Understanding Adolescents Experiences with Gender-Based Norms in India through a Participatory Storytelling Game

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INTRODUCTION

In Uttar Pradesh (UP), India, rates of gender inequality are higher compared to other states in India. Among adults in this region, only 45% of women are literate compared to three-quarters of men and only 15-27% of women participate in the labor force, compared to 78-82% of men. These inequities start early. Girls generally lag behind boys in education, income, and employment. Nearly one-fifth of India’s adolescent population resides in Uttar Pradesh, making it an important place to focus on.

Published in the International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, the study titled, “Understanding Adolescents’ Experiences with Gender-Based Norms in India through a Participatory Storytelling Game” used a storytelling game as qualitative data collection method for learning about Indian adolescents’ experiences with gender. From April through July 2016, participants, ages 15-17, from an urban slum in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh were asked to engage in a storytelling game in which they create their own characters, themes, and settings, in order to share stories based on their experiences about gender and sexual and reproductive health. The game was developed by Ci3 designers and researchers who conducted a pilot test with young people, refined it with Indian adolescents, and translated it into Hindi in collaboration with local experts.

FINDINGS

Themes that emerged from this study include:

- Despite being socially forbidden, young people are interested in and regularly form romantic relationships with other young people.
- Adolescent relationships are stigmatized by family and community members with girls being judged more harshly compared to boys. Many young people adopt prevailing social and gender norms about romantic relationships, thereby internalizing this shame.
- Girls’ autonomy is further hindered by the common experience of sexual harassment in public places, including streets and public transportation, by men and boys.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study suggest that the use of a qualitative storytelling game is one way to understand the experiences of adolescents around sensitive issues such as gender. They also suggest a need for interventions focused on improving gender equitable attitudes among adolescents, fostering greater parent-child communication on relationships, and strengthening the policy response to girls’ harassment.

The study builds on Kissa Kahani, a multi-year intervention using traditional and non-traditional research methods to learn about gender and sexual and reproductive health experiences of young people living in India. In particular, these study findings informed the creation of a gender and sexual reproductive health intervention that aims to create gender equality and improve the wellbeing of young people as they attend schools and participate in their communities. Find out more about the Kissa Kahani intervention here.

The study was published in the International Journal of Adolescence and Youth. Read the full article, here.

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