting married at the right age (not delaying it beyond her early 20's).

Teachers' perspective

Teachers cited financial conditions, number of siblings and the need to share household responsibilities as barriers that dissuaded girls from continuing their education. However, they feel that girls primarily drop out of school

because their parents get them married. In some cases, students reach out to their teachers for support when they are forced to marry and are told to stop going to school. In a few instances, teachers have intervened and spoken to parents to let their daughters continue their studies. One teacher stated that when a girl's parents informed the school that their daughter would not continue in school because of poor health, she found out that, *"…her parents had actually fixed her marriage in their native place. So we spoke to them in a parent-teacher meeting and helped them understand the importance of education."*

Teachers also feel that marriage is fixed irrespective of the class the girl is studying in. This is in contrast to what was being articulated by girls, their mothers and even boys. Teachers attribute early marriage to the socioeconomic and cultural background that the girls come from.

"Their parents still believe in marrying girls as soon as they get a good proposal. If a girl in Class 8 gets a good marriage proposal, she will get married."

It is critical to acknowledge here that the program reached out to those girls who were already in either Class 9 or Class 11, which itself is evidence of a relatively greater support of parents for their daughter's education. The teachers, however, interact with adolescent girls across classes and their perspective can be valued as a bird's eye view.

4.3 MARRIAGE: PERSPECTIVE AND CHOICE

GIRLS: Girls feel that marriage is inevitable and their parent's only goal is to ensure that they are married into a family of their parent's choice. While some girls have become comfortable about stating their desire to delay marriage and wish to have a greater say in the choice of groom, others—especially older girls—have learned to negotiate an extension in the age of their marriage by focusing on good academic performance, and continuing to study as far as they can. They express the need to delay marriage knowing that in-laws do not usually support further education, and correlate it with their understanding that education and professional ambition will help them gain independence and a unique identity. For younger girls, marriage is not a tangible reality yet, but they do express a need to keep pursuing education, so that they do not have to get married too soon.

BOYS appear to have acquired the understanding that girls should be allowed to delay the age of their marriage to pursue education. However, this understanding is attributed to their own choice of a well-educated partner to help them run the home and fulfill household duties. They state that they have a say in the choice of partner, but their expectation is limited to the girl being educated to take on the household responsibility. Boys also feel the pressure of gendered expectations; of having to be financially secure before getting married.

MOTHERS are keen to get both girls and boys married, but there is a distinct focus on the marriage of the girl, which is attributed to societal pressure. Still, they feel that it has become commonplace for girls to get married in their early 20s so they can complete their college education – a thought they repeatedly attribute to the Plan-It Girls meetings. They believe that 'choice' in marriage must be that of the parents and while girls still comply, boys prefer to marry girls of their own choosing. They acknowledge a friendlier relationship with their daughters, but the expectation of 'a good girl' abiding by her parent's choice remains paramount.

TEACHERS feel that marriage is of utmost importance for parents. Parents do not hesitate to pull their daughters out of school irrespective of their age, if they find 'a good match' for their daughter. Some teachers shared instances of intervening in cases that came to their attention.

4.4 ASPIRATIONS – EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

Girls see the pursual and completion of higher education (degree/diploma) as an aspiration that can also be used as a tool to negotiate their age of marriage and subvert familial pressures. At the time of this qualitative study (early 2020), all the younger girls interviewed were enrolled in school in Class 11. Most girls had either chosen Humanities or Commerce as a stream in secondary school. There was mention of some girls preferring the Science stream but there was no option for science in their school. The older girls were continuing education after Class 12 either from an Open University (Indira Gandhi National Open University – IGNOU) or regular college. Some of them were also enrolled in Diploma courses. It was observed that most girls intended to graduate or finish their Diploma course.

In addition to formal education, girls consider learning the English language, learning how to use the computer, and being able to hold confident conversations as skills that are crucial for their professional futures. Older girls mentioned taking up various professional courses like beauty/makeup, henna/*mehendi* artist, tailoring etc. The acquisition of additional skills is seen as a tool for gainful employment (part-time/full-time) that could give them some level of financial freedom and allow them to establish their unique identity through their achievements. As evident in their choice of vocation, older girls aspire for traditional domains of work. The work that they want to engage in is determined by their own understanding of expectations and responsibilities, which are inherently gendered.

"My dream is to become a teacher...I used to think of working in the nursing profession or becoming a teacher sometimes. I chose teaching after thinking about the working hours and the time I have to give at home. There are part-time jobs, where we can look after our home also. I thought of doing a dietician course of two years from Gwalior College." – Older adolescent girl

Older girls consider the number of working hours, time of the day, distance, location and current and future household responsibilities while contemplating available opportunities for vocational skills, training and work that can be used if their marital family 'allows' them to work. It was observed that older girls usually preferred either daytime jobs, jobs that were close, or work that is home-based, keeping safety concerns in mind.

One older girl was planning to work as a beautician and henna (mehendi) artist as advised by her future husband but only from home. This also indicates that girls believe that the shared expectations of their family and community is that they will marry by their parents' choice and the decision to work will be determined by their marital family, and they usually intend to abide, as that's what 'good girls' do. This corroborates the lack of significant impact on employability outcomes for older girls in the impact evaluation study.

Unlike their older counterparts, the younger girls' aspirations did not account for office hours, location or expected restrictions post marriage. They aspired for professions of their interest and inclination.

"I am currently doing a General Duty Assistant (GDA) course; it is a small part of the nursing course. I want to do General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) and the course fees is two lakh rupees. Right now, our financial condition is not good, so I will first find a job, gather some money and then I will take admission to this course." – Younger adolescent girl

"I know I have to take commerce and graduate and simultaneously prepare for the bank exam. I will give the IBPS (Institute of Banking Personnel Selection) exam and then only I can be selected as bank manager if I pass that exam." – Younger adolescent girl

As evident in the above quotes, **younger girls showed greater preparedness and concrete planning after participating in the program. They were able to chart out a clear plan regarding their future academic and career prospects as opposed to having a more general and vague idea of their plans.** Two girls desired to become teachers, while three others were

more inclined to get into government services after clearing the exams for Staff Selection Commission (SSC)[22] and Police.

In this context, they explicitly credited the Plan-It Girls program modules that involved youth facilitators guiding them through the process of identifying the right subjects to study after school and setting tangible goals to pursue. They mentioned that the youth facilitators encouraged and motivated them to focus on their education, to learn and do better and to work toward a financially secure future where they can support themselves and their (marital) families.

Further, many of them claimed that the skill of communication is something that they gained from the program. Earlier, they weren't confident enough to be able to strike up a conversation with anyone or communicate confidently in a group as most of them have been brought up to believe that girls must not be assertive, should be polite, shy and not draw too much attention to themselves. **Many girls reported that they would not have been able to participate in the interviews for this study, had it not been for their experience with Plan-It Girls.**

Participation in Plan-It Girls and sessions on employability gave them access to tangible skills like communication and planning; skills that helped them create a concrete roadmap for their future careers. For younger girls, the program enabled them to start thinking about and setting broader goals aligned with their ambition. For older girls, the program created an opportunity to learn things like creating a CV for a potential job and identifying which courses to enroll in – steps that they could take after school and college toward building a career.

A few of them mentioned the possibility of taking up 10–5 office-based work, which could include being a computer operator. Girls also recalled learning financial planning and accounting and how to make their CVs, fill forms, and create their email ids.

"We were told about budgeting, accounting, filling e-forms, making bio-datas etc. One can only do this if they are educated." – Younger adolescent girl

In addition, girls who accessed the Youth Resource Center in the community, which was developed as an activity center, recalled learning to use a computer, book tickets and transfer money using smart phones while receiving information, guidance and support from the youth facilitators.

Boys' perspective

In terms of aspirations pertaining to education and employment, **employment takes precedence over education** for boys. They reported feeling immense pressure to secure a job and contribute financially to the household, since this role is believed to be predefined for them. While boys aspired to become a sportsperson or an officer in the police or defense services in the future, they had all taken up some work immediately after finishing school to provide financial help to the family. Both older and younger boys stated that most of them preferred taking up work after Class 12 to provide a helping hand to their fathers.

Most of the older boys interviewed in the study were already doing part-time jobs (such as working as delivery agents), while simultaneously being enrolled in college through distance-learning. In this context, higher education (education beyond school) for boys is seen as a means to an end since a graduate degree would mean better income. For a few boys, professional aspirations and interests are intertwined, and they have planned for ways in which they can pursue both. Some articulated detailed plans for their professional future, with the understanding that their current jobs are a means to save money so that they can pursue their passions. However, most boys did not have an understanding of what they need to do and plan for to achieve their aspirations.

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22 Combined Graduate Level Examination, often referred to as SSC CGL is an examination conducted to recruit staff to various posts in ministries, departments and organizations of the Government of India.

It was observed that while boys see education for girls as essential, their understanding does not transcend into girls being able to study or work out of their own volition. Their perception of a girl's life trajectory is embedded in the normative understanding that a girl is supposed to study, get married and her future in-laws and family will decide whether she gets an opportunity to work or study further. They were vocal about their belief that girls need to prioritize their in-laws after marriage and not their job or education as it is a boy's responsibility to take care of all these things. Boys perceive girls as a replacement for the unpaid care work that their mother undertakes and therefore a girl working outside the home is seen as a conflict between the primary roles.

"If your wife is doing a job, she has to leave the house but if your parents are old, they require support. Basically, one gets married because they want someone to take care of their house and their parents. It is better if she leaves her job and takes care of the house. If she does not, then there might be trouble in the family." – Younger adolescent boy

"Suppose someone in the family does not allow her (wife) to go to work, she should understand the practical scenario in life. If I am capable enough to do a job, then I should do it." – Younger adolescent boy

The gendered division of roles and responsibilities is evident in boys' articulation of the expectations, not only from girls but also from themselves.

Mothers' perspective

Mothers felt that it is now common for girls to study after school and complete their college degrees before they get married. They felt that education is important for their daughters to learn how to present themselves and to be able to educate their children in the future. They also felt that education served as a mitigation plan for problems that girls might face in their marital home.

"Children who are well educated have manners to talk to other people and also have a different attitude toward others."

"The main reason is that even if she studies till Class 5 or 10, she can teach her children in the future. If she doesn't have any knowledge, how will she take care of her children? Nowadays 5th pass or 10th pass does not have much value. Even 12th pass has no value these days as there is a trend for education."

Mothers seem to understand the need to complete school education and even opt for higher education, as that is what is expected. However, it is also understood that mothers allowing their daughters to continue high school and college education is contingent on their academic performance, inclination to study further and ability to maintain the family honor by adhering to acceptable social norms. According to some mothers, it is often the girl's lack of interest in education that leads to her not being able to continue higher education. In some cases, it is the lack of financial resources and the need for someone to take on household responsibilities. In such cases, girls tend to enroll in distance learning courses.

"Children are following their parent's decision. Girls think that they should remain good in studies, so that parents will let them complete their further studies, if they are on the right path."

Mothers recalled their participation in the Plan-It Girls program, highlighting that they were told that parents should attempt to have a friendly relationship with their daughters and not stifle their aspirations.

"The girls (YFs) told us that we should educate girls so that they will not depend on anyone. Daughters should be strong and we should know what she wants to become. They came almost a year back. We don't remember much now but they spoke about educating girls and allowing them to stand on their feet."

Mothers also mentioned that financial independence could make a girl self-reliant and not have to depend entirely on her in-laws. But while education is seen as essential, employment is seen as an option that girls should have the skills for if they are required to work in the future. This is evident from mothers' articulation of girls' need to work with reference to 'difficult situation after marriage' as against supporting their daughters to

fulfill their aspirations and potential. This is what Verick (2014)[23] terms as 'distress-driven' entry of women in the labor market.

"There are many problems at the in-laws place. If no one supports the girl, she will have to go out and work. A girl who is not educated will wonder what she can do to get some money but the one who is educated will think, I can do this."

"Girls take up jobs if the husband is ill and not earning. If she is educated, she can take tuitions. There are many openings in anganwadis which she can avail."

However, single mothers or mothers who were working seemed to be more vocal and vehemently supportive of girls being financially independent, relating it to their own experiences of having to earn to provide for their marital homes. These were mostly mothers who were chief wage earners working as helping staff in hospitals, as house maids and in other cleaning jobs. It was also observed that mothers who were employed seemed relatively more open to a girl's education and employment and were willing to support her in fulfilling her aspirations.

While there is acceptance for recognizing and understanding a girl's professional aspirations, culmination into paid work with the intent to contribute to the household income as an earning member is subject to several conditions.

If a girl is to have a job before marriage, mothers would prefer that it be strictly during daytime for a limited number of hours, and not beyond a short distance from the home (within a 3–4km radius) in locations well known to them, so that it is safe, they can verify that the girl is being honest about having a job, monitor her movement, can reach her if she needs them, and she can be back home before it gets late in the evening.

'If the daughter is going out to work at night, the mother can't sleep well. One thing is safety and the other is that society thinks wrongly about them. We feel that girls should go out only during the day."

"Some girls want to learn stitching, embroidery etc. A few girls have taken up computer coaching. A lot of girls want to go for government jobs like police etc. After she is married, working or not depends on her husband and in-laws."

The support that mothers provide to the girls for employment is limited to knowing how to support the marital family in case of dire circumstances but not to pursue her career aspirations unless she gets a government job. Government jobs essentially denote a safe, stable, respectable and secure opportunity that also provides social security and socially upward mobility.

For boys, mothers' aspirations for education and employability are centered around the boy becoming financially stable and therefore more eligible for marriage. They feel that a good education is paramount since their eligibility for marriage increases if they are well educated and can secure a well-paying job. Simultaneously, this also gives the boys' parents more leverage whereby they can ask for a higher dowry – a phenomenon that is reported to be a huge barrier by girls' mothers.

Teachers' perspective

Teachers feel that parents treat a girl's education as an act of 'ticking off a checklist' with the constant threat of withdrawing admission upon failing. Teachers specifically cite that girls are made to stay at home to do household chores. It is typical of parents, especially when both mother and father are working, to delegate management of the household and care of younger siblings to daughters.

"When you are growing up in a family of 7–8 members and your parents are going out to earn money, you have to stay at home and make dinner, as well as breakfast and lunch for your family, and you have to take care of your siblings too. It is a big challenge for girls then to make time for their studies."

23   Chaudhary R. & Verick, S. (2014). Female labor force participation in India and beyond. ILO Asia- Pacific Working Paper Series. ILO. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_324621.pdf

Teachers also spoke about how a 'good' marriage proposal can hamper girls' education, dreams and aspirations at any point of time. Parents need to understand the importance of education more than girls.

Teachers believed that the Plan-It Girls program focused on providing emotional support to girls, developing their skills and providing information related to career opportunities. They mentioned that programs like this should not only focus on counseling or equipping girls with information but should also provide opportunities for them to find jobs since most girls come from economically weak backgrounds.

With respect to program impact, a few teachers mentioned visible changes in girls in terms of more clarity on how to plan for their future. The teachers were sensitive to girls' needs and wanted to provide all the support and input that the girls required.

For teachers, paid work for girls is seen as a tool to ease the economic burden of the family and not necessarily as fulfilling career aspirations. Their lens of looking at girls' aspirations is also restricted to the gendered idea of 'traditional' work options that some girls find feasible for themselves. This is also governed by the teachers' own understanding of what is permissible for girls from under-privileged backgrounds and what they perceive as realistic options that girls can pursue. Drawing from their experience of teaching the girls, they feel that programs like Plan-It Girls should help girls strengthen vocational skills such as 'stitching, cooking, hair styling' as these are the skills that girls are good at, can monetize and safely pursue without the fear of backlash.

"Sometimes on karwa chauth, we conduct mehendi competitions. Some children are good in drawing, some in painting. For SUPW, children do hand work like stitching. Some children know how to do makeup or hair styling very well, some are good in stitching or cooking so programs should work with girls on strengthening these skills."

One of the teachers was a little apprehensive about the possible backlash on the girls because of the program. She stated that although the program has definitely equipped the girls with their right to information and knowledge, this information has also led the girls to face backlash in their own families like restricting their accessibility and mobility to visit places, even restricting going to school because of their attempts to speak up in their homes, or discuss topics such as relationships.

"Parents of these girls are not very educated. These girls, after listening to the session, just go and say something to the parents, who, of course, don't know about the extra sessions being held at school. They then believe that their daughter is learning all these (bad) things and restrict her from going out, meeting friends, going to school etc. Not every girl informs her parents of what happens in school, and neither are the parents willing to hear that story."

Across all stakeholders including the girls, this was the only mention of anticipated backlash that the girls could have faced because of the program. However, despite the ecosystem approach of the program, which was designed to reduce backlash and provide an enabling environment, fear of backlash needs to be considered central to the program design.

4.4 ASPIRATIONS – EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

GIRLS feel that parents are not inclined to let them pursue higher education, but they themselves are determined, especially after the Plan-It Girls program experience, to study as much as they can (at least till graduation). They want to use education as a stepping stone toward having a career, financial independence and an 'identity of their own.' Many of them see this as a way to be equal partners with their husbands and to be able to contribute economically to their future homes. While most of them want to work, the opportunities that older girls see for themselves are still limited to 'traditional' skills that have greater possibility of being pursued from home even after marriage. Younger girls aspire to engage in professions that they are interested in and have a clearer understanding of the plan. Most girls aspire for government or non-government office jobs that are stable, safe, respectable and secure.

BOYS perceive education as a necessary step toward building a career that provides them quality employment in the future. They face the pressure to start earning as early as possible. Many of them have enrolled in distance learning and have taken up work to start contributing to the household income. Where girls are concerned, boys have come to understand that in current times, it is regressive not to educate girls as much as they want to study. However, their understanding of the role a girl plays still remains limited to the household and taking care of the family.

MOTHERS see education as a means to secure a 'good match' for their daughters. They highlighted education for girls as one of the key topics of engagement during their participation in the program with the understanding that it is now common for girls to study at least till the college level. However, very few mothers attribute the need for higher education to girls' aspirations. Most mothers feel that fulfillment of aspirations is up to the girls' in-laws. Though mothers acknowledge that it is now more common than before for girls to work, they see it as an economic necessity only in case of difficult situations, and the financial responsibility rests on the girl's husband. Only single and working mothers seem more supportive of girls taking up work to fulfill their aspirations. Those who seemed to have a more favorable opinion also wanted to ensure that the girls engage in work that is safe, secure, respectable and easy to verify or monitor.

TEACHERS emphasized that parents only permit girls to study if they perform well in school or college. Failing a class or poor academic performance often leads to parents having their daughters drop out of school and getting them married. Teachers are supportive of the Plan-It Girls program as it focuses on helping girls build their skills and offers information and support on their career choices, which they do not have the opportunity or the time for. They feel that it is crucial for girls to have gainful employment, but see the scope being restricted to 'traditional' vocational skills like learning henna art, working at a beauty salon or stitching clothes. They feel that more than ambition, employment opportunities are necessary to enable girls to support themselves and their families financially, with the understanding that most of the girls come from homes where parents are struggling to make ends meet.

4.5 STORY OF THE YOUTH FACILITATORS

It is imperative to capture the story of the youth facilitators who extensively engaged with all key program stakeholders and were the main functionaries within the program. **The youth facilitators (YFs)** were boys and girls from communities similar to those that the girls and boys who participated in the program belonged to. Their story has been one of change and growth. Across the board, YFs reported that the Plan-It Girls program had been an unprecedented experience in their lives that enabled them to shed their own inhibitions, biases and navigate discomfort in tackling issues that they themselves had never addressed in the past. The induction of YFs, their training and execution may be recognized as a best practice within the program.

The program training equipped YFs to reflect upon their own deep-seated sociocultural and gendered conditioning prior to engaging with program stakeholders. This included navigating their own personal relationships and roles within their respective families. The YFs admitted to being disconcerted in the initial days when they were oriented into the program modules. Due to the capacity building and engagement with the program team, the YFs had the opportunity to internalize the curriculum topics – especially those that they themselves had never thought about or addressed before. The YFs specifically recalled topics related to the inherent gender inequality in communities and families, understanding self-efficacy, body image and the ability to express themselves.

Many female YFs reported that they had to navigate their discomfort with discussing topics like bodily changes and menstruation with their male colleagues present in the room. Every single YF acknowledged that the regular trainings enabled them to unlearn some of their own perceptions and/or misgivings regarding curriculum topics like self-identity, patriarchy, gender-based discrimination, power, and inequality, among others. For several female YFs, the space to reflect on

their lived reality through the program curriculum led to recognition of issues of inequality within their own homes. This included restrictions imposed on them when it came to taking up employment, or the unequal treatment given to them, their mothers and sisters in comparison to their fathers or brothers.

One of the first challenges that YFs stated having to overcome was confronting their own family members to assert their right to pursue their professional ambitions. One female YF mentioned that she realized that she was expected to fulfill all her household duties, tend to her father and brothers and only then was she allowed to step out of the house for her work. She stated that this had been the outcome of deep-seated gendered conditioning, and she had to confront her siblings and father in order to change the division of work within the household. Another female YF stated that until she attended the Plan-It Girls training, she had felt that there had been no gender-based discrimination in her home because she was loved by her father and brother. The program equipped her to recognize that in spite of having loving relationships, there was discrimination in terms of the domestic responsibilities placed upon her. She reported that she then tackled it by having a conversation with her father to make him understand that though his intention may not be so, he was inadvertently discriminating between her and her brother. The YFs also acknowledged that had they not taken these steps within their households, they would not have been able to effectively transact the curriculum content with the program participants, and that this journey of reflection, realization, internalization and ability to act was a necessary prerequisite to being able to effectively deliver their work as facilitators.

Female YFs also reported that the training pushed them to challenge their existing notions and understanding of identity, gender roles and inequality as the program trainers used relatable and powerful examples. For instance, questioning the basis of festivals like *Rakshabandhan*. Earlier they *"celebrated it and thought of it as a festival where girls get money."* After being part of Plan-It Girls, they realized that even the festival promotes

discrimination as it states that a girl cannot ensure her safety and needs to depend on her brother.

"I got to learn many things from the program. We analyzed everything in detail. There was an advertisement on TV for detergent where only women were shown washing clothes. Later during our training, I related gender discrimination to that advertisement. It is not right that some work should be done only by women and not by men the way it is shown in our society. Anybody can do anything." – Male YF

One female YF felt that the program was equipping girls to take 'incorrect' steps by encouraging freedom of expression and even the choice to have romantic relationships.

"They should have shown girls their responsibility as well. Both the family and the girls have responsibility toward each other. We are telling them about rights, but they are forgetting their responsibilities. What is the use of this now as girls are smoking and drinking also, what do they need now? They don't value their parents and elope. As I sometimes say to my friends, I have been in a relationship for eight years but my father is most important."– Female YF

It is evident that YFs were able to challenge their own beliefs around gender discrimination and effectively transacted the curriculum content with the program participants. However, they often found themselves caught in the dichotomy between rights and choice vs. normative and moralistic right and wrong. They faced a constant struggle on a daily basis and found themselves navigating through their beliefs, norms and their newly acquired understanding. This is reflected in their own articulation of the 'good girl/bad girl' trope which is still associated with making choices that are not socially acceptable.

Skill building and professional development

Soft skills like communication, negotiation and resourcefulness were learned in the process of
curriculum training and negotiating with stakeholders like teachers and parents. YFs repeatedly stated that they had to undertake a series of tough negotiations with teachers to convince them to give them time in the school timetable in order to conduct sessions. They reported that teachers would often be unavailable or disinterested in giving them time, despite an allocated slot in the timetable, but they learned the value of persistence. In many cases, this process also required them to build rapport with the head of the school, as they learned to navigate the power dynamic.

Female YFs, specifically, reported a sense of fulfillment in having dispersed the apprehensions and disinterest of mothers during the mothers' meetings. They encountered mothers who either believed that the YFs were wasting their time giving them information they already had or were suspicious that the YFs were teaching their daughters immoral or inappropriate things. To tackle this, YFs leveraged the relationship they had built with the girls to create mothers' groups.

Technical skills like making reports, PowerPoint presentations and most importantly, public speaking, were learned by the YFs in the course of the program. YFs also said that they learned skills they had not anticipated – from looking for real estate space for the Youth Resource Center (YRC) and setting it up from scratch, to being able to use technology comfortably to work on documents, reports, databases and even emails that they were required to maintain in order to track their progress with students and the community.

YFs also learned teamwork and collaboration with colleagues and navigating inter-personal conflict. They were often responsible for multiple tasks, including maintaining the YRC space, practicing their curriculum topics, managing schedules with teachers in schools and holding meetings with mothers in the community. In this process, they had to learn how to share tasks with their colleagues and adapt plans depending on the requirement, including substituting for one another. In some cases, where there was a personal conflict, female

YFs reported either negotiating with their peers, or being able to find the right support to manage the conflict by reporting the matter to the right person.

Youth facilitators reported that the single most effective method that helped them transact the program with the girls was the repeated training and rehearsing of program modules and mock practice before the transaction of each session. They believe that the repetition helped them not only to internalize the content of the session, but to also practice the methods of transaction that required extensive interaction with the participants – leading to well-executed sessions and a sense of satisfaction with their own performance.

"I have learnt a lot from it…within 15 days of leaving this program, I got a job as a trainer." – Female YF

A sense of pride in being 'change-makers' has been reported by all the YFs who participated in the program in Delhi. Much like teachers, YFs see themselves as catalysts for adolescent girls and boys, being able to introduce them to concepts that are rooted in their realities – such as establishing a unique identity, the need to be able to demand one's rights, and to be able to work toward a successful future. They reported feeling proud when their 'kids' report back to them with actions taken toward being treated fairly and being given the opportunity to pursue academic and professional aspirations.

Readiness for similar programs

At the time of the study, most YFs were either working in other organizations or studying further to fulfill their aspirations. YFs have credited the Plan-It Girls program with immense growth in terms of providing them with soft skills like collaboration, communication and negotiation among others, as well as technical skills like public speaking, making presentations, creating and maintaining databases and reports and **most importantly, equipping them with the tools to navigate a multitude of stakeholders across varying levels of difficulty in engagement.**

4.6 STAKEHOLDERS' EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM

As part of the study, stakeholders were also asked for feedback on the program activities that they participated in.

Girls

Several topics such as identity, gender, power, patriarchy, bodily changes, goal-setting and planning for the future had top-of-the-mind recall for girls. They also recalled the method of transaction and the activities even after a year of program completion. They found the activity and discussion-based sessions exciting, as it was a safe space to share their thoughts and emotions, without fear of being judged or reprimanded.

They recalled activities such as power walk, role plays and body mapping – identifying various parts of the human body. A few girls spoke about the activity in which they were asked to write the good qualities of their friends.

"Didi (female YF) played a game with us in which we had to write five good qualities about our friends and five qualities that were missing. We wrote good qualities, but it was difficult to write the bad. They are our friends." – Older adolescent girl

Most girls recalled the Plan-It Girls sessions fondly as they seemed to provide some respite from their regular classes.

"It is said in the beginning of Class 12 that the board exams are very difficult, but they are easy if we study throughout. We used to get bored studying continuously, so when didi came to do some activities and teach us something, we were entertained and also learned something." – Older adolescent girl

It was observed that girls mainly recalled activities that they were able to engage in physically as well. Sessions that were more discussion-based or did not have games or activities were termed as boring. Interestingly, they did not even recall the topics that they found boring. The girls also referred to the workbooks while talking about the sessions that had interesting activities.

The girls seemed content and happy with the program overall but wished that there had been more sessions for them to be able to cover all the topics in greater detail.

Boys

Overall, the recall of specific sessions was low among boys. They did not recall much of the content or the activities, but referred to the program with reference to the YFs.

"Two bhaiyas (male YFs) used to come to class. They told us about equality, rights and that we should not differentiate or discriminate." – Younger adolescent boy

The partial recall is reflective of the limited engagement that the program had with boys in Delhi schools because of lack of support from the heads of the boys' schools. This was unlike the receptivity that the female heads of schools showed in the case of girls' schools.

Mothers

As part of the program strategy, sessions with mothers were planned as short-term engagements. This posed a challenge in the recall of specific session content by mothers. However, they connected the program with the YFs and suggested that the program engagement should be longer. This is in contrast with the responses the team had received while planning the activities.

Teachers

Teachers who participated in the program had a clear recall of participating in the sessions that were conducted with them.

"Plan-It Girls' program started in either 2017 or 2018 with 10 or maybe 12 teachers. There were two teachers who came and did a few activities with us."

They also remembered activities like the 'kite' activity. The activity demonstrated that there is a solution to every problem. The key recall for the teachers was that of participating in interactive discussions with the Facilitators who led thematic conversations on issues of adolescents. These conversations included inviting the teachers to share their observations on the issues that adolescents face – physical, emotional, mental, family-related, educational etc.

"I liked the discussions. I love sharing my ideas with whoever is available, and in a like-minded group you can come out with your ideas and discuss them even if solutions may not be possible. These problems are so vast and given their social and financial standing, the solutions are not always available, but one thing that is available is the exchange of ideas. You might pick up some ideas while discussing a problem, so discussion, debating and introspection are some of the things that happened."

The teachers were also aware of and familiar with the activities that were being undertaken with the girls in the classroom. They were not only aware of the program but some of them were also appreciative.

"YFs used to take sessions as per a schedule allotted to them. Children liked them. They were happy talking to these YFs, so I also talked with them personally."

The teachers recognized that the sessions created a safe space for girls and therefore, girls could open up better to the YFs.

"I once entered a class by mistake. A session on periods was going on. As soon as I entered, students became quiet. After that, I didn't go there."

The recognition that students may not be able to discuss the same topics in front of their teachers dissuaded them from sitting in the classroom. However, some of them felt very strongly that teachers should be able to play the role that YFs undertook as part of the program.

"By profession we are teachers, but we too are mothers and have children at home and have brought them up, so we understand what is going on in the mind of a girl. When we see girls participating in school competitions, we acknowledge that and help them to take it up as a skill so that they can make a living out of it if required in future. As

teachers, it is our duty to encourage and guide students to work better and scold them if they are doing something wrong and explain things to them."

The engagement with teachers was initiated as part of the program to create a group of like-minded teachers who would support the program as well as the girls. The above quote is indicative of their readiness to undertake activities and further discussions with adolescent girls to help them advance in life.

4.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Each stakeholder was asked to share their perspective on elements that could be modified or improved in order to maximize the output, based on their understanding of the program objective.

Girls

Girls recommended that both their parents be involved in programs like Plan-It Girls. They especially emphasized the need to include fathers, since they are the ones who are the key decision-makers in their lives.

"They should hold meetings for the parents and make them understand rather than just conducting sessions for boys and girls. Meetings could be kept on Sundays." – Older adolescent girl

Teachers

Many teachers felt the need to include the sessions in the class curriculum for the students. However, a few teachers showed lack of interest because it would mean an increased workload for them. The ideal solution in this case would be to reduce the number of classes and administrative responsibilities for teachers, and make time for a period where these sessions could be undertaken.

"Girls hesitate a lot in talking to people around. They hesitate in talking to boys, teachers or even friends. As teachers we try

and discuss all these issues in class as well. It will be great if this is included as a class curriculum as then it would help students to open up and know how to talk and communicate."

Teachers suggested that it would be a good idea to introduce dedicated personnel for this purpose with regular periods to conduct sessions fitted into the timetable. A couple of teachers suggested that this dedicated teacher could be in an age bracket close to the girls as they felt that girls will be more comfortable talking to someone their age. Unanimously, teachers felt that grading or marking such sessions would make it less impactful as the teacher and the students would lose interest. For example, if exams are conducted for these sessions, then it will be like any other subject. The intent for these sessions should be to equip girls with knowledge to differentiate and understand right and wrong and not to test them on their recall ability.

"It will be difficult for us as teachers to take class as well as talk to girls on these personal topics. However, if rather than involving us in such programs, we involve specific people to just take these classes then I think it will be useful as that person will have time to discuss all types of issues in detail."

Youth Facilitators

Emerging from the challenges and questions they faced whilst transacting the P.A.C.E. curricula and engaging with other stakeholders, youth facilitators made the following recommendations:

- Adding topics such as mental health, awareness about the LGBTQIA community, sexuality, plural gender identities and HIV AIDS to the curriculum.

  "Sessions on gender identities should be added. The children are interested and it is important to give them information that will help them understand the LGBTQIA community better as they do not have the correct information." – Female YF

- Starting the program with younger classes will help in building rapport as YFs mentioned that spending more time with them will result in active participation.

As the program worked with girls and boys who were due to give their board exams, they might not have been able to engage much due to exam pressure. Also, starting interactions with students about their lives and issues at a younger age might help toward reducing the number of dropouts due to poor academic performance.

"The program should have included girls from Class 6 and not directly involved girls from Class 9." – Female YF

- Continuing associations with students beyond a period of two years, as even after the program ended, girls felt the need for continued support.

"Whenever we meet these girls outside the school premises, we make it a point to talk to them and listen to what they are trying to say. In a way, maintaining communication, because though the program ended, we had developed a relationship with these girls. So, they come to us for solutions to their problems and we just cannot leave them like that." – Female YF

- Finding a way to cater to girls who were not able to continue participating in the program because they did not pass to the next class.

"There are some girls who could not stay with the program because they did not pass to the next class. I felt very bad about it. I wish there was a way to follow up with them so that they do not lose out on our sessions." – Female YF

- Making use of digital devices in the session attracts the students and impacts their thought process as well. Students start to express greater interest in the content.

"If we use a digital platform like a laptop or projector, it is difficult to carry, but we can use that once in a week because children show more interest." – Male YF

4.8 PROGRAM LIMITATIONS IN DELHI

Plan-It Girls had been conceived as an integrated program across two academic sessions (2017–2018 and 2018–2019) and was embedded in the ecological approach. The program was initiated in Delhi schools in September 2017 after generating school buy-in and receiving the requisite government permissions. However, the sessions had to be stopped in December owing to the focus on final exams in March. Between September and December, only three to four sessions (one session in a week) could be held across schools as this was a busy period that included half yearly exams, sports days, annual day, annual picnic and holidays (festival break – Dussehra and Diwali, followed by winter vacation). The sessions were resumed in the next academic year starting April (with a summer break in May and June) and conducted till early December just before the pre-board exams for Classes 10 and 12.

These issues were further compounded in boys' schools where the team was unable to garner the support of the heads of schools (HoS) despite repeated attempts. They felt that since the program is focused on girls, the engagement of boys was not required. Also, the HoS of boys' schools believed that the boys are aggressive and cannot be dealt with through this type of program. Despite the policy of no corporal punishment, it was observed that in boys' schools, the HoS used the stick extensively. The intention was to integrate the program into the timetable as in the girls' schools but the HoS did not allow it. The sessions with the boys were thus conducted in 'workshop' mode once in a fortnight.

Also, the program strategy with mothers in Delhi had to be recalibrated to their availability. The mothers' groups were formed for a four-week period to initiate a dialogue between mothers and daughters. Similarly, the teachers' engagement strategy had to be reworked as it was found that only 3–4 teachers in each school were willing to participate in the sessions.

After the program culminated, the team stayed in touch with the program participants. Some of the participants accessed the YRC while others were supported in accessing training programs. It is critical to note that at the time of data collection, Delhi saw massive public protests in the area where the intervention schools and communities were located.

Section 5:
Study Findings – Jharkhand

As in Delhi, the study in Jharkhand was conducted in the early months of the year 2020. As it had been a year since the program had culminated, the older adolescent girls were expected to have passed out of school and the younger cohort was expected to be still in school. However, the team was aware that in Jharkhand the possibility of girls having got married—both older and younger—was higher. This is critical to remember as the study could only involve the girls who were still living with their families irrespective of their marital status.

In Jharkhand, the villages that were visited during the study were at varied distance from the district headquarters. A few villages were relatively close while others were at least 30–40km away from the town. The girls mostly attended the nearest school which could vary in distance from being in the vicinity, to being 3–4km away. Before the program was initiated, the teachers in most intervention schools had reported that the girls do not attend school regularly. This was attributed to the distance of the schools. This claim was substantiated by the baseline survey when girls reported that they missed school on an average of 14 days in a month because of household work, health issues and distance.

As compared to their Delhi counterparts, it was observed that girls in Jharkhand have significantly lower media exposure. Less than one-third of the girls from Class 9 and just over 40 percent girls in Class 11 watched TV every day, while in Delhi this proportion was close to 60 percent across classes. Mobile access was also limited to 16.4 percent and 25.9 percent in Classes 9 and 11 respectively. The baseline survey had reported that internet access to girls in Class 9 was less than 1.5 percent and less than 5 percent for Class 11 girls.

5.1 IDENTITY, SELF ESTEEM AND SELF-EFFICACY

Younger and older adolescent girls in Deoghar and Pakur shared detailed and positive responses to the modules that focused on identity, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Most girls reported that they had never spent time thinking about themselves in the past, and the interactive activities carried out through the program had made them question how they defined their individual identity.

The need for an individual identity was recognized after participating in the program. Many girls who were interviewed expressed that they were surprised when they reflected on their identities as part of the sessions. They were being typically defined by either the groups they belonged to, or by the male members they were associated with (father, husband). There was an explicit declaration across age groups that girls had recognized the need to have their own identity. Self-Identity was also the most frequently and immediately recalled topic among the younger girls as it was applicable to their own life. Girls stated that they wanted to make their own identities and move beyond being known primarily by their father's name. They articulated their understanding that certain parts of identity can be changed and worked upon like education, work and behavior, while others like physical characteristics and age cannot be changed.

They reported that they were now more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in terms of ability and skills. They believe that their strengths lie in studying, helping others, making friends and handling household chores along with their studies. In terms of weaknesses, older

adolescent girls were eager to improve their skills such as stitching, operating a computer and learning English. They wanted to improve their marks and study more and also learn to cook as cooking is seen as a vital skill which will help them after marriage. Girls reported an overall increase in confidence and self-esteem: a feeling that 'I can do'. Their belief in their capacity and ability to take action is evidence of improved self-efficacy. This supports the impact evaluation which showed significant improvement in self-efficacy of both younger and older cohorts.

Girls revealed that they were exposed to the idea of appreciating one another, knowing their self-worth and being non-judgmental for the first time. Several older and younger girls remembered being told to offer positive comments to their peers, not be judgmental or rude in their responses but instead be empathetic; something they reported having continued after the program.

"Now I don't make fun at all if someone scores less or gets scolded. I tell them to do better next time." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

"My friend recited a few couplets and everyone liked it. I told her that I am proud of her and she thanked me. She liked that I liked what she said. Nobody else said anything." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

Girls also reported a drastic shift in the way they see their bodies, as the program normalized conversations about the changing female body during puberty. Both younger and older girls highlighted that it has positively impacted their sense of self. Most girls reported that prior to the program, they felt a discomfort with their changing bodies, leading them to become reclusive and unconfident. The program sessions that focused on bodily changes were credited with creating a comfort in acknowledging the various body parts that they were ashamed to talk about and breaking the taboo on conversations around menstruation. There is a shift from taboo and shame to a need to understand their own bodies for good health.

"When a girl cannot tell anyone that she has her period, she feels very awkward. Didi told me that now it has become a normal topic and we can share about that with anyone." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

Girls also reported that they felt an increased confidence in being able to communicate, challenge and negotiate against discriminatory practices. After participating in program modules focused on gender, communication, emotions and interpersonal relationships, girls reported that they were able to articulate their concerns by using the right tone of voice and at the right time.

'I was not interested in talking to anyone two or three years back, but now I am interacting with everyone and I even talk to unknown people and get to know what is going on. Earlier my world was very small but now I have a broader one." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

Understanding how to communicate in various scenarios has given them the skill to be able to express their views and share their feelings. This gives them the ability to negotiate with others in their life. Girls are now able to gauge situations and approach people when they feel the person might respond positively to them.

"I used to be afraid to speak to people in the past... Even my father listens to me now. If I want to go out, I convince him that my friend is going and I can too. I tell him that I can go out and study because I want to be something in life and for that I need education." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

It was also observed by the research team that the girls demonstrated several of the skills that they claimed to have acquired. They were able to communicate with the team openly and with confidence.

Boys' perspective

The boys who participated in the program were also asked to reflect on their qualities, strengths and weaknesses. Most boys spoke about their hobbies and what they aspire to do. Unlike their female counterparts,

they did not directly state how the program influenced their sense of self, self-efficacy or self-esteem, but some of them mentioned feeling more confident as they are growing older.

They also demonstrated an ability to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. While they did not attribute this to their participation in the program, they acknowledged the support they had received from the YFs.

It is important to note here that the curriculum for boys focused primarily on building gender perspectives and reducing violence. The male peers were seen as critical to the girls' ecosystem to ensure that the girls' success is not impeded due to fear of violence from their male peers.

Community members' perspective

Community members, including parents of the girls, felt that the girls seem more confident in dealing with the 'outside' world because of the program. As part of the program, girls participated in role plays that were staged in the community. The community members recalled those performances and stated that seeing the girls coming out of their houses and performing in front of the community is the biggest sign of them developing confidence. They felt that education and this confidence will help girls educate their children better and deal with decisions in their marital families.

"Girls who participated in the play felt confident and if they do it regularly, they will become more confident." – Male community member, Deoghar

"Yes, now girls are getting smarter and doing well. They are going to school and also taking part in nukkad naataks (street plays) and the teachers invite their parents to watch them." – Female community member, Deoghar

While the community members, both male and female, acknowledge that the girls have become more confident, this continues to be seen as a quality that will help them improve their marital life.

Teachers' perspective

Teachers have also noticed that the girls have gained confidence since participating in the program. They felt that adolescent girls were now talking and engaging more freely with boys in the school. Some teachers also felt that girls have become comfortable in sharing information or concerns about their menstrual health with female teachers.

Teachers shared that a program like Plan-It Girls has helped girls to open up and present themselves as confident individuals in front of everyone, as opposed to their usually shy and hesitant behavior. **In some cases, teachers reported an increase in school attendance, ever since girls participated in the program**.

"We saw that when these sessions were held, the attendance was better and they did a great job. The feelings that the girls had deep in their hearts came out and their hesitation was gradually disappearing." – Female teacher, Pakur

They observed that girls had also begun interacting in class and developed the interest, comfort and confidence to raise questions in the classroom. In Pakur, teachers also mentioned that girls who were shy and hesitant earlier, now took part in various activities like street plays, door-to-door campaigns and sloganeering and performed in front of an audience. They also reported that boys have started supporting girls in these performances.

"Girls started participating in everything without any hesitation and I saw boys supporting them and giving them respect. I think all of this happened because of the program because the program taught how a girl should lead her life and move ahead." – Male teacher, Pakur

A few teachers also shared that girls have become more vocal about their discomfort when boys pass comments or tease them.

5.1 IDENTITY, SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-EFFICACY

GIRLS, both younger and older adolescents who participated in the sessions, articulated that they want to develop their own unique identities and not be known primarily by their father's or husband's name. They have also become more comfortable with the bodily changes experienced during puberty, thereby gaining greater confidence in themselves. Sessions on communication further built their confidence and ability to articulate their needs and concerns. Program sessions have enabled them to seek ways in which to establish their unique identities both through developing the confidence to interact comfortably with the people around them and putting their perspectives forward, as well as through academic achievements.

BOYS also articulated feeling more confident and being reflective of their behavior. However, they did not attribute these changes to the program but rather to 'growing up'. But they acknowledged the support received from the YFs throughout the program.

COMMUNITY members corroborated the girls' narrative and observed changes in their confidence. They stated that the girls appear to be engaging more comfortably with the 'outside' world after attending the program. However, they view this increase in confidence as a positive development that will enable girls to manage their marital life better.

TEACHERS reported observing greater attendance, improved quality and frequency of interaction between girls and boys, improved communication with teachers and articulation of their concerns and questions. Further, teachers felt that a program like Plan-It Girls provided a platform that girls have been able to leverage for their overall development.

5.2 GENDER EQUITABLE ATTITUDES

Sessions on gender discrimination were the most recalled sessions across interviews and workshops. **Girls knew that restrictions were imposed upon them when they entered puberty but after participating in the program, they were able to locate these restrictions, roles and expectations in the larger context of patriarchy and gender-based discrimination. They were able to identify and articulate the restrictions and scrutiny that they are subjected to, which do not apply to their male counterparts.** They reported that after participating in the program, they could recognize specific occasions and situations wherein they **were being treated differently and were considered weaker than their male counterparts.**

Though girls had always known about the inherent inequality, they had never articulated it in the past. **This change was attributed to the facilitators sharing examples from their own lives, which girls were immediately able to relate to.** These acts of inequality manifested across various aspects of their lives – girls not being given money to spend while boys are, girls being primarily responsible for household chores from a very young age while boys are not, boys being given autonomy to make decisions with respect to clothing, lifestyle or even food habits but others decide for girls. While going out, girls are generally accompanied by a male chaperone. They do not even have a share in their father's property.

It is important to note that girls could recall topics like power and patriarchy and were able to explain how patriarchy is the transference of power from males to males, from one generation to the next. They were also able to cite this as a cause for inequality.

"We have a male-dominated society. Earlier my grandfather and then my father and after him my brother will handle everything. There are no rights for girls in our society. This is what patriarchy is." – Older adolescent girl, Deoghar

"We did an activity on pitrasatta (patriarchy) to understand it. As girls, we don't have the power to take decisions on our own. If my mother decides to sell her jewelry, she needs to ask my father. If my grandfather is there, then they need to ask him too." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

"Girls are not allowed to eat first. When everybody finishes their food, then girls eat. After eating, boys only wash their hands but girls need to wash the utensils and clean the house. Girls do all the household work and boys only do outside work." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

"Boys have to do much less as compared to girls. Girls have to take care of the family and the house. They have to go to work and care for everything also. Boys go to the office after having food and that's all. They don't have to do anything else." – Older adolescent girl, Deoghar

This articulation is indicative of their developing understanding of structural inequalities which was also evident in the other examples of power they shared. They recognize that power plays out not only in the case of gender but also in age, wealth and other social categorizations. Girls gave examples of "chhote par bade ki satta" (power of an older sibling over younger) between siblings and "gareeb par ameer ki satta" (power of a rich person over a poor one) in society.

Many girls pointed out that boys are seen as the primary financial providers for the household, and are therefore given greater importance, while girls' needs are not cared for because they are seen as temporary members of the household who will eventually move out after marriage. Girls spoke about how parents feel pressured to plan for their daughter's marriage and therefore their focus remains on accumulating wealth for marriage and dowry, rather than focusing on the needs or desires of the daughter.

Some girls pointed out that they are under constant scrutiny for what is considered to be 'incorrect behavior' – from talking to their husband before marriage, going out of the house alone, and in many cases even talking too much, especially openly around strangers. **However, after participating in the program, many girls stated that they have stopped caring about what people say about them, as long as their families are supportive of them.**

The ability to take action against inequality is still dependent on the girl's familial context and the restrictions imposed upon her, but girls now feel strongly about the need to navigate and negotiate around these norms. Some girls feel comfortable taking action against inequality, while others feel that they need to maintain status quo and not disappoint their families. The need to prioritize their family's happiness and honor is intrinsic to their understanding of the norms that they have been socialized into since childhood and can be further influenced by the type of media content that they consume via television or internet (on shared or personally owned mobile devices). For instance, some girls mentioned that they were inspired by TV serial protagonists who were seen as fulfilling the wishes of their families. These girls wished to emulate such characters.

"When I see the serial and how much she does for her husband, I feel that when I get married, I will also have a family and keep everyone happy so that nobody has enmity against me." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

Some girls have started questioning gender discrimination at home for a range of issues, including access to and usage of a mobile phone, mobility, and going for tuitions or coaching. They try to convince their parents that they are responsible and should be trusted and are using their newly developed communication skills to navigate the conversation. Some are now willing and eager to educate their family and others about gender discrimination if they get a chance.

"We try and convince them…explain things to them better. We tell them that there is no difference because girls can also study and do something in life." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

"My brother doesn't give the mobile to me. When I ask him for it, he says what will you do with it? Then I tell him that if you can talk to your friends, why can't I? I told my grandmother to buy one for me. Since I fought for it, I got one too." – Older adolescent girl, Deoghar

The girls who said that they felt comfortable taking action against discrimination saw self-confidence as crucial to be able to do so. A younger girl clearly stated that:

"If we are self-confident, we can agitate against this social problem of dowry."– Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

The understanding that inequality is structural has helped them assert themselves. The response to this understanding varies from understanding the concept, to developing a vocabulary, reflecting on its impact on day-to-day lives and in some cases actively addressing it using other skills learnt as part of the program. Learning, reflecting, internalizing and assimilating the lessons were the various stages that girls were in.

Boys' perspective

Boys felt that Plan-It Girls was aimed at empowering girls and making them aware of their rights. They understood that the objective of the program was to bring gender equality and make girls feel confident so that they raise their voice against discrimination.

"As far as I understood, the main concept was that we have to understand that boys and girls are equal. We have to treat them equally in all aspects. Both should get equal opportunity in everything and should not be discriminated against." – Older adolescent boy, Pakur

Adolescent boys who participated in Plan-It Girls articulated the greatest recall and impact of the session that focused on gender-based discrimination. Most boys reported being able to connect the session content to their lived realities and identified various points where girls were treated unfairly in comparison to them.

"When someone says that a woman should not speak her mind, I would love to stand up to him and tell him that she has a right to voice her opinion as well." – Younger adolescent boy, Deoghar

Boys were able to identify clear instances of girls being treated differently than them. Early marriage was reported to be a key point of difference as compared to boys. Boys recognized that the community believes that a girl's marriage is an important event, and girls tend to get married as early as 16 years of age.

"The family keeps telling them that they are supposed to get married soon so they have to learn to do household chores." – Younger adolescent boy, Pakur

Most of the boys interviewed felt that discrimination is unfair to girls and stated that this is a result of traditional thinking. They said that girls are unable to take on jobs that require them to leave the home owing to the limitations imposed upon them by family members.

"They spoke about the discrimination that is happening in society. If a girl is working outside, she is given less importance and is kept at a status lower than a man even if she is doing the same job as the man. Since she is a woman, she is not given respect. So, I felt very bad at that time. I even told the teacher (YF) in the class that whatever is happening is wrong and he told us that this is what we have to remove from society." – Older adolescent boy, Pakur

"Through this program, I realized what is happening in society… An incident happened and a lady was asked to go inside and was restricted from putting forth her opinion. I felt what was happening was wrong. Some way or the other this program has influenced the way I think about discrimination happening in society. I learnt that some things happening in society are not right and we have to bring changes." – Older adolescent boy, Pakur

Based on this understanding, boys feel motivated to take action against inequality when they witness it. Both

older and younger boys cited several instances where they wished to, or were able to take action, including enabling the fulfillment of academic goals, and preventing their peers from misbehaving with their female counterparts.

"I now stop my friends when they abuse or comment on girls. I told them that it is torturous for girls. I do not know whether they are following it or not, but I always give respect to girls because I think both boys and girls are equal." – Older adolescent boy, Pakur

A key change cited by the older boys is that they feel greater comfort in interacting with their female peers. **This can be attributed to a deeper sense of empathy felt by them toward girls who are treated unfairly.**

"My sister was interested in completing her education, but she was not allowed to do so. In the future, if I have a daughter, I will definitely allow her to study till she wants to. If she is interested in education, I will give her all my support." – Older adolescent boy, Pakur

For some boys, the articulation of gender inequality is demonstrative of the prevailing social reality and not a 'problem to be tackled'. While they recognize and describe the nature of inequality, they continue to subscribe to gender-discriminatory opinions, attitudes and practices. Many boys stated that girls should be given freedom of mobility as long as they do not bring dishonor to their families by eloping or engaging in objectionable activities (alluding to intimacy). They continue to attribute traditional roles like the need for girls to be educated so that they can educate their children, and to uphold the trust of their family members. Some younger boys also felt that restrictions on mobility are justified because girls are expected to help their mothers with managing the household, and because these restrictions are mostly imposed in the interest of their physical safety. A few boys also mentioned that it is a girl's responsibility to not break her parents' trust and to instill confidence in them. This is indicative of the fact that while the sessions enabled boys to think about gender discrimination and roles, their gender attitudes are still reflected in statements like:

"If a girl has some work, why shouldn't she go out at night? If the guy can, then she can too. All that is important is that she ensures that she is right. It is not really good to come out of the house in the night and go out with boys." – Younger adolescent boy, Pakur

Hence, while boys are vocal and, in some cases, also advocate for equal rights for girls, they still subscribe to attitudes whereby they feel that the onus of maintaining the family honor is on the girl without recognizing their own privileges within the normative structure.

Community members' perspective

For community members, roles and expectations for girls revolve around domestic responsibilities and marriage. All the conversations around education and work are also in the context of marriage and household responsibilities.

Female community members attribute domestic responsibilities for girls as being a form of support and love that is received from daughters. They feel that in the current generation, mothers and daughters have bonds of friendship, whereas this is not true for sons. However, this bond is bundled with the expectation that the girl 'takes care' of her mother by sharing the burden of household chores with her.

"A girl looks after her mother and father and everyone. If the mother is ill, the daughter cooks for her. She takes care of her mother." – Female community member, Pakur

It was evident that the girls' roles and responsibilities were gendered and could only be envisioned within the household.

Teachers' perspective

Teachers who participated in the program felt that boys and girls have begun to interact more freely since the program, which was not the case earlier as interactions would mostly be awkward and uncomfortable. They feel that girls have now become more independent and are capable of protecting themselves when boys

Older adolescent girls discussing program experiences at the YRC in Jharkhand

misbehave with them. They also find that boys have been encouraging of girls when it comes to speaking up and participating in events in the school.

"Girls started participating in everything without any hesitation and I saw boys supporting them and also giving them respect. I thought all this happened because of this program since it taught girls how to lead their life and move ahead." – Male teacher, Pakur

"They have started coming closer to each other and they talk to each other. Earlier if there was a sports event, it used to be mostly boys participating and girls used to feel uneasy. But it is not like that anymore, now they all play together." – Male teacher, Deoghar

Teacher trainings were conducted as part of the program. Reflecting on their participation and experience of the training, teachers felt that they were aimed at sensitizing teachers on issues faced by adolescent girls and boys and gave them a way to learn about concepts that they might not have paid attention to otherwise.

"We were taught that the main difference between boys and girls is societal rather than physical. Then we did a few activities including role plays, like if you are a panchayat head, how you can treat the two genders (differently)." – Female teacher, Pakur

"In the workshop, we had discussions and shared our opinions. The conclusion was that we have to change our point of view and society's point of view." – Male teacher, Pakur

There was heightened awareness and motivation to bring change. Teachers from Pakur mentioned that the workshops provided them with information on various topics like adolescence, gender, power, use and misuse of the internet. It gave them a platform where they could reflect on their own actions at home and at work. The training motivated them to forego their 'traditional ways of thinking' and help girls in moving forward.

"During the workshop, we realized that we are well educated but we still differentiate directly or indirectly in the family

or in society. This program made us think about changing our mentality. We realized that we were being unjust to our daughters, sisters or wife and often don't give them the chances that we want for ourselves. We also tried to bring changes in our life. In society we are following the same old traditions and are unable to come out of that circle." – Male teacher, Pakur

"I really liked one thing in the program when the facilitators said, 'You are the only hope'. The ultimate point is that parents deny education to their kids because they feel that they don't have the ability to educate them further. These kids come to the teachers with a world of hope because they feel that we can actually motivate their parents and change their mind." – Female teacher, Pakur

Male teachers opined that their participation in the workshops helped them reflect on their own attitudes and opinions around gender. One of them also mentioned helping out his wife in household chores after the program.

"After attending the workshop, I started helping my wife in the kitchen because it is my responsibility also to do that work." – Male teacher, Pakur

A few of them also spoke about discussing this with their colleagues at school and questioning the social expectation of women being restricted to the household and not being 'allowed' to work outside.

"One of our teachers thinks that ladies of the house should not work. If she is working, then who will stay at home? I asked him that after your daughter is married, will you be okay if she is restricted to the house. He replied that now the society has changed. I said if society has changed, then your way of thinking should also change. It is not good for you to restrict a girl from working because she got married to you." – Male teacher, Pakur

The narratives of both male and female teachers who participated in the workshops revealed an inclination to challenge the existing gender roles and expectations in their own lives.

5.2 GENDER EQUITABLE ATTITUDES

GIRLS resonated deeply with the curriculum content around gender equitable attitudes, as they found stark examples of inequality in their immediate surroundings and were able to relate them to the concepts they learned about patriarchy. They are now able to locate the root of the discrimination they face in the system of patriarchy. Their articulation of the same is indicative of their developing understanding of structural inequalities. Most girls feel that now maybe they are equipped to identify these situations, pre-empt them and even put forth their perspective. Some of them demonstrated the ability to negotiate for privileges; including access to and use of a mobile phone, mobility, going for tuition classes or coaching and even continuing education.

BOYS felt that girls should also be given equal opportunities to study and work. However, they believe that while girls should be encouraged to study and do what they want, their primary role is to take care of the household and family, especially after marriage.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS mostly articulated support for girls' education. However, they have a clearly defined gendered approach to the roles played by girls and boys. Their perspectives on education and employment for girls indicate a strong need to assert control over a girl's mobility so as to ensure that she maintains family honor and does not engage with boys, thereby eliminating any possibility of a relationship or elopement.

TEACHERS felt that the program has given girls the confidence to comfortably interact, collaborate with and in case of conflict, confront their male peers. For the teachers themselves, the trainings attended during the course of the program informed them about the needs of the adolescents and encouraged them to reflect on their own biased gender attitudes at home and work.

5.3 MARRIAGE: PERSPECTIVE AND CHOICE

Marriage was the primary concern for girls. It was most frequently responded to and opined on, by younger and older adolescent girls alike. **Girls' most immediate and direct association with marriage in Jharkhand is that of girls getting married before reaching the legal age. Older and younger girls both observed that they had seen girls 'being married off' by parents at as young as 13 years of age.** Girls stated that they recognized and related to the topic as by the time they reach 16 years of age, parents start pressurizing them, looking for a match and in some cases, do not allow them to continue their education. They even felt that parents prioritize what society thinks and not their own daughters.

"Five out of ten girls are married off when they turn 16. Only a few are able to pursue their studies after marriage." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

"Parents start thinking about the marriage of their daughter when she reaches the age of 14–16. Society starts pressurizing them." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

Program activities around the topic of early marriage—role plays, street plays, campaigns and rallies—left an impression on the girls' minds. Most girls also recalled the plot of the street play they performed to spread awareness about the negative impact of child marriage on a girl's life. They also recalled being told about the ill effects of an early marriage on the life and health of a girl and the right age of marriage as being above 18 years.

"If she gets married at a young age, then she will have a baby at a young age and be in bad health. If she is older when she gets married, it is better." – Older adolescent girl, Deoghar

"…my parents got my sister married at an early age. After marriage, girls suffer from various illnesses and the reason for that is child marriage. So, I want that girls should be aware about all these topics." – Older adolescent girl, Deoghar

It is interesting to note that for several girls, the practice of early marriage is one that needs to be challenged due to the adverse effects it can have on the health of a girl and her children. While some of them understand that early marriage severely restricts their future aspirations and choices, most articulate health effects as the key reason to challenge the practice. This is also reflective of the arguments that are usually made against child marriage, both by the government as well as civil society organizations. The narrative to counter child marriage revolves around the impact of child marriage on the health of adolescent girls and the adverse effects including adolescent pregnancy, childbirth, maternal health and maternal mortality.

After attending the program, while some girls felt that they will at least be able to have a discussion with their parents and express their point of view on marriage, others felt that they have no say in selection of a partner or even with respect to the age of marriage. Girls would ideally want to meet their potential partner before marriage and wish to get supportive partners who will 'let' them study after marriage.

"I feel scared…what happens if I can't get married? I feel I will get settled after my marriage and if he gives me the permission, then I will complete my studies. I feel scared about all these things." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

Some girls felt that they would be allowed to complete their graduation before getting married. A few stated that they now feel that they can 'fight for their rights' and showed willingness to at least try and intervene in the cases of child marriage that they might witness.

"We can change the system of child marriage and encourage parents to help their daughter study further. They should marry a girl at the age of 18 years and boys should get married at the age of 21 years." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

A few of the older girls who participated in the qualitative study were already engaged and were waiting for their husbands to complete their education before marriage. It is critical to note here that the girls who could participate

in the qualitative study were those who were still living with their families irrespective of their marital status.

"I got engaged in 2018 and will get married next year. My husband is yet to finish his studies. He has done his B.Ed. Once he gets a job, our marriage will take place." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

Girls reported that parents are under constant pressure from society to get their daughters married early and to save money for dowry – which is a rampant practice in Jharkhand. They think that it might not be possible for them to have a choice in marriage, but they now feel equipped to negotiate delaying marriage till the legal age and have the confidence to approach their parents to allow them to pursue higher education after school. They recognize that this is not commonplace but feel that they are now able to raise these concerns, which they had previously not considered discussing due to fear of backlash.

"I will somehow try and convince my father... I will tell him that I can go out and study because I want to be something in life and for that I need education. I will reject any alliance that they bring." –Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

Girls have recognized that they can use their academic performance as a means to negotiate a delay in marriage. Many older girls who were currently enrolled in college courses reported that they had used their keen interest and good performance in academics as a means to negotiate a delay in their age of marriage.

A few girls cited examples of women from social media and in their community, who have not gotten married till a 'later' age of 24–25 years and are working. Such examples act as role models for girls and they look to them for guidance.

"There is one person here. She is not married and is working in Bhopal or somewhere. I don't know in detail, but she is doing a job. She is around 24 years old." – Older adolescent girl, Deoghar

However, a few older girls also feel that these girls (the ones who are not married till 24–25 years) will now not get a suitable match and that they are wasting their time. This is indicative of the belief held by the older adolescent girls – that delaying marriage beyond the age of 18–20 years or escaping marriage altogether is not an option.

Despite having accepted the inevitability of marriage, a few older girls shared their fears and apprehensions around marriage. For example, a girl from Deoghar knew that she will be married off next year as her family and the community feel that she is old enough to get married. She was apprehensive of the changes and responsibilities after marriage and hoped that her partner will be supportive of her studying after marriage. She had accepted that she cannot escape marriage and is fine with it since others around her are also getting married.

"My grandparents want me to get married early. I can study further only if my in-laws allow me. If the family wants me to get married, I will have to. But I want to stay here and study further. They want me to get married." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

The possibility of being subjected to violence after marriage is one of the fears that a few older adolescent girls voiced. Sessions and activities on violence were also recalled by them in the context of marriage. Both younger and older girls spoke about how violence can be both physical and mental and gave examples of sexual violence as well.

"YFs told us in class that to injure one physically and mentally is called violence." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

"When someone is not interested in physical relations but still has to do it; that is also violence." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

Older adolescent girls recalled an activity on violence where they were asked to identify whether a reaction by a character in a story was violent or not. One such story was where a husband slaps his wife for forgetting to put

salt in his dinner. Girls recognized this act by the male character in the story as being violent and felt that they now 'know their rights' and can 'raise their voice' if needed. Girls also demonstrated an intent to not tolerate any acts of violence in their marriage.

"When I get married and if I make a mistake, they (marital family) cannot raise their hand or voice on me. That is violence. They can make me understand in a nice way." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

Boys' perspective

Boys are aware of having greater autonomy as compared to girls in their age of marriage and in some cases, choice of partner. This is attributed to the traditional role of a boy being a provider in their families. Many boys (especially older adolescent boys) felt that this choice is justified because they were expected to earn and support their families, so they should have the time to earn enough before getting married. They spoke about how during the program, they learned that both girls and boys should not get married early as it can have adverse effects on both their lives. After the program, many boys recognized that early marriage would not allow them to adequately support their family. This is also aligned with their understanding of the gendered roles and expectations of men and women in the household and society.

"We can get girls married before 18 but shouldn't…. That is because girls are not developed by then. If they get married at a young age and then have a child, the child will not be healthy. A man shouldn't get married before the age of 21 because he cannot stand on his own feet before that, so how will he care for his wife and child." – Younger adolescent boy, Pakur

Boys want to marry educated girls – so that they can take better decisions for the family and can educate their children. **Beyond this, boys want their future spouses to be responsible and caring, and take care of their parents in their absence.** The onus for being accepted within her marital home also lies on the girl as the boys expect her to fulfill the demands of the family and 'do whatever is required to be liked within the family.'

"I want her to care for my family. She has to feel that my family is her own and show them the love and care in the same way. She has to understand the family and become part of it in such a way that they don't see her differently." – Older adolescent boy, Deoghar

Boys reported that there have been cases of dowry deaths and violence in the village. The parents of a girl are constantly worried about arranging for dowry and this is one reason why they do not want to spend money on their education.

The response of most boys regarding early marriage, dowry and related violence was located in their understanding of the gender roles and prevalent practices in the community. While the boys see their roles as the 'bread-winner' and their partner's role as 'housewife', they seem to condemn violence in the context of dowry. But while they acknowledge the financial pressure that families face because of dowry, the boys neither condemned nor stated that they would not take dowry. Also, while extreme violence that led to a girl's death was denounced, only a few reflected upon day-to-day violence.

"She (girl in the village) was being tortured every day by her husband's family that she didn't bring any dowry and, in the end, they burnt her alive…. There was another girl who was also being ill-treated. She told her family that she was being tortured a lot for money. By the time her brother got there, they had hung her in her own house. These things need to be stopped. I am a student and I know about these things, but the uneducated have to be told these things for sure." – Older adolescent boy, Deoghar

A couple of boys also spoke about their intent to take action against child marriage. However, they reported that their families did not allow them to as this is an accepted practice and reporting a case of child marriage could lead to backlash.

"I was trying to stop a child marriage. I was unable to do it because of my family's honor. We got a phone number where we can call for such complaints, but our family members did not permit us to do that." – Younger adolescent boy, Pakur

Community members' perspective

Community members interviewed during the study appeared conditioned to state that the 'appropriate' age of marriage for a girl was 18 years. While they opined that the girls should be married only after the legal age of 18 years, several members in the group also candidly accepted getting their own daughters married by the age of 15 or 16 years.

Community members first and foremost attributed financial pressure of a girl's marriage to the practice of dowry. They stated that it is an accepted practice to seek dowry from the girl's family, even if the boy is less educated than the girl or is a school dropout. While higher education for boys translates into a higher amount demanded for dowry, education of the girl has no bearing on decreasing the amount of dowry demanded.

"We have to give dowry. We have to give jewelry and cash. At least 50 grams of gold and five lakh rupees or even more." – Female community member, Pakur

"Here families want dowry—25,000 or even 50,000 rupees—and a poor girl cannot get married. If the parents don't fulfill the demands, the girl can be sent back home. They do not see the qualities of the girl; they only want money. This is the trend here." – Female community member, Pakur

Both male and female groups mentioned that higher the education of the girl, lesser were her chances of getting married. They further opined that a girl who turns 18 and is not married is considered to be old and should be married as soon as possible. Community members also shared that the age of marriage is also driven by the number of daughters in the family. Higher the number of daughters, higher the pressure on the family to get them married early. Many members stated that because of societal pressure to find a spouse for the daughter, and the need to ensure that she remains eligible, parents tend to marry their girls before 18 years if they find a 'good match' so as to not lose the opportunity. This pressure follows from the fact that it is usually considered unfortunate for a girl to reach her 20s and not be married. This is usually attributed to 'flaws' that make her ineligible for a worthy match;

these flaws could be anything from a darker skin tone to an 'unattractive' appearance. Another key reason that is associated with delay in a girl's marriage is the community perception that the family is unable to arrange dowry and so, they are not able to get the girl married.

"If the girl is too old in age, one does not find a match. People feel that there is something wrong with the girl." – Female community member, Deoghar

According to several members, if an 'achha rishta' (good match) is found for the girl, the age and education of the boy don't matter. Fixing the marriage is what matters the most. A good proposal or match is one where the boy is earning well or is a professional like a teacher, doctor, business or shop owner; the family is small with fewer members; and they own a house.

A female community member from Pakur shared that a good match is one where:

"The boy is working and the family is in a good financial condition. The girl can stay there happily. He is earning 500 to 600 (rupees) daily. He could be a businessman or a serviceman."

While the community members were in agreement on the importance of getting their daughters married at the 'right time' (age) to a good prospective match, they did acknowledge the street plays and activities conducted on child marriage as part of the program. Many community members also felt that while the nukkad naatak (street play) performed by the girls on child marriage may have been well received, it was a hopeless cause. Some community members appreciated the activities but did not comment further. They felt that parents continue to arrange child marriages behind closed doors. This is mostly because exposure to government campaigns and programs has conditioned them to report the legal age of marriage when asked.

"The government has fixed the age of 18 years for marriage, but people don't follow this rule. You can do nukkad naatak in the village but its result is not positive. People are still doing the same thing and no change can be seen in society." – Male community member, Deoghar

Some of the community members who participated in the FGDs were frontline workers such as *anganwadi* workers or Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and office bearers such as ward members and panchayat leaders. It was observed that they sometimes tried leading the discussion in the direction that they perceived 'the researchers might want to hear', or their answers were what they deemed 'acceptable'. However, the participation of parents in the discussion brought out the practices that are prevalent in the community as well as their priorities regarding their daughters.

Teachers' perspective

Although the teachers did not reflect extensively on marriage as a topic, it did emerge spontaneously as a concern and reason for girls being pulled out of school. Some teachers mentioned that students had shared that they were being forced to marry or not being allowed to attend school. A few instances were reported where teachers intervened and tried convincing parents to allow their daughters to continue studying. A few teachers also felt that some parents have shown change and are allowing their daughters to study, learn how to operate computers and letting them participate in activities like street plays and door-to-door campaigns.

"The guardians also think that it's fine if the girl doesn't want to get married. She will be educated and self-dependent. Slowly people are changing but it will take time." – Male teacher, Pakur

While the teachers were hopeful, they also acknowledged that the pace of the change is slow and it only seems to happen among families who have access to resources.

5.3 MARRIAGE: PERSPECTIVE AND CHOICE

GIRLS face consistent pressure of marriage even before their schooling is over. They have started negotiating the expectations of their families and community to try and delay marriage – though they are worried they will not be able to do, since parents see it as a rite of passage. Early and child marriage is also associated with the accepted practice of dowry, leaving girls with little choice to navigate decisions about their future. However, girls have learned that education can be used as tool to negotiate a delay in age of marriage, but only if the girl continues to perform academically well, is compliant and a 'good girl'. While they have accepted the inevitability of marriage, girls continue to struggle between negotiating for delaying marriage and the fear of not getting a good match at the right time (latest by early 20s). Older girls also fear being subjected to violence in their marital home.

BOYS have far more autonomy in age and choice of marriage as it is understood that they will earn and provide for the family and thus require time to secure work before getting married by the age of 21–22. Boys' desire for educated partners is limited to the purview of the household.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS understand that the legal age for marriage is 18 years and above but continue to marry their daughters preferably between the ages of 14–16 years. They justify their decision of early and child marriage by citing the availability of a good match. They also feel the societal pressure to marry their daughter within the socially acceptable time frame. However, they do acknowledge that if girls perform academically well, they may consider delaying the age of marriage until graduation.

TEACHERS recognize that girls are often pulled out of school for marriage. However, they also acknowledge that they are now seeing some parents delaying marriage to allow their girls to study.

5.4 ASPIRATIONS: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

All the younger adolescent girls interviewed were enrolled in school either in Class 11 or 12, except for one who was enrolled for a graduation program in Hindi from the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

All the older adolescent girls were enrolled in graduation courses from an open university or a nearby college. These colleges tend to be located in a town in the adjacent district or district headquarters. Girls often do not attend regular college and only commute for exams.

The desire to continue education seems to have received impetus as the girls have started to link the various aspects of their life. They now recognize that education can help them not only push back the age of marriage but also help them access resources that they may not have had prior to this. While some have shown greater inclination in negotiating, others feel that they will use the opportunity till the family allows.

Girls have also come to understand that a good academic performance is rewarded by families in terms of privileges such as allowing more time on a smart phone and applying for higher education. They have learned to leverage this so that they can fulfill their desires and pursue their aspirations.

"Whenever I get good marks, I show it at home. My marks are improving and now I have an interest in studies." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

"I told my father that I want to study further. I said that when I go to Inter (Senior Secondary – Classes 11 and 12) then I can't get ICT (computer) class and my father said that if you score first division, I will send you for computer coaching. So I said, you get ready, I will score first division." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

"I want to study till B.A. If my family allows me to study, I will. I will study till the last level in school and further if my family allows it." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

"I am studying in a college in Pakur. I have to go to college every day. I will study well and then I will fill the forms for SSC (Staff Selection Commission) and other competitive exams." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

Girls who think they have support from their parents want to study, become graduates and take up jobs. One older adolescent girl from Pakur who is currently pursuing her graduation, plans to take up a foreign language course followed by a master's degree and a National Eligibility Test (NET) to become a professor.

"After graduation, I want to do a certificate course in a foreign language. In M.A. (postgraduate degree) first year, we need to write competitive exams, then I will get a scholarship with which I can go forward with my studies. I don't want to be a burden on my dad for a long time. Then I want to clear NET, and get into a teaching course." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

However, it is critical to note that this girl is an exception to the norm.

The girls' motivation to continue school education is not only to use it as a negotiation tool for delaying marriage, but also an opportunity to socialize in the absence of scrutiny. In Jharkhand, with restrictions on mobility because of social norms as well as a lack of infrastructural resources like public transportation, **girls reported that education was a means to socialize.**

"I was having a good time with my friends and teachers. I had one friend who I used to study with. I am not good in English and she was good and used to help me. I miss everything about my school now." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

Girls' desire to build a career is hinged on the possibility of financial independence which is paramount. They have developed an understanding of the importance of paid work for women. Another motivation for girls to work is examples of women who were not self-reliant and have suffered at the hands of their in-laws. Girls reported instances where women around them had to stay with their husband and in-laws and continually face acts of violence as they were

Girls exploring different career options at the career fair booths in a Jharkhand school

not financially independent and therefore did not have anywhere to go, even if they wished to leave their marital home.

"A woman was being tortured by her in-laws. She didn't want to go back to them because they wanted to kill her, but her father convinced her and sent her back. They killed her by throwing her in the well. I want to earn on my own so that if there is any problem, I will not have to bear his (husband's) torture and stay with him. In the village, women have no knowledge that they can be free…they cannot earn their own living, so they stay with their husband." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

A few girls also expressed an inclination to share the financial burden at home. They recognize that having an income would mean not having to depend on anyone.

"I want to be independent so that if I want to buy anything, I don't have to ask others to do it for me." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

A few older adolescent girls who had supportive, elder male siblings were intent on following in their footsteps, as in a few cases brothers were seen to be more lenient and supportive of girls' choices.

"I want to become a teacher and for that I will have to do B.Ed. My brother has told me about it." –Older adolescent girl, Deoghar

"I want to join the police. I have not enquired about that. My brother told me that he will enquire and tell me what has to be done." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

"I want to be independent and earn for myself. I am preparing for competitive exams to qualify for a government job. My brother helps me in my preparation and also guides me." – Older adolescent girl, Deoghar

Most of the older adolescent girls seek resources and information to create a career path. They have a clear idea of the kind of training or education required to get to their choice of jobs, even when that is limited by the

kind of jobs that are permissible for the girls. They are also aware of the resources that they can make use of—books, internet, apps, and advice from YFs, teachers and coaching tutors—to find out about job openings and dates of application forms.

"I get to know from friends and social media platforms. Sometimes I also access social media. There is an app from where we can get the updates of jobs." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

The girls also recalled the career fairs that were organized to provide exposure to locally available opportunities of training and employment.

"In school, they arranged a camp, and they were giving us information. My friend asked them about jobs in the bank. Didi told me that there are separate counters. If you want to join the police or become an engineer or a chef or doctor, you can ask them about anything there." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

The distinction in the level of clarity and confidence to plan for and seek out resources and information about a future career path between younger and older adolescent girls seems to be a function of the life stages that they are at. For the older adolescent girls, marriage is a distinct, inevitable, and inescapable reality, one that they can only negotiate in terms of delay in the age of marriage through education. They also feel the urgency to acquire skills, training and education during this small window of opportunity that they have before they get married.

Unlike their older counterparts, the younger girls have garnered the drive to do something and 'be something' in their lives, but are not yet clear about what they aspire for, or the concrete steps they need to take toward it.

Girls also used the tools that were provided as part of the program. For instance, a few girls mentioned the workbook that included activities such as how to set up a timetable for studying, and activities associated with future plans, work and confidence. They also mentioned that the book had activities that were to be shared at home with mothers.

Recalling these activities in the workbook was also linked with the employability modules that helped them plan for the future. Girls also look up to local role models including teachers, youth facilitators and a few social media influencers. They spoke about their relationship with the YFs and how it had created a safe space and a platform for them to comfortably discuss their concerns and questions, including those they wouldn't discuss even with their friends. Since the YFs were a part of the same community, girls felt connected to them and saw them as role models who had successfully built a career and circumvented the pressures of marriage to fulfill their aspirations; something the girls now aspired to do.

"She (Female YF) used to explain everything to us clearly. She asked questions and everyone answered. They used to play games with us as well." – Younger adolescent girl, Pakur

"Didi was not married…and we thought that she is so much older than us and not married, why are we hurrying up? We should do something in life and only then get married." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

After participating in the program, both older and younger girls recognized that education can be used to garner self-respect, confidence and power.

"If we are educated, then we can do anything in our life." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

"After studying further, I want to do a job and become self-confident. Then I will get power." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

However, both younger and older girls were aware that while they might want to work, their ability to do so would largely depend on their marital family. **Although girls have aspirations and are trying to get support, information and resources, the decision of whether they will be able to work or not lies in the hands of their parents and in-laws.** Girls receive limited support from their parents, and some are aware that they will not be able to pursue their aspirations. However, in rare cases, parents were found to be actively involved and wanted their daughter to look at career prospects. For instance, a girl's father took her to consult a doctor and find out about

the process of becoming a doctor since she expressed interest in becoming one. This is a positive deviant case where the father provided the required support in accessing information about a career of the girl's choice.

Boys' perspective

Boys did not speak much about their own education but highlighted the fact that girls do not receive equal opportunities for education, which they think is because of the 'traditional thinking' of society. They felt that everyone should be educated to a certain level to be able to take good decisions for themselves and their families. In many cases, boys were motivated to advocate for the education of their female siblings and peers. **They also felt that they want to marry educated girls so that girls can educate their children and take better decisions and better care of the boys' families.**

Older boys are under pressure to start working as soon as possible, and while they want to contribute to their household income, they are also keen to pursue their ambitions. Older adolescent boys who have clearly defined goals are planning and working toward achieving them. They had very specific ideas about what they wish to do to grow professionally, such as enrolling in different courses, getting into the police force, becoming a teacher at a local school or setting up their own businesses. Younger boys have broader goals defined for themselves. They too, ultimately want to have a job but were unable to articulate the type of profession or steps they need to take to fulfil their ambition.

"I want to do something with computers. I know how to do all the online work, like booking flight tickets, railway tickets and making pan cards, so I'm thinking of opening a shop for that." – Older adolescent boy, Pakur

Older adolescent boys also referred to the fact that the youth facilitators enabled them to plan their professional goals better. They found that the friendly attitude of the YFs encouraged them to approach them with their questions and concerns.

Boys recognized that girls have professional ambition but are not given opportunities due to an unsupportive societal mindset. However, they did not have solutions to offer as this issue is considered normative, and therefore would require a change in mindset at a larger level.

"Girls also have the same desires and want a good lifestyle and want to make a name for themselves. It is just that they are not given that chance here. They start studying and then they are just married off when the time comes. They are not able to fulfil that dream." – Older adolescent boy, Pakur

It needs to be acknowledged that while boys seem to recognize that girls have dreams, they want to marry educated girls who will replace their mothers. The boys are unable to conceive the role of girls beyond the household.

Community members' perspective

For community members, the primary concern is a girl's 'safety'. They feel that there is a need to regulate education and potential employment for girls as they fear that opening up options of education or employment might result in girls eloping or having relationships with boys – thereby bringing dishonor to the family. There are clearly defined options of education for girls, ones that allow for the family and the community to exert control over a girl's mobility so as to ensure that she is 'safe' and not liable to get into a relationship or run away. This includes distance education options or enrolling in nearby institutions (where they only go to college for exams) and work options that can be managed from home. There is also a cost attached to daily travel as colleges are not located in the village area. It is therefore preferred that girls study from home and only travel for exams.

"There were girls who had gone to study outside the village but ran away with some boy without even thinking about their parents in the village." – Female community member, Pakur

"They don't go to the college daily. They go there only to give exams. If they go everyday then they have to spend 50 rupees every day. " – Female community member, Deoghar

"We don't differentiate between our sons and daughters, but we don't want to send our daughters for further studies as there is a problem of transportation. People think that it is pointless to educate their daughter as she will eventually go to her house after getting married." – Male community member, Deoghar

Community members feel that the level of education for girls has gone up in recent times and it is now common practice to educate girls till the 12th standard (Intermediate). This is mostly attributed to the fact that there are now schools within or close to the villages, so girls do not have to be accompanied to school. **A few community members also opined that these days, girls are even aiming to achieve professional success.** They listed exceptional cases where girls from the village have become bank managers, police officers or are working in the post office.

"Girls are securing top positions and getting good results. Some of them are managers at State Bank or Syndicate Bank and now we even have engineers in this village." – Male community member, Pakur

This is supported by some families because government schemes and offers have made it easier to access educational material. They mentioned schemes like free bicycles for girls and free educational material.

"Nowadays girls come by cycle to study. Girls are becoming pilots and reaching the sky. Here too, girls have gotten jobs in the police and post offices." – Male community member, Pakur

A few were very keen to educate girls and were also appreciative of the fact that the girls who participated in the program also participated in campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of girls' education. These members also felt that education would give girls the confidence to speak up. **It is interesting to note that community members who were supportive of girls' education were those in** positions of influence in the community and had greater access to information. These were a PRI member, ASHAs and *anganwadi* workers, who by virtue of their work needed to interact with many people and therefore had more exposure, or were members who themselves were educated. They advocated for higher education, and in some cases, even

employment for girls. There is a possibility, however, that these members were providing 'socially acceptable' responses to the researchers.

Some community members, however, blamed education, saying that it was responsible for extending the age of marriage and making girls ineligible for good matches, given that boys' families seek younger brides, and that a girl who is 'too educated' would not be desirable for a boy and his family.

"Some face difficulty in getting married or getting a marriage proposal. If her age increases, the number of proposals decreases." – Male community member, Pakur

While the reasons for limiting a girl's education are many, the arguments given in the support of educating girls are couched within the realm of marriage. Community members feel that educating girls is meant to enable them to be eligible for a good match (in matrimony), and to be able to educate their children in the future.

"If a girl is educated then she can look after the education of her own children. Yes, she can make her daughter progress in life. My daughter is a graduate, so she knows how to teach her children. Her husband will be out for work so she has to look after her kids." – Female community member, Deoghar

Almost all community members perceive education as a tool that girls can use in their marital homes to manage the household and their children better. In very few cases education was cited as a means to contribute to the household income, if the need arises. Some female members of the community stated that being educated would give girls a chance to be self-reliant in their in-laws' homes – in that, if girls ever faced conflict in their marital homes (abusive behavior/violence) they would have the option to leave if they were educated and financially independent.

Controlling a girl's sexuality is an overriding concern for the families and communities of a girl, especially when it comes to work. The fear of losing control over a girl's whereabouts and

the possibility of 'affairs' with male peers makes community members apprehensive and object to the possibility of girls leaving their villages for any kind of work. To begin with, it is not considered necessary nor worth the time for girls to take up work. In the event that they do, community members acknowledge that there are no job opportunities in the immediate proximity. For this, members advocate for the provision of vocational training for girls so they can take up work like stitching and rolling cotton. Most community members advocate for traditional household skills as they deem them necessary for a girl's preparation for her role as daughter-in-law, wife and mother.

"They learn how to clean the house and cook. If she wants, she can learn stitching, making sweaters etc., so that no one in her in-laws house can say that she doesn't know anything."
– Female community member, Deoghar

"On Sunday there is no school, so they learn household work so that they don't have to face complaints when they go to their in-law's house." – Female community member, Deoghar

In the rare cases where parents admit that their financial condition is weak and would benefit from more helping hands, community members still advocate helping out with domestic work, or at best, leveraging vocational skills that can be monetized at home. However, these are limited to traditional vocational skills such as stitching. A female community member spoke about government schemes and said,

"If the government provides sewing machines to the girls, it can make life better for them. They can earn some money."

The responsibility of enabling or inhibiting employability for girls is relegated to their marital homes with the reasoning that it does not make sense for girls to work in their hometown since girls will leave after marriage anyway. They cite examples of both, homes where girls have been allowed to study after marriage because their in-laws were educated, and homes where this was prohibited.

"Girls want to study more but we cannot do anything about it. They get married and then it depends on the husband. Some people do let them study." – Female community member, Pakur

Community members expect boys to take up employment as early as possible. They feel that if boys are not interested in studying, they should take up work as early as 13–14 years of age and begin contributing to the household. **This opinion is also in line with the boys' understanding and belief that they need to secure work as soon as possible after school is over, as they are the primary earners for their families.**

"Some are leaving studies at lower classes and working. They work for some company or sit as guards at the door. They do whatever work they get." – Female community member, Deoghar

In general, the traditional gendered roles for girls and boys still stand. Education is only acceptable for girls and in some cases even for boys, if they perform well academically. As boys and girls enter adolescence, gendered roles and expectations get further defined in terms of getting boys to earn as soon as possible and getting girls married as soon as possible. However, some community members also mentioned that the thinking of the younger generation is changing with time. Now some younger husbands 'allow' their wives to complete their education and, in a few cases, also 'allow' them to take up a job, mostly that of a teacher.

"We will educate both boys and girls. Even if the boy doesn't want to study, we will educate the girl. Educating the son is a matter of responsibility, educating the daughter is a matter of pride." (Beta padhana farz hai. Beti padhana garv hai)
– Female community member, Pakur

The concept of girls' education as a matter of 'family pride' is the same as the girl being responsible for 'family honor'. Even when parents are willing to educate their daughters as it adds to 'family pride', it is located within the patriarchal belief system. Both male and female community members agreed that sending girls to other towns or cities for higher education was not permissible. They reported that girls were not being allowed to go out for education or work.

Industry partners answering adolescent girls' queries at the career fair- Jharkhand

Overall, community members' support for girls' education is contingent on the girl's inclination to study, perform well academically and ensure 'family honor'. The 'appropriate' response on the question of girls' education was that parents now want both sons and daughters to have quality education. However, community members do not see any merit in sending girls to school if they are not willing to study or to perform well academically. **The onus of earning parents' approval for continuing education rests on the girl—she is expected to fulfill all household duties, be compliant and adhere to social norms (not talk to boys or go out) and perform well academically—and then parents may permit her to continue education.**

Teachers' perspective

Teachers said that after participating in the program, they have a more nuanced perspective on the role that they play in the lives of their students. They reported that the workshops helped them to reflect on the fact that more often than not, families may not be equipped to educate children, and so it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to take charge and ensure that the students get what they need.

Teachers from Pakur opined that the program has impacted the community's perspective with respect to

girls' education. They said that some parents of adolescent girls are now allowing them to study, learn computers and letting them participate in activities like street plays and door-to-door campaigns.

"The guardians also think that it's fine if the girl doesn't want to get married. They will be educated and self-dependent. Slowly people are changing but it will take time." – Male teacher, Pakur

"Girls are now participating in activities such as plays and quizzes in the school. There is a center (Youth Resource Center) in the village and I can see that girls are learning computers there. Earlier, this didn't happen." – Male teacher, Pakur

One teacher from Pakur also mentioned that after the program, particularly the career fairs held in the schools, students have started enrolling in tailoring and computer classes. Teachers from Pakur felt that students are now aware of the various career options that they have after finishing school. Girls have started seeking relevant information from the teachers and a few have also registered at the employment center. Teachers reported greater inclination among girls to seek information about relevant career options and were taking small steps toward planning for work in the future. It was interesting to note that the teachers saw this as a major shift but were also keen to provide the support that the girls required.

5.4 ASPIRATIONS: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

GIRLS: Post-program, girls have been able to draw linkages between education and establishing their own identity. They see it as a starting point to pursue their aspirations and to become independent and be known by their own names. Girls find that they are able to use education as a means to negotiate an extension in age of marriage by promising a good academic performance in school and college, thus persuading their parents to delay marriage. Girls have come to realize that for parents, education is not about aspirations but about the level of education that would make girls eligible to secure a good matrimonial match.

Older girls have decided upon a number of careers to pursue like teaching, nursing and joining the police and are in the process of identifying how to apply and what to study for it. Younger girls, however, have a generic idea about wanting to 'be something' but are unclear about the concrete steps that need to be taken towards fulfilling their aspirations. Both younger and older adolescent girls feel that it is necessary to be economically independent in order to ensure that they are not entirely dependent on and controlled by their in-laws. **They see work as a stepping stone in a world where they can be self-reliant, and therefore can secure an income for themselves if required (though it is not considered necessary).**

BOYS: Boys recognize that girls do not secure equal opportunities for education, and that everyone should be given a chance to study and pursue their passions. However, they continue to see the need for education of girls as couched within the gendered framework of the desire to have an educated partner who would then be able to educate their children and take care of the family. **For themselves, boys feel the pressure to start earning as soon as possible, to be able to secure work, be eligible for marriage and provide for the household.** They take up small jobs immediately after school, enrolling in distance-learning, while saving up to follow their passions. Again, boys feel that it is good for girls to work, but this is not seen as an equal financial partnership as boys continue to abide by the gender roles of being the primary financial providers.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS do not feel comfortable with the idea of girls leaving the village to pursue higher education (or work) as it is not considered 'safe'. This is mostly out of fear that giving girls access to resources and information will provoke them to elope with boys, bringing dishonor to the family. Hence, they are comfortable with girls enrolling in distance education courses and taking up home-based traditional skilled work so that they can be closely monitored and also develop the skills they will require in their marital households (including monetizing skills if needed). They feel that the decision to 'allow' a girl to work is in the hands of her in-laws. Therefore, the preferred mode of employment remains work that can be undertaken from home, where the girl would be 'safe'. Overall, in the community, the expectations from girls and boys are gendered.

TEACHERS have been able to reflect and reiterate the significance of the role they play in the lives of these girls and boys as they recognized that there is no other stakeholder to have these conversations with them in the community. Teachers also mentioned how the program has enabled a few parents to start focusing on girls' education and have become more open in allowing them to participate in program activities like street plays and rallies. A greater inclination among girls to seek career-related information was observed by teachers and they are willing to provide support to the girls.

5.5 STORY OF THE YOUTH FACILITATORS

In both districts in Jharkhand, adolescent girls and boys face limitations in terms of mobility, access to resources for education and employability, and have very few role models to look up to in terms of achieving success and personal growth. Here the youth facilitators (YF), by virtue of their position and responsibilities in the Plan-It Girls program, became role models for the younger and older adolescent girls and boys with whom they transacted the curriculum.

Based on the program design, the youth facilitators in Deoghar and Pakur were selected from the same communities as the students and came from similar backgrounds. The similarities of their socioeconomic and cultural background with program participants made the youth facilitators sensitive to their needs and struggles. Female YFs shared that they have had to struggle within their families to work. The challenges they mentioned revolved around struggling to finish their education, negotiating with their parents around marriage and thereafter continuing to work after marriage (or delaying marriage in case they had not yet married at the time of the interview) and even negotiating with the marital family to be able to work. Most YFs stated that they felt passionate about helping younger girls in dealing with similar circumstances.

YFs realized that they had the potential to use their own stories of learning, growth, and perseverance to continue with education and find employment. This enabled them to develop a strong rapport with the students. For instance, one of the YFs in Pakur shared her story of having to negotiate with her father to delay her marriage, and how through secondary, higher secondary and college education she persistently refused matches, until she found a job and handed over her salary to her father to prove that she was capable of being independent. Another YF in Deoghar told the story of her securing a position as a youth facilitator and defying the wishes of her husband and in-laws to take on the work she was doing. She reported how she was able to demonstrate

her current concerns and the need to balance her domestic responsibilities while working for long hours as a facilitator.

"My family was against me getting a job, but now they have reached a compromise with me. In my village, I was the only girl who had completed Class 10 in 2006–2007. Before that, no girl had studied that much. Now, people are inspired by me and every year girls from my village appear for their Class 10 examinations." – Female YF, Deoghar

"My family has been boycotted by the entire village. No one likes to talk to us and every second day someone from my community visits my father to tell him that his daughter is not the correct representation of a woman." – Female YF, Pakur

Married female YFs had taken it upon themselves to balance household work with their roles as YFs. They mentioned that they did not want their in-laws to blame them for neglecting their homes due to 'work'. The onus continues to be on the female YFs to earn the right to work outside. While the female YFs were able to negotiate with their families to take up paid work outside the household, they also felt the pressure to prove themselves as 'good and efficient' daughters and daughters-in-law, thus bearing the double burden of balancing both the roles. They constantly had to deal with the pressure of unpaid household and care work and the onus of balancing personal and professional roles continued to fall on them. This was found to be similar to the kind of expectations that program participants also negotiated with in order to continue their education.

The YFs felt that they could relate more to this work as they knew that the girls were fighting the same battles at home and in the community. This was stated to be one of the reasons for girls being open with the YFs and addressing them as '*didi*' and '*bhaiya*' (elder sister and elder brother), and sharing their thoughts and concerns with them. There were several instances mentioned by YFs where girls sought their support because of unsupportive parents and family in terms of permitting them to complete schooling or enroll in college.

"I am from the same community, so I know about the discrimination. It is etched in our minds from the beginning what a girl can or cannot do. I have faced similar situations." – Female YF

Girls and boys who participated in the program reported that they felt very comfortable engaging with the youth facilitators. **Girls, especially, felt comfortable as they found a safe space to learn, to question and to participate in activities organized by the YFs.** In many cases, the camaraderie between the girls and YFs led to situations where girls reached out to the YFs to help negotiate their cause for continuing education or not getting married, and the YFs reported that they felt responsible to at least advocate for the girls.

Skill building and professional development

The program curriculum offered a learning opportunity for all the YFs who themselves did not have prior exposure to the topics covered. Given that YFs come from similar backgrounds, only a few of them had worked in projects that focused on adolescent issues and needs. Irrespective of their professional background, they had never engaged with these thematic areas that were central to the curriculum content. **Unanimously, all the YFs shared that the Plan-It Girls induction and training process had been an exponential learning curve for them.** Topics related to identity, gender inequality, power, patriarchy and different forms of violence, among several others were ones that they themselves had never thought about or reflected on. It took them time and effort to learn new concepts that they could relate to in their immediate environment. This process helped them to reflect on the way these concepts played out in their daily lives. Through continuous training and handholding, they were able to develop the confidence to transact the content and engage with all the program stakeholders.

For example, YFs shared that prior to the training, they were not aware of why we associate certain tasks or manner of clothing with a particular gender but after the training, they realized how society and families play an important role in shaping their understanding of constructs like gender and that there is a need to challenge and change these. The training also enabled them to overcome their own hesitation in using previously taboo words like 'breast' and 'periods', which later helped them in delivering the curriculum as well. Further, training in communication and negotiation skills helped them build inroads with all their stakeholders.

"I got a lot of information in the training. We had many games and sessions. I remember one session on violence. Violence was limited to physical violence for us, but after this session, we realized that if you trouble anyone mentally, that is also violence." – Male YF, Deoghar

The training methodology and approach was found to be engaging and encouraging. YFs felt that they were interacting with colleagues in the training sessions and were deeply appreciative of having a dedicated time and space to learn new techniques, interactive tools and activities to engage with their audience. They also stated that the trainings helped them develop skills like presentation and collaboration and that they were able to use these skills in interactive sessions with adolescents, engagement with teachers and large group meetings with community members. The YFs shared that they found the training methods to be very engaging and effective and it encouraged them to follow the examples for their own work.

"It was my first training and on the first day, I was hesitant while talking with others. My trainer and senior encouraged me to talk. He said that if you don't speak, you won't be able to understand anything. From the second day, I started talking with them and I also felt comfortable." – Female YF, Deoghar

"It was good. Everybody was supporting me and I was very excited to attend the training. I did not feel that I was outside my house. My seniors and colleagues were very cooperative, and I was very friendly with them. Because of the training, I was comfortable discussing my doubts and point of view." – Male YF, Deoghar

"The training I got from the Plan-It Girls program was different. In other training centers, the trainer used to come and sit and if somebody was not attentive, then they scolded them or sent them out from the center. But here, the trainer was like a colleague who had come to help us. I never felt discouraged during the entire training program." – Male YF, Pakur

YFs also shared how they had to negotiate with their own families in order to participate in their first residential training since this included staying away at a residential complex for a week. The female YFs' families were initially skeptical owing to gendered norms that deem it inappropriate for girls to spend the night outside their homes. Both male and female YFs also mentioned that the residential training helped them in getting to know each other better, forge friendships and build team spirit.

An increase in self-confidence and enhancement of employment potential are two key takeaways for the YFs. The youth facilitators reported immense change in themselves after being a part of the program. They articulated feeling more self-confident and having immensely improved their communication skills which they are now able to use in their new job roles as well. All of them have been placed with new programs in the development sector and they state that they are utilizing skills like effective communication as well as the adolescent engagement techniques, like games and group activities that they learned during their time with Plan-It Girls.

"There was an activity, of which I still have the papers with me, which was to write on everyone's back about their positive traits. It was a game, and everyone had paper stuck to their backs and everyone needed to write something positive about that person. From that game we came to realize that speaking well about someone increases their self-confidence." – Female YF, Pakur

The program gave YFs the opportunity to engage in extensive learning about the various curriculum topics, some of which they have been able to apply to their own lives as well, in the form of negotiating with family for employment or restructuring the gender-based roles in the household. **They were able to build a series**

of positive, open and trusting relationships with their trainers, program team and their peers, resulting in a fulfilling experience through collaboration.

"If anybody had a problem in the session or in the school, they used to call me to solve their problems. I realized that I can give them good advice." – Female YF, Deoghar

"We got support from our seniors and never felt any pressure to do work. If we had any problem, they were always ready to help us." – Male YF, Deoghar

YFs spoke about engaging large groups of stakeholders and holding the attention of boys and girls in the sessions as some of the key challenges they faced. They recognized that it was a challenge to build their audiences' interest in the beginning. Several engaging activities like role plays, wall painting, organizing rallies on issues like child marriage, and smaller tools like using special applause *'baarish waali taali'* (Raindrop clap) or encouraging students to speak to them, helped build and retain their interest. The other factor that influenced the rapport building was YFs citing examples from their own lives around gendered norms and the ways in which they were able to question, subvert, challenge, and address these challenges.

YFs felt that the community plays the biggest role in obstructing a girl's success. According to them, even if she somehow manages to convince her family about her education and career aspirations, society starts taunting the family so much that they are left with no other option but to keep the girl confined to home and get her married as quickly as possible.

YFs belonging to the same community as their stakeholders has proved to be a potential best practice. The girls and boys could relate to them and saw them as local role models from similar backgrounds who were able to negotiate restrictive gendered social norms to pursue their education and work aspirations. This also helped them gain the trust of community members and schoolteachers alike.

5.6 EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM

All the stakeholders in Jharkhand were asked to reflect on their experience of participating in the program.

Girls

The girls associated the program with the experience of learning new things, playing games and 'having fun'. They shared that these sessions were beyond the class syllabus and the content was supported by real life examples. They were glued to the sessions due to the way in which the topics were explained through games and activities.

"Didi made us play games and taught us new things. It was nice." – Younger adolescent girl, Deoghar

A couple of older girls who were in Class 12 at the time of the implementation, felt that the program hampered their studies. Since some schools did not have enough teachers, the girls attended tuitions and therefore, they did not wish to come to school to attend the sessions regularly.

"I didn't attend many sessions because I had to go to the school daily and it was disturbing my studies. Actually, we had to stay at the school to attend that class." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

Activities and games such as sticking a paper on the back and writing 'one good thing' about a classmate, encouraging others around them (pat on the back) and role play exercises which required the girls to represent other characters in their lives were vividly recalled. Older adolescent girls remembered a game where they were asked to move in a direction (left or right) depending on whether they thought a cited action was right or wrong. They recalled an activity on violence where they were asked to identify whether a reaction given by the character in a story was violent or not. One such story was where a husband slaps his wife for forgetting to put salt in his dinner:

"They made us do activities. One sentence I remember, if there is no salt in food, what will a husband do? Didi said those who believe that he will eat the food without complaining should go to the left and those who say he will scold her should go to the right." – Older adolescent girl, Pakur

The interactive activities and games had a high recall as girls were engaged in it physically. Recall was also impacted by associated relevance such as the session on violence which was recalled more by older girls. Other methods which taught through painting, skits, door-to-door campaigning and storytelling were also recalled. *Baarish waali taali* (rain clap) was recalled enjoyably (with laughter and banter) by both younger and older adolescent girls. They stated that it made the sessions fun to attend and would also energize them if they were tired.

Boys

Most boys interviewed across Deoghar and Pakur led the conversation with the statement that the program had taken place some time ago, so they may not remember accurate details. A few boys recalled the sessions being conducted after lunch in school. Some of the boys interviewed in Pakur mentioned taking part in a door-to-door campaign against child marriage.

"We went from one house to another to tell them not to get girls married before 18 years. People's reaction was "Will you take their (girls') responsibility then?" This is what happens." – Older adolescent boy, Pakur

Gender equality was the most frequently recalled topic by younger and older adolescent boys in both Pakur and Deoghar. They shared that during that session YFs explained how society treats boys and girls differently in terms of restrictions with regard to movement outside the home, opportunities for higher education, or differential status at work.

After the sessions, they cited feeling encouraged to take action and try to change how society differentiates between them.

Community Members

The community members did not recall the program by its name but the majority of them recalled it by the slogans, skits and door-to-door campaigns conducted by the students in the community. It was assumed that the visibility of the program by virtue of students performing street plays stood out in the eyes of the community.

"Girls were doing a skit with the YF. There was another madam and she was playing the role of the mother-in-law. They were doing this skit and girls were acting like men." – Female community member, Pakur

The members whose daughters had participated in the community-level activity had greater recall. In Deoghar, some recalled the meetings that they had attended in the Panchayat Bhavan or areas like anganwadis and stated that the objective of these meetings was to inform them about the ill effects of early marriage and the importance of higher education for girls.

"She (YF) used to come here to make people understand about child marriage. She went to every house in the village and spoke to people. She also arranged a meeting." – Female community member, Deoghar

"Through a skit they showed a boy and a girl where the boy fails and the girl passes. So, they tried to tell us that a girl should also be given education. A girl is not there only to work in the house." – Female community member, Pakur

Community members felt the need for higher and continuous community engagement. They felt that there is a need to engage with parents more frequently as they are the decision makers and girls cannot change the way society functions on their own.

"You should come more often. The play was for five minutes and we don't remember everything after a long time. But if you people come regularly, we will remember the message clearly." – Female community member, Deoghar

Teachers

Of the two districts, Deoghar posed a huge challenge for teachers' engagement due to lack of support from the district administration. The team could only conduct one workshop of the three planned workshops. However, in Pakur, the team conducted all the planned activities.

The teachers from Pakur not only recalled the workshops, they recalled the activities that were conducted in each of the three workshops. Some of them mentioned activities like role play, pat on the back, step-by-step, writing qualities on the back, working in groups, along with ice-breaking activities like treasure hunting. One female teacher in Pakur recalled training-wise details: the first training was on gender roles, second on the use and misuse of the internet and the third was on the curriculum with a parting session where the teachers were provided with booklets and asked to discuss these topics at school. Most teachers from Pakur recalled the role play they had enacted as part of the workshop.

They understood that the training was aimed at sensitizing them on issues faced by adolescent girls and boys and gave them a way to learn about concepts that they might not have paid attention to on their own. Although they were not aware of all the topics of discussion, they had an idea that the sessions undertaken were around issues faced by adolescents, gender inequality, the issue of girls not being allowed to study, bodily changes, future aspirations and importance of education. They also recalled the meetings with other stakeholders.

"Teachers, adolescent girls, their parents and other family members also participated in the program. Reputed members of the village like mukhiaji or representatives or other persons like Maulavi sahab also attended the meeting as the people from the organization went door-to-door to convince everybody." – Male teacher, Pakur

The career fair was also recalled by the majority of teachers as a platform that provided students with information related to potential careers. The activities like quizzes, painting competitions and prize distribution that they helped to arrange also had a significant recall. Teachers expressed complete support of the program as they felt that the topics being taught to the students were important. They also expressed their interest in undertaking the sessions if the content was integrated as part of the school curriculum.

"Yes, definitely, I would want to conduct these sessions. This is my area of interest. I have been doing the same kind of work from the beginning. I may not be as organized as you are."
– Male teacher, Pakur

This readiness for taking up the program as part of the regular curriculum was shared by most teachers.

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Teachers

1. Teachers advocated for a long-term and continuous engagement with program participants—both girls and boys—starting as early as Class 6. They suggested that initiating the program when children were 11–12 years old (Class 6) would have a bigger impact in shaping the behavior of boy and girls.

2. They also advocated reaching out to the community as much as possible as they are the decision-makers in the lives of students. Involving parents and securing their understanding and support is crucial for successful implementation and impact of the program.

   "Girls are dependent on their parents. If they are coming to school, it's because of their parents. If they come to school after they get married, it's because of their in-laws. If we want to change their life, we need to convince their guardians." – Male teacher, Pakur

"We have to meet their parents and talk to them. Whatever we discuss and talk to the kids about their future etc., their parents don't know about it. That is why I think, before the kids, the guardians should be convinced. That would be better." – Male teacher, Pakur

3. Teachers also felt that there is a need to make the program digitally accessible to students who face limitations in attending classes regularly – a situation that is prevalent in both districts.

4. They suggested that the program should ideally avoid conducting sessions for Classes 10 and 12 as these are board exam years. The students are typically under a lot of pressure to perform well academically and hence might not be able to attend the sessions regularly.

5. Some teachers are in favor of including topics from the Plan-It Girls curriculum in the school's academic curriculum. They feel that including the Plan-It Girls topics will have a more sustained impact on students beyond the program, and that teachers can take it up along with their subject matter.

   "This program is not running now. So it will be good if it becomes a part of the curriculum. That will bring a change in the mentality of people and we will get better results." – Male teacher, Pakur

6. Teachers also believe that except for a few topics about bodily changes and menstruation, sessions for girls and boys can be combined, given that these are co-educational schools. They feel that collective learning has a greater impact on the minds of the participants.

   "There are a few topics that can be done only with girls and similarly, a few specifically with boys. If you conduct the sessions together (for boys and girls) and they both learn things together it will be a lot better. They will be able to debate on topics and both boys and girls will be able to voice their opinion and learning will be better." – Female teacher, Pakur

Youth Facilitators

1. YFs felt that the program should have involved parents as well in the career fair, as informing parents is more important than informing children. Parents are the ones who would financially support the child.

    "Parents should be given information in the career fair. If parents want to make their child an engineer or a doctor and do not consider their child's interest, then there is a gap between the understanding of parents and the child. A career fair where both the parents and children are present can help bridge that gap." – Male YF, Pakur

2. YFs suggested that involving both parents along with the girls and boys in such programs is a good idea, as the decision-making is usually in the hands of father. Hence, the father's involvement is as important as that of the mother's.

3. They also suggested that there should be a continually accessible digital platform where YFs can access capacity-building resources online.

5.8 PROGRAM LIMITATIONS IN JHARKHAND

In Jharkhand, the government issued the letter of permission only in December 2017. As soon as the team received the permission, the baseline survey was conducted as by then, the team had developed a good relationship with school authorities. The sessions were initiated in April 2018 when the girls were in Classes 10 and 12. The schools provided 2–3 sessions per week, as teachers were not available and students' attendance was impacted. The program could be effectively and regularly implemented for one academic session in both Delhi and Jharkhand. Due to the emphasis on academic activities in Classes 10 and 12, the Plan-It Girls sessions often had to be adjusted. This reduced time-period had an implication for curriculum fidelity. Module 1 that focuses on building an understanding of self, gender, power, patriarchy and Module 2 focusing on self-efficacy could be transacted according to the lesson plan, but the two employability modules had to be adjusted by combining sessions depending on the time available in the schools.

The program strategy attempted to work closely with the community leaders through regular meetings. However, one of the biggest setbacks was that women panchayat leaders were represented by their husbands in the meetings despite repeated efforts by the team. The team engaged with them at an individual level to motivate them, but realized that even when they came, they would not engage with the group and that responsibility was that of their husband's. A few women who participated were from the self-help groups (SHGs) or were frontline workers.

Also, as part of teachers' engagement, the team received tremendous support from the district administration in Pakur, but not in Deoghar because of the frequent transfer of the District Education Officer. The series of planned teacher's trainings—three trainings over a period of one year—could only be conducted in Pakur district. In Deoghar, which had six intervention schools of the ten, only one training session could be conducted due to the frequent changing of the District Education Officer.

Section 6: Discussion

The study findings for both Delhi and Jharkhand highlighted that the adolescent girls who participated in the program had shown improvement in their confidence to negotiate for choices, felt more comfortable with puberty and bodily changes and were able to locate gender discrimination in the context of patriarchy. However, the younger girls in Delhi and older girls in Jharkhand showed greater inclination toward career and financial independence with varied motivations based on their context.

While other program participants—boys, mothers and community members—articulated that girls should be educated, the main reason for that still remains entrenched in gender norms that prioritize marriage for girls. This section delves into the key observations of the study and implications for future programming with adolescent girls.

Gendered realities are similar despite contextual variations

Despite the wide contextual variation in Delhi and Jharkhand, the gendered realities of the girls remain similar. Girls are expected to be the beacons of family honor and all the critical decisions of their life are tied to it. The mothers in Delhi, community members in Jharkhand and the male peers of the adolescent girls across both sites continue to hold on to the gendered framework where the girl is expected to study enough to be able to manage her household and be a 'good mother'. Most stakeholders in the girls' ecosystem do not see her as an economic entity and conceive of women working only in 'dire scenarios' when the girl should be able to use her education if required.

Primacy of marriage and family honor emerge as major barriers to girls' agency

The anxieties around losing 'family honor' seem to be the biggest barriers for girls to pursue education or a career. The notion of a 'good girl' continues to put the onus on the girl to acquire education and skills without using them to take her own life decisions, especially related to marriage. This essentially implies that the girl can study as long as it keeps her 'obedient' and does not expose her to the possibility of choosing her own partner. These notions are also internalized by the girls to a point where some of them wish to adhere so as to not disappoint their families and thus do not wish to challenge the status quo.

The primacy of marriage across the urban-rural spectrum and its linkage with family honor is a critical barrier. Even when girls have initiated negotiations within the family for allowing them to continue their education and delaying marriage, it may not translate into girls entering the labor force. However, that does not mean that they have not acquired the skills that are required to enter the workplace.

Gaps in the patriarchal structures should be identified and leveraged for change

While parents want their girls to study, education is perceived as an essential quality deemed useful for finding a 'good match'. It is only in the case of single or working women in Delhi and rare cases in Jharkhand, where parents were more supportive of girls' education

and for them to work and be financially independent. This creates an opportunity to advocate and negotiate for pushing the boundaries.

Essential to create an understanding of critical concepts — gender, power and patriarchy

The adolescent girls who participated in the program had never had the opportunity to think of having an identity of their own, irrespective of the location. The program curriculum that was transacted helped them develop an understanding of **self-identity**, improved their **self-esteem** and gave them **confidence** to interact with people around them. The program also equipped them with the conceptual understanding of gender, power and patriarchy. It was observed that these terms became part of the girls' vocabulary. Across program sites, girls referred to **gender**, *satta* (power) and ***pitrasatta*** (patriarchy) as being responsible for the discrimination they face within their families and in the community. While girls were always aware of the differential treatment of girls and boys, and accepted these practices, the newly acquired language and knowledge helped them recognize the root of discrimination and thus challenge the prevalent practices.

In Delhi, girls had greater access to resources and information and many of them stated that identifying their strengths made them feel more confident about their own ability to take action to negotiate and navigate through various domains in their lives. This is in line with the findings from the impact evaluation that showed improvement in girls' self-esteem.

In Jharkhand, girls also felt an overall increase in confidence and self-esteem: a feeling of 'I can do it'. This belief in their capacity and ability to take action is evident of improved self-efficacy. This supports the finding of the impact evaluation that also showed significant improvement in self-efficacy of both younger and older cohorts.

Both younger and older girls felt the need to be economically independent

Among older girls in Delhi, no significant impact was observed on any of the employability outcomes. This was in contrast to their younger counterparts. Younger girls showed greater inclination to use education as a steppingstone toward having a career, financial independence and having an 'identity of their own.' Many of them saw this as a way to be equal partners with their husbands and be able to contribute economically to their future homes.

While most of them want to work, the opportunities that older girls see for themselves are still limited to 'traditional' skills that have greater possibility of being pursued from home even after marriage, which for most of them is an impending reality. In contrast, since marriage is not an immediate life event for younger girls, they aspire to engage in professions that they are interested in and have a clearer understanding of the plan.

In Jharkhand, the impact evaluation found a significant improvement in career decision-making efficacy among older girls. This scale was related to girls' ability to seek information and take steps to make career decisions. During the qualitative study, it was observed that both younger and older adolescent girls felt that it was necessary to be economically independent in order to ensure that they are not controlled by and entirely dependent on their in-laws. However, older girls were able to identify and had decided their career choices like teaching, police force and nursing and were in the process of identifying how to apply and what to study for it. This was also driven by a sense of urgency and a greater conviction in using education as a tool to negotiate delay in marriage. It is important to note here that these are also girls who have received parental support to continue education beyond the prescribed limit for girls in their community. Younger girls, however, had a generic idea about wanting to 'be something' but were unclear about the steps to be undertaken to fulfill their aspirations. They were also aware of the limited support from the parents.

Need to develop and promote schools as safe spaces

In Jharkhand, the school climate showed significant improvement. The teachers, community and the girls confirmed that the program was able to improve the school environment for girls. The implementation of the program helped to create a safe space for girls where they could articulate their fears and concerns. Their interaction with peers and teachers increased and they also started participating actively in extra-curricular activities, which in turn instilled greater confidence in them.

Need to engage early with adolescents

The need to start earlier in both Delhi and Jharkhand has again been emphasized by the findings of the study. While in Delhi, younger girls showed greater change, in Jharkhand it was evident that younger girls needed more support and input to be able to aspire and plan for their future.

Teachers, both in Delhi and Jharkhand, suggested that it would be best to provide relevant inputs to girls at a younger age. This would make it easier to shape their attitudes and also give them a longer window of opportunity to be able to plan their future and negotiate their choices.

6.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR ADOLESCENT PROGRAMMING

The study underscores the need for a comprehensive ecosystem approach for enhancing the agency of adolescent girls, amplifying their voice and building employability skills. It is critical to create an enabling environment by fostering equitable attitudes and providing support to access opportunities for girls to be able to translate their efforts into gainful and dignified employment.

The key considerations for future programming focusing on empowerment and employability of adolescent girls are as follows:

Implications for Adolescent Programming

1. As investment in adolescent girls is gradually increasing, it needs to be recognized that these programs not only equip girls with knowledge and skills, but also create an enabling environment for them.

2. Greater investment is required to create in behavior change among boys and men as it is evident that an understanding of privileges among boys and men does not always translate to them giving up their privileges and creating an equitable environment.

3. There is a need for an ecosystem approach especially when the agenda is to shift the norms. Greater inputs need to be provided to all the critical stakeholders to address structural inequality, along with equipping individuals with the required information and skills. Further investment in research and programs that intend to shift the norms is necessary.

4. As part of the ecosystem approach, it is essential to develop and promote the school as a safe space for adolescents. Teachers could also become greater allies in creating an equitable and safe space within schools.

5. Aspirations to educate girls and the dream to attain better socioeconomic status could provide an opportunity to further the cause of girls' engagement in work outside home.

6. Mothers could be potential allies as they seem to have a more favorable attitude towards their daughters. There is a need to create allies for adolescent girls through intergenerational programming and leveraging women's collectives.

Notes

Notes