

March 8, 2019

## New Ci3 study finds storytelling as an innovative research method to better understand gender, sexual and reproductive health of young girls

**Chicago** - A recent study by Ci3 at the University of Chicago demonstrates that an innovative story-based research method can be used to learn about stigmatized topics in research with adolescents. Published in the *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, the study uses story circles, a storytelling methodology in which participants form a circle and each tells a story in response to a single prompt. Here, story circles were used to study gender and sexual and reproductive health among girls in India. The parent study, [Kissa Kahani](#), set in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India uses a variety of narrative-based methods to unpack the relationship between gender, sexual and reproductive health, and poor educational and economic outcomes for girls and women.

Elucidating these relationships is critically important. Gender inequality has severe consequences for the health and wellbeing of women and girls. Gender inequalities manifest in vastly different outcomes for women compared to men in rates of literacy, school completion, and employment. They further manifest in early marriage, early childbearing, and poor maternal and child health outcomes. For example, in Uttar Pradesh (UP), where this study was conducted, only 76% of young women in the region are able to read compared to 87% of young men, according to the United Nations 2011 Population Fund. The same report also states that despite laws prohibiting marriage before age 18, 21.1% of girls aged 20-24 years in UP report being married before 18. Indeed, UP has slanted sex ratios with 871 young women per 1000 young men, aged 15–24 years. Understanding how gender influences the lives of young women can provide insight into how gender inequalities are reinforced, and highlight potential avenues for intervention.

The article, [“Understanding young women's experiences of gender inequality in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh through story circles.”](#) features a study that found story circles, a narrative-based participatory method, can provide the nuance and detail needed to understand young people’s experiences, build trust between participants and researchers, and create a place to speak about sensitive topics. Unlike traditional focus group discussions, story circles use broad prompts that allow each person time to develop, refine, and share their story through multiple rounds of storytelling. In this study, the resulting stories suggest that gender norms strongly influence four key aspects of young people’s lives: mobility; sexual harassment and assault; education and labor; and relationships, including marriage. These factors coalesce to form a vicious cycle that traps young women in a lifelong battle with gender inequalities.

“This study demonstrates the feasibility and importance of using participatory research methods to learn about the lives of young people,” said Dr. Melissa Gilliam, primary investigator for the study and founder of Ci3. “Using story circles helped the study team gather important information that is currently being used to design our follow-up intervention.”

- More -

To review the full publication, click [here](#). This research was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

###

### **About Ci3 at the University of Chicago**

Established in 2012, [Ci3](#) is a research center the University of Chicago addressing the social and structural determinants of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. At Ci3, we envision a world in which all youth emerge into adulthood with agency over their bodies and futures. Ci3 houses three labs: [The Game Changer Chicago Design Lab](#); [The Transmedia Story Lab](#); and [The Design Thinking Lab](#). Within these labs, we create games and digital narratives, and design interventions with and for youth. Ci3 is committed to empowering young people, conducting innovative research, and uncovering opportunities for policy and systemic change.

Follow us on Twitter [@UChicagoCi3](#)

Like us on Facebook [@UChicagoCi3](#)