

## **The effect of a livelihoods intervention in an urban slum in India: Does vocational counseling and training alter the attitudes and behavior of adolescent girls?**

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### **Introduction**

Of the few policies and programs directed toward adolescent girls in developing countries, most are confined to the health sector. Proponents of adolescent policy have stressed the health consequences to adolescents and the larger society of early sexual activity and pregnancy. Little attention has been paid to preparing girls for future livelihoods or to fostering their social mobility. Yet legitimate income-generating work is likely to transform the nature of girls' adolescent experience by providing them with a degree of autonomy and freedom from traditional gender roles. Most important, work should help to reframe the second decade of girls' lives from a period devoted to preparation for marriage and childbearing to a time when they can develop as individuals and gain knowledge and skills that are the foundation for a more productive adulthood. Moreover, it should provide girls, who are often confined to the home where they have heavy domestic responsibilities, with a degree of mobility and with networks and peer-support groups outside the family. By offering girls an alternative source of social status, work is also likely to delay marriage. Girls who contribute income to their households appear to have greater control over their sexual and reproductive lives.

More than 20 years ago, Ruth Dixon (1978:132) recognized the potential demographic benefits of wage-earning work for young women in South Asia and called for efforts to "recruit unmarried girls and young married women in their early childbearing years [for employment outside the home] so that their new status can have a maximum potential impact on delaying marriage, delaying their first birth, and spacing and limiting additional births."<sup>1</sup> Yet to the extent that adolescent girls' labor-force participation has been measured, opportunities for formal, remunerated work have barely grown and remain much less common for girls than for boys. Thus, we can only speculate about the implications of such opportunities for girls' social and economic well-being. Although livelihood initiatives and natural employment experiments are scarce, a few examples of these are found in the developing world. Research conducted in Bangladesh provides support for the view that income-generating employment can transform the lives of girls in settings where historically their social status has been low. Impressive delays in marriage have been observed among adolescent girls employed in garment factories.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth B. Dixon. 1978. *Rural Women at Work: Strategies for Development in South Asia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Sajeda Amin, Ian Diamond, Ruchira T. Naved, and Margaret Newby. 1998. "Transitions to adulthood of female garment-factory workers in Bangladesh." *Studies in Family Planning* 29(2): 185–200.

In addition to these long-term demographic effects, more immediate benefits of employment initiatives are potentially seen for adolescent girls. When given safe spaces outside the home, girls may develop new skills, gain a degree of mobility and independence, and develop relationships with non-family members, in particular other girls, as well as adults in the community who can mentor them. Finally, such programs offer acceptable venues for providing information about reproductive health and life skills, such as income management through savings and credit mechanisms.

The rationale for developing livelihood programs for girls is particularly applicable to India, where 40% of girls 15-19 are married. In addition, dramatic gender disparities exist among adolescents in educational attainment and literacy. About one-third of girls aged 15–19 complete middle school, compared with more than half of boys of that age, and 56 percent of girls are literate, compared with 81 percent of boys. Mortality rates among adolescent girls are between 25 and 50 percent higher than those among boys; nutritional deficits are greater and access to health care is lower for girls.<sup>3</sup>

Although a wide variety of livelihood programs and projects for women exists in India, access is generally restricted to those who are married. The few nascent experiments involving unmarried adolescent girls are limited in scale and have not been evaluated. To the extent that adolescent girls are involved in income-generating activities, they assist their mothers in home-based work for which they may or may not be remunerated. Moreover, adolescent girls' participation in savings and credit programs is considered nonexistent (Sebstad and Singh 1998).<sup>4</sup>

## **Objective**

Programmatic initiatives that prepare girls in India for future livelihoods and foster their mobility are rare, and evaluations of such programs are even rarer. In this paper we will examine whether an experimental intervention providing vocational counseling and training to adolescent girls aged 14-19 in urban slum areas of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, India:

1. increased physical mobility and contact with individuals outside the family;
2. increased savings behavior;
3. altered work aspirations and encouraged more progressive gender role norms, as measured by changing attitudes about the timing of marriage, female labor force participation, and women's involvement in household decision-making;
4. reduced gender differentials in time use such that girls now spend less time on domestic tasks and more time on productive activities or training for productive activities.

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<sup>3</sup> Shireen J. Jejeebhoy. 1996. "Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Behavior: A Review of the Evidence from India." International Center for Research on Women Working Paper No. 3. Washington, DC: ICRW.

<sup>4</sup> Jennefer Sebstad and Sagri Singh. 1998. "Adolescent livelihoods programmes: A preliminary review." New Delhi: The Population Council.

## **Study Design**

Allahabad is divided into seven wards. For programming and research purposes, these seven wards were divided by CARE, the organization that conducted the intervention, into 143 slum areas. For this project two comparable slum wards were selected purposively according to the CARE project schedule; one was randomly assigned to be the experimental site and the other to be the control. Five larger slum areas were then selected as project sites in the experimental ward and nine smaller areas in the control ward.

## **Livelihoods Intervention**

The project developed 19 short-term vocational courses. Courses began in the Fall of 2001 and continued through June 2002. The selection of courses was based on the interest (e.g., enrollment) shown by the girls – a minimum of 10 girls was required for a course to be offered. Mehndi (hand or feet painting) was the course almost all the girls were interested in. Other courses arranged by the project included tailoring (requiring basic literacy skills that some girls did not possess), creative painting, dhari weaving, mending, embroidery, candle making, silver ornament / link making, pot decoration, crochet, jute doll, basic cooking, personal grooming and fabric painting. The project also has made arrangements for older girls (18 years and older) to attend government-run courses, for example bee keeping, food preservation, jute craft, macramé, cooking, carpet weaving, and block printing. Since many girls wanted to participate in more than one course, the project set a limit of 5 courses per girl, in order to allow as many newcomers an opportunity as possible.

Concurrently with the vocational skills training, counseling and assistance was provided for creating savings accounts at banks or post-offices. Most of the new accounts were opened at post-offices rather than banks, as the procedures were simpler and less money was required for the initial deposit.

## **Baseline and Endline Surveys**

A baseline survey was conducted in May 2001. All adolescents between 14-19 years who were living in the study areas for at least a year were included in the baseline survey, (both sexes, married and unmarried, in-school and out of school). In addition one of the parents or a recognized guardian older than 25 years within each household was targeted for interviews. Information on the following domains was collected from the adolescent:

- Demographic data
- Family background
- Respondent's education and training history
- Livelihood and employment history
- Time use pattern
- Mobility, autonomy, gender role attitudes and behavior
- Knowledge of reproductive health

- Knowledge of contraceptive methods
- Marriage process
- Reproductive history
- Self-efficacy
- Connectedness and friendship
- Alcohol and drug use

Although earlier listings of the households within each slum area were provided to the research teams, the baseline survey conducted a mapping exercise to determine the exact number of households and eligible adolescents. This preliminary step prior to the baseline survey revealed many of the difficulties of working in urban slums, including fixing boundaries of the slum versus non-slum area, and arriving at a functional definition of household. Many structures are temporary shelters for migrant laborers, and others are dwellings that are locked shut and appear to be abandoned. Because of the large number of these locked or abandoned households, the data collection teams returned to the slum areas 8 months after the baseline survey to verify the listing data. The results from the locked-house validation study were used to determine a final response rate for the study.

In approximately 2,452 or 40 percent of the 6,086 households listed there were adolescents in the designated age group. These 2,452 households contained 4,284 adolescents of which 3,199 completed interviews for the baseline survey -- a response rate of 75 percent. The principal reason eligible adolescents were not included in the baseline survey (93 percent of the cases, n=1,013) was an inability to find the adolescent at home after having made at least 3 follow-up visits at different times and setting appointments in advance through other family members. The remainder of the adolescents who were not included in the baseline survey either refused to take part in the study (n=28) or did not complete the interview (n=44).

A total of 2,014 parents or guardians completed the baseline parental interview (82 percent of the 2,452 households). Among the 438 parents who did not take part in the survey 54 percent (237) were unavailable, an additional 29 percent failed to complete the interview after beginning (n=128) and 17 percent (n=73) refused to take part in the study.

There are several findings to note about the sample:

- The number of respondents is larger in the study's experimental group (n=1,913) than in the control group (n=1,286), even though the preliminary mapping exercise and pre-study information suggested that the populations of the slum areas used for each study group were about the same.
- The experimental and control groups are fairly similar except for the fact that there is a significantly greater proportion of lower caste respondents in the control area and a significantly higher proportion of Muslims in the experimental area.
- Over 95 percent of girls reported that they were not married, despite the inclusion of married adolescents in the case definition. The small proportion of girls who are married is a function of several factors. Frequently, married girls aged 18 or 19 are not considered adolescents either by themselves or their parents, and hence

won't be included in a listing of "adolescents" living in a household. In the case of India, this problem is compounded by the fact that the Hindi word for adolescent/youth – *kishor(i)* – which was used in the survey, implies that one is unmarried. A contributing factor to the failure to include married adolescents may be the desire to hide an illegal under-age marriage, either from shame or fear of legal repercussions.

The baseline survey clearly indicates the appropriateness of the intervention, particularly in the differences between boys and girls with respect to mobility, time use patterns, and savings and work experience.

- Approximately half of girls indicated that they have not traveled outside of Allahabad during the past six months, compared to only about one-quarter of boys.
- Girls were much more likely to report that they need to seek permission to make visits outside of their homes than boys and both boys and girls report that there are no places in the community where unmarried girls can safely congregate for any purpose, a finding that reflects local norms governing the limited use of public space by unmarried girls.
- Dramatic differences between boys and girls are seen in the amount of time spent on chores: Girls reported spending almost 4 times as many hours as boys on chores.
- The proportion of boys who report that they have ever worked for pay is five times greater than the proportion of girls.
- Despite the fact that girls are much less likely to work for pay, they are more inclined to save; 54 percent of the girls and 26 percent of the boys have some rupees saved and of those who have saved, 7 percent of girls and 28 percent of boys have money in a savings account.

Data collection for the project's endline survey began in March 2003 and was completed in June 2003. As with the baseline, the goal was for the endline survey to be a 100 percent census of all adolescents in the designated age range living in the slum areas in the intervention and control sites. Thus for the endline survey an attempt was made to interview all 4,284 adolescents included in the baseline as well as any adolescents in the designated age range who were missed in the baseline, especially those who were married. The endline questionnaire for adolescents included the same domains and questions as the baseline with the addition of questions on exposure to the intervention. Prior to the endline, procedures were established to identify adolescents interviewed at the baseline and to match them to their baseline data. As in the baseline, one of the adolescent's parents was interviewed. Data cleaning and matching is currently on going.

### **Proposed Analysis**

In this paper we will compare the behavior and attitudes of girls in the experimental slums with girls in the control slums before and after the intervention. First there will be an extensive discussion about the difficulties of implementing an intervention and

fielding a panel survey in an urban slum. Second, we will provide descriptive data from the baseline and endline surveys. Third, regression models will be employed to assess change in dependent variables associated with the intervention, controlling for characteristics of the parents and households at baseline, as well as characteristics of girls that may have changed between the baseline and endline, e.g. educational attainment and marital status. Outcome variables will include measures of physical mobility, time use, savings behavior, work aspirations and gender role attitudes. Intensity of exposure to the intervention will be included as a covariate. We will also address the issue of selective participation, namely that within the experimental areas girls who chose to be involved in the intervention differ in significant ways from girls who did not participate.