

GENDERED IMPACT OF COVID19 ON GIRLS EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM THE FRONTLINE

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Abstract

In India, access to education for girls had improved tremendously over the last seven decades. India's female literacy rate had risen from 9% during Independence to 65% in 2011. Primary-level female gross enrolment ratio rose from 61% in 1970 to 115% in 2015. At the secondary level, enrolment rose from 14% in 1970 to 75% in 2015. This upward trajectory has been severely disrupted by COVID19 and is likely to regress. As of July 22, 2020, nationwide school closures in 40 countries affect 282 million children, of whom 134 million are girls. UNESCO's Stefania Giannini, warned of the "potential for increased drop-out rates which will disproportionately affect adolescent girls, further entrench gender gaps in education and lead to increased risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancy and early and forced marriage" Nearly 10 million secondary school girls in India are likely to drop out of school due to COVID19 that will put them at physical, emotional and intellectual risk and reverse the gains made in the recent years. Many schools have launched online classes to keep on the momentum of learning. Over two decades ago when information technology was introduced in education, expectations were high and there was optimism that this would increase easy access to education for the underprivileged. However, this has not happened, and the digital gap has widened quite fast, and impacts are now vivid. Online classes do not factor in the country's digital divide where 16% females have internet access, compared to 36% males, according to the National Sample Survey 2017-18. This gap can sometimes have tragic consequences as in Kerala where a 14-year-old girl, a merit scholar, committed suicide when she couldn't access her online classes.

Even before COVID19 crisis, it was found that girls who engage in two hours of housework per day had a lesser probability of finishing secondary school in the country. With social stigma associated with menstruation, girls have been discouraged from continued learning. In India where limited social security nets are in place, the financial and social hardships caused by COVID19 can only exacerbate the gender inequality in education. And now India's digital divide on top of the ever-growing gender divide, will only further enhance the education gap that already exists. And yet India could add a whopping \$770 billion to the country's GDP by 2025 by encouraging girls to study and participate in the workforce according to McKinsey's gender parity report. And that can happen if India adopts a gendered approach in planning for the post crisis reconstruction of education that will mitigate the large-scale consequences of COVID19 on girls. Special attention has to be given to accelerate girls' return to school. It is important that sex-disaggregated and decentralised data is locally collected to monitor girl's attendance on the reopening of schools. Remedial and additional courses can be adopted to catch up with the lost academic schedule. Rigorous evidence from across the globe can help support Indian policy makers in designing programs to protect girls during the crisis and help them build resilience for future shocks.

This paper will further explore the alternate inclusive models that exist in India and examine how such models can be replicated across the country.

Keywords: COVID19, impact, gender, discrimination, inequity, inclusion, education.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Historical journey of education of Indian women - Vedic times

The status of women's education in India has been subject to many changes over the span of recorded Indian history. During the Vedic time that is dated to the second half of the second millennium BCE, women were given equal status in society and therefore had equal access to education. Some *mantras* mentioned in the *Vedas* underscores that education was considered inevitable and important for girls. Both religious and spiritual teachings were given to women and even co-education was a common practice. It is said in the *Gobhil Ghar Sutra* text that the uneducated wife was not able to perform the

yagna. Music education for both men and women was also encouraged. According to the Vedic traditions, the yardstick for attaining education was guided by desire and merit and nothing else. The Vedic period has witnessed many women scholars and they were well versed in sacred texts and Vedas. In fact, there is a record that 20 women have contributed to the creation of *Rig Veda* verses that many *Hindus* recite even today. In earlier times, *Hindus* considered education as a process of life. It was a belief of the ancient *Hindus* that education should prepare an individual to attain the main objectives of life like liberation, for living, for character formation (self-confidence, self-reliance and self-respect) and preservation of culture. Therefore, education was made available to women as it is directly related to the improvement of society, economic prosperity, national solidarity, their social status and for the well-being of the family of generations to come. All facilities were accessible to women who wanted to pursue education and knowledge and that too without getting married.

1.2 The post Vedic times

The decline of the status of Indian education for women began about 1000 years ago. Social practices such as female infanticide, dowry, child marriage and the taboo on widow remarriage, have had a long duration in India, and have proved difficult to root out. This perception of women as either a valuable commodity or a liability has influenced the education deemed out to them.

1.3 The British impact on education

The British rule that followed had other objectives for education for women. The missionaries came to India with the East India Company and various measures were adopted to educate the local population. The missionary activities also included conversion to Christianity and as such the Indian population was wary of the education given by them.

The British did not start a program of mass education. They were only concerned about creating a small class of English educated Indians out of the millions that would serve as interpreters and clerks in their trading offices.

The '*pardah*' system, the system of child marriage and the general indifference of parents to the education of their daughters acted as a check to the progress of female education. Girls were not required to be independent of their established customs and domestic duties. Her general appearance was most important and the main criteria for being selected as a bride. The desire to get the boys educated was openly expressed but girls were safer if they stayed at home. There was a rigid seclusion of women. These reasons prevented even elementary education from being given to girls. However, there were many social reformers both from the church and the government who on their own tried to do something about the girls.

Table 1: Girls in Primary and Secondary schools for Indians

Province	High	Middle	Upper Primary	Lower Primary (A.)	Lower Primary (B.)	Total
Madras	138	2,399	4,922	79,593	16,136	103,188
Bombay	215	492	8,539	24,482	35,175	68,903
Bengal	141	329	1,267	59,991	39,942	101,670
N.-W.P. and Oudh ...	26	211	715	7,924	1,493	10,369
Punjab	21	169	1,081	10,426	248	11,945
Central Provinces ...	...	55	724	3,595	5,826	10,200
Burma	6	303	1,977	22,920	...	25,206
Assam	3	9	71	6,714	1,451	8,248
Coorg ... ..	...	...	105	533	137	775
Berar ... ..	...	31	298	425	2,915	3,669
Total	550	3,998	19,699	216,603	103,323	344,173
Total for 1891-92 ...	415	3,452	16,345	175,016	99,090	294,318
Percentage of Increase	+ 32	+ 16	+ 21	+ 24	+ 4	+ 17

Data: Maharashtra State Archives, Education Department, Progress of education in India 1892-93 to 1896-97, Pg. 287

This table shows the distribution of girls in secondary and primary school where Indian girls went in 1896-97 with the corresponding totals for 1891-92. Out of the 550 girls studying in high school 215 are from Bombay. The number of girls in the middle stage is 3,998 of which 2,399 are from Madras alone. In the Upper primary stage the number is 19,699 chiefly from Bombay, Madras and Burma. This clearly indicates that already the divide between some cities and villages have started emerging. From 1882 to 1947 the progress of girl's education was slow but it continued steadily. However, it was mostly the elite classes sent their girls to school. It was the British who initiated the process of women education formally in India. Before they got started the girls unfortunately were restricted to home education where they were taught and trained to be a home-maker only. Enrolment in women's schools and colleges grew from 1.27 lakhs in 1882 to 3.93 lakhs in 1902 (Ministry of Education).

1.4 Pre-independence landscape of women's education

It was during the freedom struggle that the need to have educated girls join the movement was sorely felt. Gandhi and his progressive views about women education brought a change and increase in activities in this field even in the rural areas. The number of girls enrolled in various institutions kept on increasing continuously over the years - from 1,424,422 in 1922 to 4,297,785 in 1947 (see Table 2). The trend about women education was encouraging and it is clear that women's education had grown remarkably during 1921 to 1947. This development though was confined to the urban areas because most of women's education was looked after by private organizations that were active in urban areas only. Even the government educational agencies could not effectively reach the rural areas.

Table 2

Year	Boys	Girls
1922	6,962,928	1,424,422
1927	9,315,144	1,842,352
1932	10,273,888	2,492,649
1937	11,007,683	3,138,357
1942	12,266,311	3,726,876
1947	13,948,979	4,297,785

Data: Government of India, Progress of Education in India

1.5 The many divides

This was the beginning of the phenomena of the urban and rural divide. This added on to the growing social divide because English education was for a few and substandard vernacular education for the masses. This further added on to the gender divide because girls' education was not considered essential. And during COVID19 we have the emergence of the digital divide because technology which is the only tool for education today is not made accessible to all.

2 THE MODERN INDIA

2.1 Modern India's implementation of inclusive education

When the British rule ended in 1947 the literacy rate was just 12%. Over the years India has changed socially, economically and politically. After the 2011 census literacy rate has grown to 74.04%. If we consider female literacy rate, then it is still lower than the male literacy rate. Today the female literacy rate is 65.46% whereas the male literacy rate is over 80%.

The Indian government has made many policy changes to ensure that the girls are not left out especially in the villages. It is becoming increasingly evident how important girl's education is to the nation. Global Synthesis Report (2017) actually states that each year of secondary education for girls reduces child marriages by 5% or more. Even human capital wealth could increase by almost 22% globally with gender equality in earnings. There is enough data to prove that if every girl worldwide received 12 years of quality education, lifetime earnings for women could increase by US\$15 trillion to US\$ 30 trillion. Women with primary education earn 14% to 19% more than those with no education at all. Women with secondary education may expect to make almost twice as much and women with

tertiary education almost three times as much as those with no education. But more importantly, educating girls averted more than 30 million deaths of children under 5 years old and 100 million deaths in adults from 15 to 60 years old. And during the COVID19 pandemic, health workers have cited that educated women understand hygiene and sanitation more easily than uneducated neighbors and are better prepared to follow the safety protocols to take care of their families.

2.2 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme for girls

With a literacy rate of just 64.60 percent (as per data collected in 2011) women's education continues to be one of the most important issues in India. At both rural and urban levels, the education of girls still lacks the desirable acceleration that will indicate a change in mindset. This is why the government has even launched initiatives like '*Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*'. This campaign (in translation means Save the girl child, educate the girl child) by the Government of India aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls in India. The scheme was launched with an initial funding of Rs100 crore (US\$14 million).

Forty nine of the 100 districts covered under this program registered a positive trend in Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) in 2016, as per Minister for Woman and Child Development. This is a refreshing change, compared to the steadily declining figures of the earlier decade. The program was announced in October 2014, and formally launched in January 2015 in Haryana, the state with India's lowest SRB. Haryana has also instituted a 1 lakh Rupee bounty for reporting PCPNDT (Pre Conception, Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique) and MTP (Medical Termination of Pregnancy) Act violations. Worldwide, the normal sex ratio at birth (SRB) is 100 female babies for 105 male babies. India's "normal" is 950 female babies for 1000 male babies. BBBP was instituted to take care of the following: Prevent female infanticide, devise new schemes and work cohesively to ensure that every girl child is secured and protected and ensure every girl child gets quality education.

The question to ask however is, have these policies and this rise in awareness led to any concrete changes in the educational status of Indian girls? Let's take a look at how India fared in this area in 2019. It is not far from the truth when we say that government schemes are not without its faults. In fact, every government scheme has gaps that need to be filled to ensure that all the goals are met. And so is the case with the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme we have here.

The major issue in this scheme is not just its lack of proper implementation, but also the misuse of funds that has been happening since the scheme was launched. This means that the funds provided to each district by the Central and State governments are not all utilized for the right purposes, especially in various districts of Haryana that has the worst sex ratio in the country. According to sources, in Panipat itself, out of the 5 lakh allocated for this scheme, 3 lakh was spent on building a "theme gate" at the town's entrance to mark the inauguration of this scheme. As per the report released by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on HRD, out of the total amount of 43 crores set aside for this scheme for the fiscal year 2016-17 only 5 crores have been correctly put to use.

So, one might rightfully ask, where did the money go? And this diversion of funds actually has an opposite impact on the parents of girl children. As per the scheme, financial support is to be provided to all parents having girl children. So, naturally many families raise girl children in hopes of getting some monetary help from the government, for their education and marriage. However, not receiving dues have disillusioned many families and has turned them more anti-girl child than ever before. Data manipulation is another reason that has shown a rather inflated set of facts to prove the scheme is a success. It has been duly found out, as per reports, that various districts register the birth of all the girls taking place but conceal some of the boy numbers to present a better sex ratio.

It is the authors' assumption and submission that until corruption is eradicated at all levels, both from the top and the bottom of the implementation machinery, all such laudable schemes will only remain in paper and will not have much impact at the grass root level. Many idealistic policies that have been well intended like RTI (Right to Information Act) RTE (Right to Education Act) National Council for the Education of Women of 1959, the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA, universalisation of education) of 2001-02, have been launched in the past but have petered out with very little impact because of faulty communication and implementation strategies. Therefore, the status of women has not changed fast enough.

3 VIEWING THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 THROUGH THE GENDER LENS

In 2020 the much-awaited National Education Policy was announced. All educators and policy makers welcomed this policy as a visionary document, the first of its kind in the last 34 years. It is expected to plug all the holes in the education system in general and girls' education in particular. A report by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights indicates that 40% of girls in the 15-18 age brackets are out of school. Accessibility, affordability, and patriarchal social structures are the most significant barriers. Of every 100 girls enrolled in the 1st grade, only 30, on average, reach the 5th grade. In grades 9 to 12, the proportions of girls in the age group of 14 to 17 is only 13% as against 35% percent in the case of boys. Apart from ensuring 100% participation of girls in the schooling system, the fund according to the policy, will aim to close gender gaps in educational attainment at all levels. NEP advises the funds to be allocated to give girls equal access to education by addressing societal obstacles that they face. The fund would also enable in "changing mindsets and halting harmful practices to foster gender equity and inclusion; inculcating girls' capacity for leadership to help develop current and future role models; and improving dialogue with civil society to exchange best practices and lessons learned", (NEP 2020).

While the authors appreciate the sensitive approach, the NEP has propagated to reduce the gender gap in education, it is as important to educate the boys and families so that the girls are given a chance. It is a myopic assumption that gender-based discrimination and gender inequality can be addressed by focusing on girls and women alone. Gender issues should not be equated to what some of us erroneously term 'women's issues'. It will therefore be very important for educators to ensure that the boys and men are as much included in all the awareness programs that are created in institutions to reduce the gender gap.

As in most other government policies, while the spirit and the vision of the NEP 2020 is indeed on the right track, the implementation plan is not given enough thought and that is where it is likely to go wrong. The policy talks about a consolidation of school complexes, so schools with too few students will be shut down. Significantly, rationalizing distances to school to 5-10 km, as the policy does, is a dilution of Right to Education norms. According to the RTE forum, 1,47,494 schools had been closed by 2017 in 13 states. With education players still reeling with COVID19, more than 1000 schools are expected to shut down by the end of this year.

4 THE IMPACT OF COVID19 ON GIRLS EDUCATION IN INDIA

In spite of all the criticisms and apprehensions expressed, it is evident that the numbers of girls in education is slowly on the rise. Whether it is entirely through individual endeavor irrespective of government efforts or not, India's female literacy rate had risen from 9% during Independence to 65% in 2011. Primary-level female gross enrolment ratio rose from 61% in 1970 to 115% in 2015. At the secondary level, enrolment rose from 14% in 1970 to 75% in 2015.

Unfortunately, this upward trajectory has now been severely disrupted by COVID19 and is likely to go on a downslide. As of July 22, 2020, a nationwide school closure in 40 countries has affected 282 million children, of whom 134 million are girls. UNESCO's Stefania Giannini, warned of the "potential for increased drop-out rates which will disproportionately affect adolescent girls, further entrench gender gaps in education and lead to increased risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancy and early and forced marriage." Nearly 10 million secondary school girls in India are likely to drop out of school due to COVID19 that will put them at physical, emotional and intellectual risk and reverse the gains made in the recent years. The problems of not attending school are multifold and severely enhanced in the case of girl students.

4.1 Girls are likely to drop out of school when schools reopen

As the economic crisis with loss of pay and unemployment is being experienced it is estimated that girls' education is likely to feel the impact. When faced with limited resources, households may prioritise sending the boys to school rather than the girls. There is enough data from the Ebola crisis of 2014 in West Africa when girls dropped out of school due to increase in domestic caring responsibilities and shift to income generation. In most cases boys were prioritized over girls to attend schools. Lessons from the Ebola crisis validates the point that all the effort made by NGOs and governments to get girls to school may get lost because of COVID19.

4.2 Girls are being engaged in household work

Even before COVID19 crisis, it was found that girls who engage in two hours of housework per day had a lesser probability of finishing secondary school in the country. With social stigma associated with menstruation, girls have been discouraged from continued learning once they reach the age of puberty. In India where limited social security nets are in place, the financial and social hardships caused by COVID19 can only exacerbate the gender inequality in education.

A recent study, aptly titled 'Whatever she may study, she can't escape from washing dishes: Gender inequity in secondary education', also finds that the engagement of girls in housework and domestic chores is the largest contributor to a gender gap in secondary education. (Singh. R, P. Mukherjee, 2018).

More data from the above study reveals that the engagement of children, especially girls, in housework is "the single largest contributor to the gender gap" in secondary education (Classes 9 and 10). Another report, by the India arm of Young Lives, an international research project studying childhood poverty, found that 358 boys (76.8%) and 322 girls (66.3%) of the survey sample completed secondary education successfully, pointing to a gender gap of over 10 percentage points. According to the survey, 72.7% of boys who spent two hours on household work every day completed secondary school compared to 55% of girls – a gap of 17.7 percentage points. And, just 40% of boys and 34% of girls who worked for three hours or more completed Class 10. The difference in the percentage of boys and girls finishing secondary school was largest for those with mothers who had received primary education, followed by those whose mothers had no formal education. However, a gap existed even where mothers had completed secondary education or studied further. The study found the overall contribution of mother's education to the gender gap to be 2.6%.

4.3 Girls are being deprived of the Mid-Day meal served in schools

For many girls particularly in the rural areas, the mid day meal given in the schools is the only wholesome meal they have in the day. Studies show that mid-day meal scheme first introduced in 1995, has helped in reducing gender gaps in education, given they reduce the family cost of providing nutrition to girls. Economists Dreze and Kindgdon estimated that mid-day meals increase the likelihood of a girl completing primary school by 30% and reduce the proportion of girls not enrolled in schools by 50%. Closure of schools has caused complete disruption of the mid-day meal scheme. In the absence of this incentive, families may withdraw daughters from schools.

4.4 Girls are being exposed to more abuse and violence

Center for Global Development did a survey among 82 unique organisations in at least 32 different countries including South Asia and published the key findings in May 2020. 56% report girl's exposure to abuse and violence is one of the key concerns.

4.5 Girls will be vulnerable to early marriage and pregnancy

Center for Global Development survey further reveals that 40% of the respondents believe that the girls are at a greater risk for early marriage and pregnancy because of school closures. With increased household economic strains and school closures, parents are deciding to get their daughter married early especially in contexts of dowry payment or girls may face pressure to engage in transactional sex. Past evidence from the Ebola outbreak suggest that adolescent pregnancies rose during this time.

4.6 Girls are likely to being deprived of online classes

Many schools have launched online classes to keep on the momentum of learning. Over two decades ago when information technology was introduced in education, expectations were high and there was optimism that this would increase easy access to education for the underprivileged. However, this has not happened, and the digital gap has widened quite fast, and impacts are now vivid. Using data collected by the National Sample Survey as part of the Survey of Education (2014) A Mukhopadhyay of Indian Statistical Institute argues that only 27% of households in India have some member with access to the internet. As such only 12.5% of the households in India have internet access at home. Mukhopadhyay argues that this distinction between home and in-general access to the internet is important to take cognizance of, especially during this period when students have been confined to home during lockdown. (The Print, April 9, 2020). Holding online classes for students during COVID19

crisis has been posing a big challenge. For instance, while around 85% of the university students who belong to urban households have access to the internet, only 41% are likely to have access at home. Among students from rural households, only 28% are likely to have internet access at home. Online classes do not factor in the country's digital divide where 16% females have internet access, compared to 36% males, according to the National Sample Survey 2017-18. This gap can sometimes have tragic consequences as in Kerala where a 14-year-old girl, a merit scholar, committed suicide when she couldn't access her online classes.

5 A CASE STUDY FROM THE TRENCHES IN THE FRONTIERS

Parikrma Humanity Foundation, a not for profit organization based in Bangalore, was established in 2003 to provide free and high quality education to marginalized and under-served children from slums. They run 4 schools and one Junior College for about 1800 children and sponsor higher education of more than 500 students. In an environment where most of their students are first generation learners they have achieved 96% attendance and less than 1% drop out. Most of their students have broken out of the barriers of poverty and are well established in high quality jobs. This was achieved because of the unique approach that this organization has adopted with their education philosophy grounded on equality, dignity and compassion. They follow the 360 degree model where their students get all three meals, total healthcare, and family care apart from the best curriculum in the country. They also have "e to e" model where they take care of their students from age 5 to till they get a job. Parikrma today has won many national and international awards for creating a model that can guarantee impact not only on the children, their parents but the community at large.

When Covid-19 reached India and lockdown was brought in, Parikrma took the intervention in stages keeping the 360 degree model in mind. They have been giving weekly food rations to the families of the children and have distributed about 900,000 meals so far. They then began sending WhatsApp assignments to the children. In May 2020 when all other schools across the country were uncertain about what to do, Parikrma had already begun online classes for the Senior and Middle school children. Right now Parikrma Reach-V© (Reaching the students virtually) schools are running regular classes for about 1500 children with yoga, art, music and debates as a part of the curriculum. Parikrma had to deal with varied challenges to create a sustainable and replicable model of online education for children in the slums. First, was the challenge of internet access. None of the children had internet and computers at home. Parikrma ran a campaign to raise funds for the purchase of new devices as well as providing internet connectivity for the device, a cost ranging from Rs.250-300 per month per device. Parikrma grouped students into clusters of 3, sharing one device between them. Since students in each of the 4 Parikrma schools come from a common set of slums within each school's catchment area, it was possible to create the clusters based on students' grade and the proximity of their homes. Parikrma's ultimate objective is to provide a device to each child but they have begun their classes with this cluster arrangement to ensure that the students are engaged quickly. Second, was the challenge with teachers. Parikrma was faced with two issues with regard to teachers. The first and larger issue involved the overcoming of a deep-rooted fear of technology amongst almost the entire academic body, including the most senior and experienced teachers. The second issue related to actually training them on using technology to reach out to their students. Teachers were invited to contribute with suggestions on how Parikrma could tackle the upcoming challenges. Thus, teachers were slowly moved into a frame of mind where they began to think of themselves as pioneers. All training was conducted in-house by Parikrma's tech team. The teacher attendance for online classes has been more than 95%. Third was the challenge of identifying the right technology platforms with a plethora of online teaching and e-learning platforms available, it was difficult to identify the ones that would best suit the needs of Parikrma children. After various trials it was decided that the decision should revolve less around the technical capability of the platform than its ability to suit the peculiar needs of Parikrma students. Fourth, was the challenge of getting the parents on board. The parents were grateful to Parikrma for their weekly rations when all source of income had stopped and were willing to sign agreements guaranteeing their children's participation in the online classes. A week's training was given to the parents on how to supervise the children during classes. Over a period of time the teachers of Parikrma have devised a pedagogy that makes the online classes engaging and enjoyable. They have been clocking in about 87% attendance of students for the last 5 months.

From the very beginning Parikrma has paid great attention to the learning outcomes of girls. About 52% of the children in Parikrma are girls. Life Skill, Special Counseling are being conducted for girls to

keep them motivated and strong. And the impact is evident in the comparative data that is emerging about both attendance and learning outcomes from this organization.

Table 3 shows that girls have not shown any decline in performance between 2019 and the COVID19 times whereas the boys have. Table 4 shows that the girls' attendance for online classes is far ahead of the boys. Girls have always fared better at academics than boys at Parikrma. The data in the table above shows the marks from the first formative assessment of academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. This assessment is typically carried out in July each year. As the July 2019 grades show, girls have scored higher on average than the boys across grades. This trend is seen in July 2020 as well, with girls making the most out of Parikrma's online school and continuing to score higher marks than the boys across all grades.

Table 3

1st assessment marks on 40 (JAY)	2019-2020 (JAY)						2020-2021 (JAY)					
	Class (1 to 4)		Class (5 to 7)		Class (8 to 10)		Class (1 to 4)		Class (5 to 7)		Class (8 to 10)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Avg. marks/40	27.0	29.5	25.3	27.8	22.8	22.6	28.1	28.6	15.8	18.6	20.3	23.3
% 71-100	47.9	64.0	38.3	51.1	27.6	35.5	43.5	51.3	7.6	18.0	18.8	31.6
% 51-70	34.9	29.7	37.3	33.3	36.9	25.4	43.5	40.2	28.9	32.3	20.7	23.3
% 1-50	17.1	6.4	24.4	15.6	35.0	39.1	4.2	3.0	56.8	42.5	47.0	37.2
% Absent	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	8.8	5.5	6.7	7.1	13.5	7.9

Table 4

Attendance / Mercury-SAH (2020-21)	JUNE		JULY		AUGUST		SEPTEMBER		ALL	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Regular	50.0	87.5	71.4	62.5	78.6	87.5	78.6	75.0	69.6	78.1
Irregular	21.4	12.5	28.6	31.3	14.3	12.5	21.4	25.0	21.4	20.3
Not attended	28.6	0.0	0.0	6.3	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.9	1.6

Data: Parikrma Humanity Foundation internal records 2020

6 CONCLUSION

India could add a whopping \$770 billion to the country's GDP by 2025 by encouraging girls to study and participate in the workforce according to McKinsey's gender parity report. And that can happen if India adopts a gendered approach in planning for the post crisis reconstruction of education that will mitigate the large-scale consequences of COVID19 on girls. Special attention has to be given to accelerate girls' return to school. It is important that sex-disaggregated and decentralised data is locally collected to monitor girl's attendance on the reopening of schools. Remedial and additional courses can be adopted to catch up with the lost academic schedule. Rigorous evidence from across the globe can help support Indian policy makers in designing programs to protect girls during the crisis and help them build resilience for future shocks.

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