

Samata: Supporting marginalised girls in Karnataka, India to stay in school

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What is the issue?

India's commitment to realising universal education has been demonstrated through its landmark Right to Education Act and flagship Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme. Yet serious challenges remain in terms of retention, quality and equity in education. Aggregate indications of progress conceal disparities in education quality and attainment that are compounded by gender, geography, caste and class.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of adolescent girls belonging to scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) families in the districts of Vijayapura and Bagalkote in northern Karnataka. The likelihood of SC/ST girls in these districts completing secondary school has been sharply diminished by poverty, stigma and traditions of early marriage or dedication as *devadasi* sex workers before girls turn 18.

Intervention

Samata reached 69 high schools and 605 teachers, serving approximately 3,600 adolescent girls from villages in Vijayapura and Bagalkote Districts. The programme was designed to reach a range of stakeholders, from adolescent girls and boys; to their parents, schools and teachers; to the wider community, state and district officials and local media. It focused on the most proximate structural issues impeding girls' access to education and academic performance, including:

- family poverty
- gender discrimination
- the traditions of early marriage and devadasi dedication
- boys' actions and attitudes towards girls
- inadequate measures to meet girls' needs at schools
- inadequate measures by community authorities and education officials to enforce girls' right to education

Summary

The Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) designed, implemented and evaluated Samata, a multi-faceted intervention to support marginalized girls to continue in high school in Karnataka State, India. Extending high school attendance has been shown to reduce girls' and young women's risk of HIV infection, reduce child marriage and delay entry into sex work, as well as achieving a number of related health, education and long-term economic benefits.

KHPT sustained engagement with local and state-level policy makers over the course of the Samata intervention. Various protocols from Samata, including an attendance tracking tool and elements of the teacher-training curriculum, have been adopted or adapted by state and local government bodies.

Study

To assess the impact of individual programme elements and of Samata overall, KHPT and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) designed and conducted a three-year, mixed-method study, with qualitative research adding nuance and depth to the quantitative findings from the community randomised controlled trial.

What did STRIVE research find?

Overall, the Samata programme enhanced school completion in one of the two districts. Girls in the intervention arm in both districts were more likely to have accessed study group and girl empowerment groups and leadership and skills training, and were more likely to support positive gender attitudes around marriage. Qualitative data suggests that girls in intervention areas had better self-esteem and clarity on career goals; better skills in managing family relationships and negotiating their needs; and better knowledge about laws that protect women's rights.

Investigating the structural and norms-based factors driving under-age marriage, early sexual debut and school dropout, the research confirmed the significance of a norm about ensuring a girl's sexual purity and her family's reputation. Conforming to this norm leads, in turn, to restricted mobility for girls post menarche. Samata research also showed that, although marriage and school drop out are sometimes linked, one does not necessarily lead to the other.

The Samata study coincided with sweeping secular changes in girl child marriage and secondary school retention due to government-led initiatives across study districts during the trial.

Impact

Samata baseline findings, intervention design, activities and tools have had an impact on state-level education regulations and methods. Most concretely, a version of Samata's attendance tracking tool was shared with the department of education to include in all schools in Karnataka State. Certain components of other materials including manuals are included in the state government's repository to support practising teachers.

Nationwide, a focus on adolescent girls gained momentum over the same period. Government initiatives, particularly Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, began to work to improve education, health and livelihood outcomes for adults. While these developments did complicate the process of assessing the programme's impact, they also created a conducive environment in which to share evidence on gender norms and to push for policies and programmes that seek to transform gender relationships.

JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

- Beattie TS., Bhattacharjee P., Isac S; Davey C., Javalkar P., Nair S., Thalinja R., Sudhakar G., Collumbien M., Blanchard JF, Watts C., Moses S., Heise L. (2015). **Supporting adolescent girls to stay in school, reduce child marriage and reduce entry into sex work as HIV risk prevention in north Karnataka, India: protocol for a cluster randomised controlled trial.** *BMC Public Health*, 2015 Mar 25;15:292.
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- Ravi Prakash, Tara Beattie, Prakash Javalkar, Parinita Bhattacharjee, Satyanarayana, Ramanaika, Raghavendra Thalinja, Srikanta Murthy, Calum Davey, James Blanchard, Charlotte Watts, Martine Collumbien, Stephen Moses, Lori Heise, Shajy Isac (2017). **Correlates of school dropout and absenteeism among adolescent girls from marginalised community in north Karnataka, south India.** *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol 61, Dec 2017, 64-76

How did the Samata study achieve impact?

Building on their established reputation and networks at local and state levels in Karnataka, the KHPT team maintained ongoing engagement with stakeholders throughout the life of the Samata study. Experienced programme leads met regularly with representatives of many related departments, including Education and Women and Child Welfare, as well as training institutes.





In June 2015, KHPT organised a particularly significant event: a state-level conference for 300 participants, 'Keeping Girls in Secondary Schools: Successes and Challenges', inaugurated by the then Minister of Primary and Secondary Education. A number of key officials from the Education Department participated actively. One official commended the Samata programme for addressing the link between HIV prevention and education, noting that: "the whole of North Karnataka requires such concerted initiatives." The Samata team organised a photographic exhibition, and ensured that some girls from the programme attended and spoke about their experiences.

Subsequently, KHPT was invited to a state-level consultation meeting on 'New Education Policy 2015', which was inaugurated by the Education Minister and attended by the Principal Secretary and Joint Secretary. There, KHPT presented recommendations for girls' education, emerging from the experience of implementing Samata. The officials involved in writing the policy recommendations and its implementation plan were interested in the recommendations and programme activities (gender training for teachers and school development and management committees [SDMCs], remedial classes and a tracking tool to monitor participation), and proposed that these would go from Karnataka State to the Government of India.

That year, the state began providing additional tuition classes to poor performing students (Mission 100) in line with those provided by the Samata intervention. In addition, the Department of Education considered widespread adoption of Samata's career counselling sessions for 10th standard students.

KHPT was invited to make recommendations to a state-level consultation meeting on 'New Education Policy 2015'. There, policy-makers expressed particular interest in Samata's tracking tool, remedial classes and gender training for teachers and school development and management committees.

At the international level, a KHPT field officer was invited to present at UNESCO's Lifelong Learning Forum (Paris, February 2015), where Samata was commended as being "unique, as it works on multiple levels with many stakeholders." A paper conveying findings from the study was featured in Adolescent Girls Dispatch, February 2019, which has a wide and international readership.

Blogs on qualitative findings from Samata baseline have featured on the World Bank's Education for Global Development and the WHO's Partnership for Maternal, New Born and Child Health. The blog 'Engaging Boys to Reduce Violence Against Girls' was viewed more than 2,260 times and received numerous commendations, including:

- "Thanks for this excellent and well written article. Isolene Rebello, UNICEF"
- To support potential uptake of the programme's methods, the Samata team developed lively, accessible, non-academic materials in English and Kannada, for audiences ranging from communities, schools and local government to state government, NGOs and funders. These included a how-to guide to social protection schemes, a brochure and poster and several videos. Among many other creative outputs, the programme's lead on Knowledge into Action produced a regular newsletter – *Samata Samachara* – in English and Kannada.

What did the partners learn about research uptake?

After STRIVE training in the photovoice methodology, the Samata team learned a new way to ensure a hearing for the voices of study participants – and learned how much of an impact this can achieve.

"I put this learning to use at the recent state conference that we organised. The photo exhibition at the conference used a combination of text and images to tell the story of Samata's intervention components and brought alive the voices of community stakeholders who had benefited from the programme." PRYIA PILLAI, KHPT LEAD ON KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION (RESEARCH UPTAKE)

"Learning how to communicate research evidence has been a key capacity building outcome for research uptake. The KiA lead at KHPT has used this to create research updates, to communicate learnings from the preparatory studies from both Samata and Samvedana Plus. The research updates have been shared globally through the Adolescent Girls dispatch from the Girl Rising network. End users of the research evidence, including the government, have found it to be easily accessible."

KHPT REPORT



Nair, S; Pillai, P. **Engaging boys to reduce violence against girls.** The post on World Bank's Voices – Perspectives for Development blog shared findings from Samata's research. <http://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/engaging-boys-reduce-violence-against-girls>



Nair, S; Pillai, P. **Engaging boys to reduce violence against girls.** Re-published by The Partnership for Maternal, New Born & Child Health, WHO on their website. <http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/news/2014/samata/en/>



Pillai, P. In Rural India, **Asking What Helps Girls Stay in School.** <http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/rural-india-asking-what-helps-girls-stay-school>



Tejaswini Hiremath. Presenter. **'The barriers and enablers to education among marginalised adolescent girls in North Karnataka, India: a qualitative study'**. Sahamanthana – Research Conference on Field Practices in Education. Organised by Azim Premji Foundation (APF), India.



Sapna Nair. Presenter. **'Understanding the masculinities, gender norms and intimate partner violence affecting the female sex workers of northern Karnataka. A qualitative inquiry with intimate partners'**. Men Engage Global Symposium 2014 – Men and Boys for Gender Justice. Organised by Men Engage Alliance-Global, Men Engage Alliance – South Asia, Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ), UNFPA, UN Women, Beijing+20 Campaign. <http://www.menengagedilli2014.net/symposium.html>



KHPT. Organisers and presenters. **'Keeping Girls in Secondary School: Successes and Challenges'**. A state-level conference on adolescent girls' education. Organised by KHPT. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/news/conference-educating-adolescent-girls-karnataka-state-india>



Tejaswini Hiremath. Presenter. **'A Structural Intervention towards Better Health and Education Outcomes for Girls: Experiences from SAMATA'**. UNESCO Lifelong Learning Forum, Paris. Organised by UNESCO. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/news/khpt-invited-speak-unesco-paris>



Samata – Equality. Seven-minute documentary of progress two years after first filming of Samata programme to keep girls in school. (English and Kannada versions). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/samata-equality>



Like a Banyan Tree. 15-minute documentary compares girls and situations at the start of the Samata programme and two years later. (English and Kannada versions). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/banyan-tree>



Aarti and Bharati. Four-minute portrait of twins facing under-age marriage. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/aarti-and-bharati>



The Chavan Family. Five-minute portrait of parental support for girls' education. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/chavan-family>



The Awadhi Family. Seven-minute portrait of one family's experience of gender discrimination. <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/awadhi-family>

More information: <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/projects/samata-keeping-girls-secondary-school>

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all members of the Samata team whose work contributed to this brief.

Suggested citation

Raghavendra, T., Beattie, T., Prakash, R. et al. STRIVE Impact Case Study: Samata – Supporting marginalised girls in Karnataka, India to stay in school; Karnataka Health Promotion Trust, Bangalore, India; London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, UK; 2019.

STRIVE research consortium

A DFID-funded research programme consortium, STRIVE is led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, with six key research partners in Tanzania, South Africa, India and the USA. STRIVE provides new insights and evidence into how different structural factors – including gender inequality and violence, poor livelihood options, stigma, and heavy alcohol use – influence HIV vulnerability and undermine the effectiveness of the HIV response.

This brief was supported by UKaid from the Department for International Development. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies.