

Understanding young women's experiences of gender inequality in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh through story circles: Kissa Kahani

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality poses serious consequences for the health and wellbeing of young women. The realization of gender equality is therefore a global health and development priority. Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's most populous state, has disproportionate sex ratios (871 females to 1000 males, aged 15-24) and numerous disparities along gender lines. The purpose of this study was to better understand how gender influences the lives of young women living in urban slums of Lucknow, UP using story circles (which involve sharing individual stories in a group on a given topic) as a research methodology. Story circle sessions were facilitated with 50 young women (ages 15-24) in Lucknow, UP. Sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis.

FINDINGS

- Participants' story circle narratives revealed that strictly enforced restrictions on traveling outside the home, experiences of rampant sexual harassment and sexual assault in their surrounding communities, limited educational and economic opportunities, and the dominant belief that marriage is the sole priority for young women, contribute to gender inequality.
- Furthermore, these factors coalesce to form a vicious cycle: prevailing gender norms limit young women's mobility and perpetuate sexual harassment, which affects their educational and employment opportunities, and that in turn forces them to take on domestic roles, which keeps them stuck in the same cycle of limited mobility, dependency, and lack of opportunities for education and economic empowerment.



IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study suggest that India's persistent issues with gender inequality will require multi-pronged solutions and interventions that address social, structural, educational, and economic factors. Despite government initiatives to support young women's access to education, the potential for these efforts to succeed is ultimately limited by prevailing cultural and familial norms that devalue young women's educational and economic empowerment. Lack of mobility is an under-recognized problem. Despite laws and ready access to public and private transportation, widespread sexual harassment and violence towards women and girls restricts their ability to attend school and other activities outside of their home. This research demonstrates the crucial link between the right to mobility free of harassment and accessing education and economic opportunities. At root is the failure to value women in their own right and not just for marriage, childbearing, and domestic work. This research hypothesizes a causal pathway linking gender inequality, health and wellbeing, and poor community-level economic outcomes.

Read the full article here: <http://bit.ly/KissaKahaniStoryCircles>
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