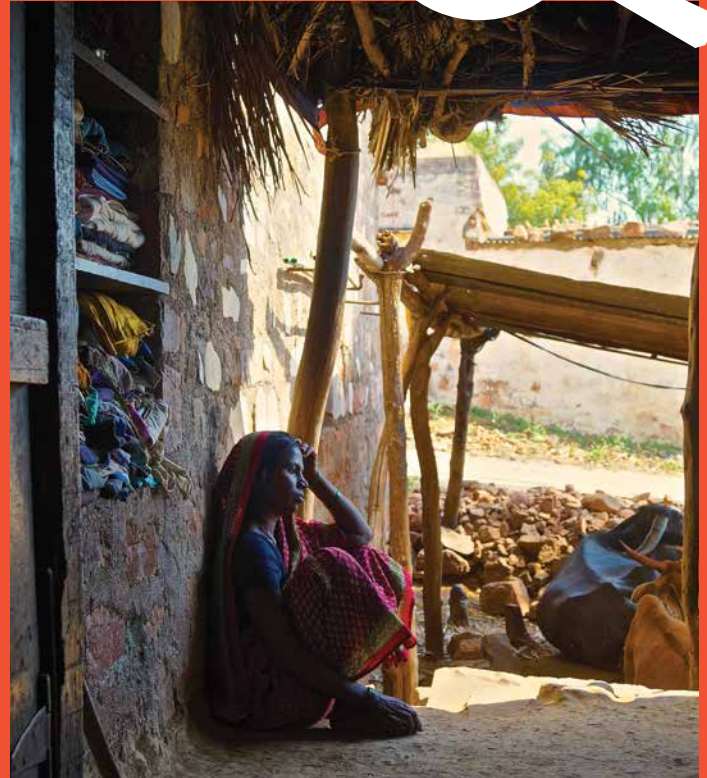


Barriers and Enablers to Education

A qualitative exploration of factors among communities in Northern Karnataka

RESEARCH
UPDATE

Poverty, inadequate school infrastructure and distance from schools are factors that limit access to education for most children. However, in situations where all children face such barriers, more boys than girls go to school. What are the reasons for this disparity? What barriers keep girls away from school? Are there factors that enable them to attend school? To find the answers, Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) conducted 55 in-depth interviews with adolescent girls in and out of school, their families and teachers and members of School Development Management Committees in Bagalkot and Bijapur Districts in northern Karnataka. This update gives a summary of what the exploratory study found out and why this information is important.



Why do this study?

The findings from this study are important for Samata, a programme to increase secondary school enrolment, retention and completion rates among girls from scheduled castes and tribes in northern Karnataka (SC/ST). Evidence shows that staying in school enhances girls' capabilities and delays their marriage and sexual debut. Completing high school improves girls' own lives and also the lives of their families, communities and future children.

But, in northern Karnataka, girls from scheduled castes and tribes (SC/ST) enter and complete secondary school at much lower rates than girls from other groups. Previous research for Samata shows that many girls drop out of school as a result of poverty, early marriage, a tradition of sex work and the under-valuing of girls' education. To address these issues, it is important to collect evidence on the situation and share it with government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), funders, schools and communities.

Samata: Keeping adolescent girls in school

This programme aims to increase the numbers of SC/ST girls who enrol in and complete secondary school, in order to delay their age at marriage and entry into sex work, thereby reducing their vulnerability to HIV.

Samata reaches 3,600 adolescent girls from 1,800 families in 119 villages and 69 high schools in Bagalkot and Bijapur Districts in northern Karnataka.

Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) is implementing Samata from July 2013 to 2017, in partnership with the Government of Karnataka, University of Manitoba, the World Bank and the STRIVE research consortium. During this period, STRIVE partners KHPT and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) are evaluating how well Samata succeeds.



What did the survey investigate?

Barriers and Enablers to Education explored the structural factors such as poverty, gender norms and low value for education that keep girls away from school in Bagalkot and Bijapur Districts in northern Karnataka. Why are such large numbers of girls out of school, when the benefits of higher education for girls are evident? The study also identified factors that enable some girls in the same situation to go to school.

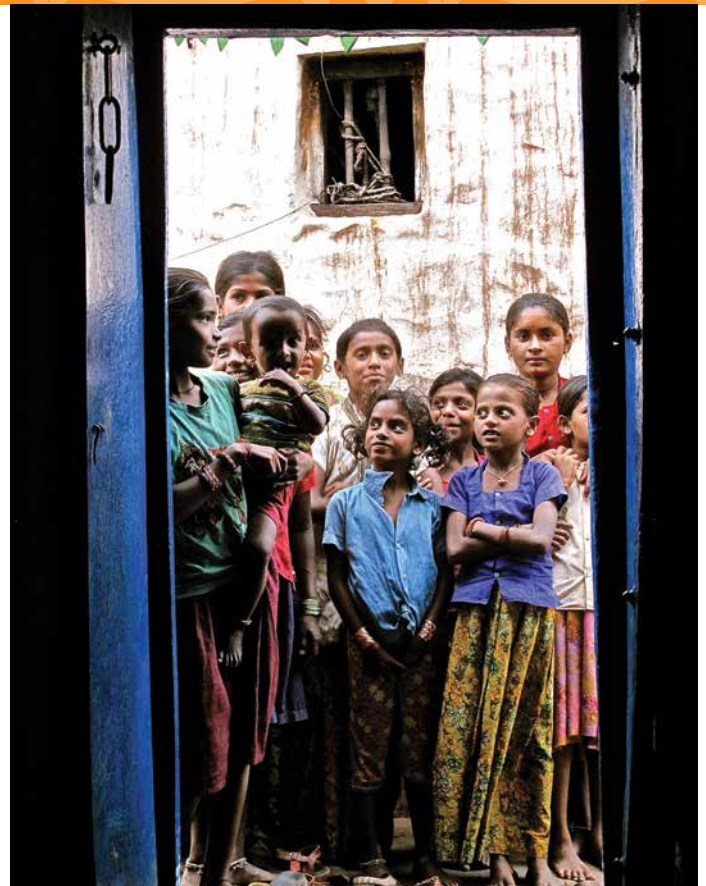
What did the survey discover?



Barriers

The study shows that social and gender norms are the main reasons why parents discontinue their daughters' education. For example, parents are unlikely to educate their daughters if they believe that everyone else in their community sees early marriage as the best way to ensure their daughters' safety and future. Gender norms such

as these ensure that girls' lives continue to be undervalued. They have the effect of disempowering girls and reducing their opportunities to make decisions about their own lives.



Low value for education and peer group influence dissuade girls from attending school

- Peers who are not in school, older girls who are educated but unemployed and the absence of positive role models reduce the attractiveness of education for adolescent girls
- Poor, illiterate parents who have not benefitted from education fail to value it for their daughters



Parents want to avoid the perceived risk of daughters' relationships with other men

- The risk of a 'bad reputation' or 'loss of honour' – if a girl becomes involved in a romantic relationship or elopes with a lover on her way to school – leads parents to withdraw girls from school



Parents perceive the costs of educating daughters as wasteful expenditure

- Parents consider investment in their daughters' education as unwise, as they expect them to eventually marry and move to their husbands' house
- High opportunity costs of a school-going daughter, such as her time away from domestic chores or loss of her labour, discourage parents from sending her to school



Girls and parents fear the lack of safety during the daily walk to school

- Parents fear that their daughters will experience 'eve-teasing' (sexual teasing) on their way to school
- Harassment faced by girls is seen as a threat to their modesty, ruining their reputation and preventing suitable marriage alliances in the future



Inadequate infrastructure, low quality of education and unfavourable experiences discourage girls from going to school

- Unavailability of functional toilets and lack of playgrounds, teacher apathy and inadequate reading and writing abilities demotivate girls
- Experiences of discrimination – such as higher caste girls not including them in their group – demoralise girls from SC/ST communities



Norm of early marriage causes girls to drop out of school

- Families see marriage as a way to secure their daughters' future
- Families want to get their daughters married early to be relieved of the financial burden associated with a wedding
- Families want to be relieved of the responsibility of safeguarding their daughters' reputation and family honour until their wedding

Enablers

A supportive family, an enabling school environment and encouraging teachers and peers combine to motivate girls to continue in school.

Teachers who teach well and encourage girls motivate them to continue in school

- Positive learning experiences, such as teachers who teach well and provide extra tutoring with lessons, inspire girls to stay on and do better at school



"I like social studies. Our teacher teaches very well and makes sure we understand the subject. Even mathematics I like. In school, teacher teaches very well and I do home work also."

Adolescent girl, 15 years

Girls with an interest in education and strong aspirations to work continue in school

- Girls who want to go to college and secure a job stay inspired to be in school



"I want to study well, attend school regularly, pass every exam and stand first in class. I want to be a doctor, a teacher or a policewoman."

Adolescent girl, 16 years

Family support and an enabling environment at home are critical enablers of girls' education

- Support from key decision-makers in the family – such as parents or uncles or in-laws – ensure that girls continue in school, even if they are married young



"My mother takes decisions at home. My father is an alcoholic and sometimes he tells me to leave school. But my mother does not listen to him. She is a helper at the Anganwadi [government run pre-school]. She encourages me to go to school. I feel very happy when I see that I have been lucky to stay on in school while my other friends have dropped out. My mother is also happy to see me in school."

Adolescent girl, 15 years, married

Supportive peers create a positive school going experience

- Having peers to go to school with and support in learning lessons act as enablers



"Friends give me their notes when I am absent from school. I borrow notes from them, complete my notes and show it to the teacher."

Adolescent girl, 15 years

Opportunities in school to develop talents outside of academics encourage girls

- Facilities such as sports and occasions to compete and win – such as interschool competitions – improve the girls' experience of schools

"In our class, they hold a competition. I participated in that. I love sports. I like to play kabaddi and ball. Every year, we go to other places to compete. I won a prize and my mother was happy to see that."

Adolescent girl, 15 years



Call for action

- ✓ Involve multiple stakeholders (girls, their families, teachers, communities and boys) in overcoming the barriers to education for girls
- ✓ Address negative gender norms among adolescent girls and boys and their families and create positive norms
- ✓ Build girls' sense of agency, their confidence, self-esteem, leadership and decision-making
- ✓ Recognise and reward girls and families who have overcome barriers to complete schooling
- ✓ Provide gender training for teachers
- ✓ Strengthen schools' capacities to be responsive to girls' needs and supportive of their success



Priya Pillai wrote this brief with inputs from Parinita Bhattacharjee and Annie Holmes.

The research team included Lalitha Bhagavatheeswaran, Sapna Nair, Hollie Stone, Shajy Isac, Tejaswini Hiremath, Raghavendra T., Kumar Vadde, Mahesh Doddamane, H.S. Srikantamurthy, Prakash Javalkar, Gautam Sudhakar, Priya Pillai, Lori Heise, Charlotte Watts, Parinita Bhattacharjee and Tara Beattie.

The Samata study and this publication are supported by the STRIVE research programme consortium, funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies.

Photos by Priya Pillai

Design by Jane Shepherd