

Alone

LONELINESS, ADOLESCENCE
AND LEARNINGS FROM
LIVING IN URBAN CITIES

together

"Loneliness comes in different forms, sometimes it is a small pin-prick of pain - We can listen to music or do something to ignore the feeling. Then it grows bigger and bigger, until we feel very and extremely cut off. The more I think about it, the more I feel as if there is no one who understands me, and how this feeling just lingers on and on. I have so many people around, and yet I have the feeling that no one will connect with what I am trying to say. I don't feel a great sense of belonging. Everything seems painful."



YOUNG
CITIES

PROTECTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN
Aangan

PUBLISHED BY

Aangan in January 2021

EMAIL

contact@aanganindia.org

WEBSITEwww.aanganindia.org

Credits and acknowledgements

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS**Young Researchers:**

Aanya Choksi, Akansha Kumari,
Amreen Khan, Anjali Verma,
Anjali Kumari, Kamini Kumari,
Manya Jaiswal, Mukta Dharmamer,
Madhusree Dasgupta, Nemat Shaikh,
Nasreen Ansari, Nayantara Piramal,
Priyam Mishra, Ravina Kumari,
Swati Mishra, Vaishnavee Gupta,
Veda Rodewald, Vaidehi Shah

RESEARCH COORDINATORS

Priyanka Guha, Sarah Hussain

WRITER & EDITOR

Deepika Khatri

DESIGN & TYPESETTINGShreya Gupta (www.shreyag.com)

Contents

SECTION A

ABOUT YOUNG CITIES & AANGAN	04
-----------------------------	----

LOCKDOWN, LONELINESS AND THE URBAN ADOLESCENT	05
Foreword	06
The Inspiration for the Report: Conversations	07
The Context: Urban Adolescent Girls and Loneliness	09
Methodology: A Participatory Process	11
More about the Young Researchers	13

SECTION B

VOICES OF ADOLESCENTS	18
Reaching out to Adolescents and Young Women	19
Experiencing Loneliness in the City	20
Lockdown Challenges	21
When Loneliness Strikes	22
The Most Difficult Situations	25
Social Exclusion, Bullying and Marginalisation	28
Coping Strategies	31
Reaching Out for Support	32
Aangan's Lockdown Helpline	33
Connecting & Communicating	34
Reaching Out to Parents and Peers	39
Staying Silent	41
Conversations that Count	42

SECTION C

CONNECTEDNESS AND THE NEED FOR A THIRD SPACE	44
What Can Cities do for Young People	47
Voices, Examples and Recommendations	48-63
Conclusion	64
Endnotes	66-69

YOUNG CITIES

ABOUT YOUNG CITIES

In the next thirty years, 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas and it is predicted that India will have 300 million urban residents by 2050. Young Cities is an attempt to document the unique perspective of adolescents and young people growing up in the city. We hope it will also spotlight the question of what cities can do for adolescents and young people, in order to ensure they grow up safe and healthy, with access to their rights, services, support systems and opportunities. Capturing these voices will help us understand what young people experience as important issues, challenges or solutions for cities. Their lived experience, we believe, will provide a rich collection of data and insights that can be used by policy makers, planners, politicians, community leaders and community members (of all ages) who are interested in the idea of young, people-centered cities.



ABOUT AANGAN

Independent Indian non-profit Aangan (www.aanganindia.org) works to strengthen child protection systems so that every child and adolescent is able to access their right to protection, growing up safe and supported, free from violence, abuse and exploitation. In "hotspot" districts or urban neighbourhoods with a high prevalence of child harm, Aangan aims to build safe communities with a focus on preventative strategies to address risks like trafficking, child marriage, gender violence and child labour.

SECTION A

Lockdown,
loneliness
and the urban
adolescent



"Loneliness doesn't necessarily require physical solitude, but rather an absence or paucity of connection, closeness, kinship: an inability, for one reason or another, to find as much intimacy as is desired."



FOREWORD

Lonely Lockdown City

Translated from Saniya Mistrii
Qaiyumuddin's rap

How am I really feeling
What do I think and see
Power cut. City lights went out,
Lockdown is darkness to me

No crowds around, no city buzz
Nothing feels okay
No meet ups with my group of friends
No visitors all day

Families and neighbours all around
Still inside I feel alone
Need face to face connections,
Sick of whatsapping on the phone

People people everywhere
Who could be lonely here?
Search the city for happiness
You'll find only lonely tears

Saniya is a fifteen-year-old resident of Rafiq Nagar, Govandi in Mumbai. She recently started writing rap and says it is a great way to bring attention to ignored issues. She is inspired by rapper Emiway Bantai because his work is, "easy to understand, hard hitting and influences people," she says. Saniya raps about lockdown and life in the *basti* (urban settlements) where she lives. "Schools have been closed, it is affecting children's studies and young people's future," she believes. In another rap *Chalo Theek Hai* (Guess it's Okay), Saniya refers to the fact that residents had to depend on non-profits for their food. "Those who have money can adjust and cope okay with lockdown, but for us, it is one long jail sentence."



INSPIRATION FOR THIS REPORT:

Conversations with Adolescent Girls

The idea of exploring the theme of urban adolescents and loneliness came up after some interesting lockdown conversations with girls and young women. It started with trying to understand challenges faced by teenagers during India's nationwide coronavirus lockdown which started in March 2020. While most initial relief work focused on reaching food and basic supplies to poor households, the impact of lockdown on women and children was further understood by May 2020. Within two months, data from across the country indicated that rates of gender violence had spiked: The number of distress calls to a helpline run by India's National Commission for Women doubled while Childline, also an emergency helpline, reported a staggering 92,000 calls within a span of eleven days. Aangan's on-ground discussions with girls and young women in 75 urban bastis (informal settlements) in three cities - spotlighted for us that adolescent girls were grappling with feelings of loneliness and isolation.

“

Aaradhya, a thirteen-year-old from a basti in Varanasi said:

"I had to stop going to school. I don't know what to do with myself or who to talk to in these stressful times. There are five of us stuck here at home since my father no longer works, but still I feel like I have nobody to talk to."

”

Ujala, also a teenager from Varanasi was worried, "My studies have stopped and several other girls in my locality are being married off. But I have nobody to share my fears with or confide in." Suhani is fourteen and says, "I really want to talk to someone. but there is nobody [...] I feel worried, angry and depressed all the time."

In another discussion with Mumbai teens Nayantara and Veda, both private school students in Mumbai, it became clear that adolescent girls across neighbourhoods and regardless of family income levels were experiencing somewhat similar struggles. Nayantara and Veda were already thinking about the lack of systems, support and services for girls their age - in the context of, but not limited to lockdown. They were also in the process of planning a campaign and strategies to break the silence around loneliness and other mental health issues. Their concern about the lack of urban services and systems for adolescents is not unfounded. Research has established clear links between loneliness, mental health and physical health. For instance, studies found that the absence of close friends is linked to depressiveness symptoms (Hartberg and Hegna, 2014¹) and social support from friends as well as spending time with peers were the strongest protective factors against mental disorders for adolescents (Myklestad Roysamb and Tambs 2012²).

A third set of conversations provided us insight about the fact that existing support systems for adolescents and young women are designed primarily for emergency and crisis response. Helplines, hotlines, phone lines, police and most social

services for women and children currently respond to formal reports about crime or violence - assault, attack, suicide, domestic violence, harassment or threats. But what about "everyday" distress, tension, and loneliness that might be less obvious to spot, but has a lasting impact? Between May 2020 and July 2020, Aangan ran a lockdown phone support helpline for adolescents in three cities. This received over 400 phone calls and trends revealed it was seemingly small, but persistent doubts and fears that seemed to be the key source for worry and helplessness, according to callers. For example girls asked: *"If I keep missing school will I be able to pass exams?" Or "I feel left out and excluded in school, what is wrong with me?"*

Although loneliness is not a subject typically associated with crowded city spaces, mental health experts write that loneliness is increasingly a disease of urban modern life. Thus to understand the struggle of young people could be a valuable first step in building adolescent and youth-centred city systems.

It has been a pleasure working with several young women and adolescents who have created this report. Chaitali Sheth, Director at Aangan - with her ear close to the ground was the first to flag the need to understand lockdown struggles through the lived experience of adolescent girls in Aangan's girl safety networks across multiple cities. She then designed a participatory process to ensure adolescent girls drove this study. Research Coordinators Priyanka Guha and Sarah Hussain skillfully facilitated the process - guiding young students through brainstorming, designing surveys, data collection, phone interviews and developing recommendations. Deepika Khatri, the researcher, writer and editor of this report generously provided ideas and additional research, and Shreya Gupta designed this document with heart and skill.

Most of all I want to acknowledge with great admiration a very special group of young student researchers who are the force behind this report.

In alphabetical order they are: Aanya Choksi (Mumbai), Akansha Kumari (Patna), Amreen Khan (Lucknow), Anjali Kumari (Varanasi), Anjali Kumari (Patna), Kamini Kumari (Patna), Manya Jaiswal (Varanasi), Mukta Dharmamer (Mumbai), Madhusree Dasgupta (Kolkata), Nemat Shaikh (Mumbai), Nasreen Tajammul Husain Ansari (Mumbai), Nayantara Pirmal (Mumbai), Priyam Sanjay Mishra (Mumbai), Ravina Kumari (Patna), Swati Sanjay Mishra (Mumbai), Vaishnavee Gupta (Varanasi), Veda Rodewald (Mumbai), Vaidehi Shah (Mumbai).

In these unique, challenging, difficult conditions of coronavirus lockdown, this diverse group of young women from various cities across India, collaborated online and through phone calls. Despite vast differences between them on various aspects ranging from spoken language, family income, online engagement, the experience of school - the group shared ideas, to have deeply respectful remote discussions. Their ability to speak a common language even in challenging circumstances, demonstrates that it is entirely possible for cities to build supportive communities - both online and on the ground - where adolescent girls and young women feel supported, empowered and heard.



SUPARNA GUPTA
FOUNDER, AANGAN

THE CONTEXT:

Urban Adolescent Girls and Loneliness

“ What does it feel like to be lonely? It feels like being hungry: like being hungry when everyone around you is readying for a feast. It feels shameful and alarming, and over time these feelings radiate outwards, making the lonely person increasingly isolated, increasingly estranged.

Olivia Laing, *The Lonely City*³

Writing on urban isolation in her 2016 book, Olivia Laing explored how loneliness can be all-encompassing – a feeling of separation and being walled off even while living in the heart of a city, surrounded by millions. Whether it is at home, walking down the street or engulfed by other bodies on a local train or bus, chances are you have caught a glimpse of this isolation. Or perhaps the disconnection – feeling cut off from your peers, family and even your own body – is an experience that resonates.

As we live in what is being called the urban century, this painful isolation is increasingly cutting across geographies and age groups, and is echoed by adolescent girls in India. “I have no one to talk to. Sometimes, I go for days without speaking to anyone. I just go from one chore in the house to the next,” says a 14-year old in Patna, Bihar. It is a reality that 255 adolescents and young women across 5 urban cities and socio-economic groups have reflected on in this study. Loneliness and isolation have long been associated with old age or illness but as urban

populations swell, the impact on young people, and particularly, adolescent girls who have little or no voice in their families or communities, is being keenly felt. Even as towns and cities offer physical proximity, the absence of connection and spaces to form community creates a sense of fragmentation and exacerbates the exclusion of this already vulnerable group.

Data on the rate of urbanisation and the demographic shift offer an indication of the scale of this burgeoning crisis. UNICEF’s 2012 State of the World’s Children [report](#)⁴ states that more than half of the world’s population now resides in towns and cities, which includes more than a billion children. In India, cities are projected to grow exponentially by 2050. The [UN Revision of World Urbanization Prospects](#)⁵ (2018) says Indian cities will grow rapidly, adding another 416 million residents to become home for 60% of the nation’s population. Another report published by the [McKinsey Global Institute](#)⁶ reiterates this, stating that 68 cities in India are predicted to have a population of 1 million plus by 2030.

Alongside this rapid urbanisation is the story of India’s population growth. A 2015 [report](#)⁷ by Save the Children stated that of the 377 million urban Indians, 32% or 120 million are children below the age of 18 and 10% or 36.5 million below the age of 6 years. It’s a demographic dividend that is being proclaimed to drive the growth of the country by expanding the work force and increasing consumption. Yet, what these numbers do not account for is that the majority live in slum households with poor access to rights and key services which in turn perpetuates exclusion.

Further, a parallel, silent crisis is unfolding. According to a WHO report⁸ in 2016, India's suicide rate stood at 16.5 suicides per 100,000 people—higher than the global rate of 10.5. At 14.5, India also had the highest suicide rate for females in the South-East Asian region. Dr. Vikram Patel, professor at the Harvard Medical School's Department of Global Health and Social Medicine in a 2020 [interview](#)⁹, says, 'A pattern very unique to India is that suicide peaks in young people. If you look at most developed countries, including upper middle income countries like China, suicide actually peaks in older age. [...] In India, roughly 75% of female suicides take place before the age of 30.'

The 2015-16 [National Mental Health Survey](#)¹⁰ in India reiterates this growing crisis. It estimated that 13.5% of adolescents in urban areas have 'mental morbidity', that is the incidence of both physical and psychological deterioration as a result of a mental or psychological condition. This was also double the prevalence found in rural areas.

Where is the adolescent girl located amidst these statistics? Who does she turn to in order to feel seen and heard? How do urban spaces reflect her needs and aspirations? Do they support her agency and well-being or isolate her further? While data exists on the rate of survival of children and access to education and nutrition, adolescent girls are rarely a disaggregated population in research and programming. Limited indicators and evidence instead point to the absence of the voices of adolescent girls in shaping policy and planning urban spaces. Connecting the dots between the data points that do exist indicates how adolescent girls are largely invisible in urban India and how that is spurring a sense of alienation and loneliness.

As Laing writes, 'Many of the things that seem to afflict us as individuals are in fact a result of larger forces of stigma and exclusion, which can and should be resisted.' It's a sentiment echoed by Johann Hari in his book *Lost Connections*,¹¹ where he writes, 'Every one of the social and psychological

causes of depression and anxiety they have discovered has something in common. They are all forms of disconnection. They are all ways in which we have been cut off from something we innately need but seem to have lost along the way.'

The research conducted by adolescents and young women in urban cities offers a glimpse into the everyday reality of this invisible group that is usually treated as a subset of children under the age of 18 or thrown into the category of youth aged 10 to 24. Instead, it has adolescents talking to other adolescents about their experience of inhabiting urban spaces. By listening to and planning for adolescents, it will also become possible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. Achieving gender equality and making cities more inclusive, safe and resilient, have been identified as priorities in Agenda 2030 of the SDGs. This will only be possible with the involvement of adolescents in planning their own future.



METHODOLOGY :

A Participatory Process Led by Adolescent Girls and Young Women

Through a series of Zoom, Whatsapp and phone conversations we connected a small group of adolescent and young women from varied backgrounds and five Indian cities across India, helping them to speak and listen to each other, despite lockdown. These eighteen researchers - adolescent girls and young women - shaped this action research. They jointly decided the focus, generated questions and finalized the survey based on what they believed were important issues. The researcher team then reached out to peers, gathered data, shared their own experiences and insights, and later came up with recommendations, eager to participate in the solution.

- CHAITALI SHETH | DIRECTOR, AANGAN

**OBJECTIVES OF
THE RESEARCH:**

1

To understand the experience of loneliness and community connectedness amongst adolescent girls and young women

2

To identify and map situations that trigger loneliness in the 13-21 age group, across different income levels

3

To document coping strategies that are used effectively by adolescent girls and young women

4

To understand the urban adolescent's perspective about how cities could respond to the specific needs of this group

METHODOLOGY :

A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was adopted for this study. As a method that links participation, social action and knowledge generation, PAR is a powerful tool for girls to not just be participants in a study, but co-researchers and co-producers of knowledge. This combination of practice and collaborative research is also consistent with the philosophy and aims of the organisation.

- A group of 18 adolescent girls and young women between the ages of 17-20 years came together to design and conduct this action research. They were a diverse group - from different income levels, varied backgrounds and living in five urban cities across India - Mumbai, Patna, Varanasi, Kolkata and Lucknow.
- Most of the young researchers have been associated with Aangan in different ways in the past - either as peer leaders or members of safety networks run by the organisation, members of community-level adolescent girl groups or as volunteers/interns.
- Young researchers were invited to generate questions for a survey to understand their peers' experience of loneliness related to lockdown, but also beyond the context of lockdown. They were also asked to think about questions that might shed light on strategies, support and resources adolescents drew upon which helped them to cope during difficult times. Following this, the Aangan team facilitated group discussions on Zoom and Whatsapp, with the goal of finalising a list of questions they all agreed upon. Besides their participation as co-researchers, the process involved joint knowledge production leading to insights for the researchers as well as those who were surveyed.
- The young researchers then received training on administering the survey and conducting interviews using the questions they had co-created. This included procedures for protecting the confidentiality of the participants.
- Young researchers reached out to 15-20 peers each, all in the age group of 12-21 years.
- Phone surveys were conducted with girls across Patna in Bihar, Kolkata in West Bengal, Mumbai in Maharashtra, Varanasi and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Interviews were conducted in English, Hindi and Bangla.
- Data processing: Microsoft excel, frequency tables were made for both quantitative and qualitative questions by the Aangan team.
- Data was presented back to the young researchers who commented and added their own qualitative insights with the group.
- A workshop facilitated by the Aangan team was conducted on Zoom and Whatsapp with the young researchers to discuss their ideas and solutions for cities, based on survey findings. Girls reviewed participant responses and their own experiences to identify patterns in the research study.
- As the researchers themselves have a deep understanding of the context and lives of other girls living in similar circumstances, it enabled identifying trends for practice change and future programming.

DATA COLLECTION:

The processing of data was done taking into consideration research ethics:

- Verbal consent of parents and respondents was taken by the researchers before minors were interviewed
- Confidentiality was maintained throughout the process as personal details such as names and contact numbers were not mentioned
- For the translation of some responses received in Hindi to English from peer leaders, a team of two external individuals was set up so as to avoid any bias

LIMITATIONS:

One limitation of the study is that it was conducted online via phones and email. As this was during the lockdown with limited opportunities for face-to-face contact, other measures and observations to map the responses of the participants could not be incorporated. While efforts were made to ensure that the participants were in a safe space where they felt comfortable to respond to the survey, there was no way to ascertain this entirely.

Another limitation of the study could be a selection bias in the sampling of the participants. Due to the lockdown and restriction of in-person access, the dependence on technology to reach research participants also means that the sample might not be representative of the overall population or that sub-groups within it have not been accessible. In both scenarios, this could affect the final sampling and result in a non-random sample.

MORE ABOUT

Young Researchers



15 YEARS
MUMBAI,
MAHARASHTRA

Aanya Choksi

Aanya is a dancer and has been training since the age of seven. She learnt ballet and Odissi, and then supplemented this classical dance training with contemporary, modern and jazz forms. "When I dance, I go into a sacred space, a space that is unique. Nothing else makes me feel the way dance does. I let go of all my inhibitions, and express all of my thoughts and feelings," she says. Aanya wonders why expressing feelings or talking about emotional or mental health is discouraged as we grow older. She believes the freedom to express oneself is liberating and wants to advocate for every girls' right to do so. For her, this project integrated both.



16 YEARS
PATNA, BIHAR

Akanksha Kumari

Akanksha lives in Hinduni and spends her time studying and playing cricket. In the absence of cricket coaching centres where she can train, she plays in the neighbourhood with friends. A batsman of repute in her circle, she wants to train professionally and prove that cricket is not exclusively a "man's game". She believes that patience and determination are qualities that make a good batsman. She also enjoys working with a team and strategising together – skills she puts to use as part of her community girl safety network, Bal Suraksha Samuh.



19 YEARS
LUCKNOW,
UTTAR PRADESH

Amreen Khan

Amreen is in the third year of her Bachelor of Arts at Lucknow University. She aspires to be a teacher and in her free time tutors children living in the neighbourhood. Her former tuition teacher is her mentor and the person who encourages her to be independent. Amreen is also creatively inclined and enjoys activities like making mehendi designs and rangoli. She decided to conduct the survey on loneliness as it gave her an opportunity to talk about mental health with her friends and family - a subject which is not spoken of and is difficult to address.



20 YEARS
VARANASI,
UTTAR PRADESH

Anjali Verma

Anjali is drawn to expressing herself through art—drawing, painting and making things of beauty with waste material. She wants to set up her own business in handicrafts and provide livelihood opportunities for those who work in this field. Conducting the survey was an experience she enjoyed because of the glimpse it gave her into the inner lives of other girls. One of her insights was how many girls experience loneliness and yet how it is never spoken of.



17 YEARS
PATNA, BIHAR

Kamini Kumari

Kamini dreams of becoming an IPS officer and making everyone in her family proud. She loves to spend time with her younger sisters and cousins. A member of the girl safety network in her community at Lohiwar Chowk, Phulwari Sharif, she is aware of how powerful it is to be part of a network that supports each other through problems and to have access to a space where she can meet new girls and establish friendships.



Anjali Kumari

20 YEARS
PATNA, BIHAR

A psychology student at the Government Women's College in Gardani Bagh, Anjali also works part time running a network marketing business that connects people to skills training and job opportunities. She thrives on having her hands full and balancing the demands of both. One of the things that motivates her is the support of her mother who pushes her to do and be better. She enjoys listening to stories of people who have chosen different paths in life and charted their own success stories. Anjali chose to be part of this project to talk about issues that are often not spoken of.



18 YEARS
VARANASI,
UTTAR PRADESH

Manya Jaiswal

When she is not studying, Manya likes to sing and watch movies. She also likes to cook and learns new recipes by watching Youtube videos. Chinese cuisine is her go-to and she likes to cook up a feast of chilli paneer, manchurian and hakka noodles. A member of the girl safety network in her community, she enjoys working with children and being a mentor to them. Her mother is the person she looks up to and the one who encourages her to pursue her dreams. She hopes to work in the banking sector.

Mukta Dharmamer



20 YEARS
MUMBAI,
MAHARASHTRA

Working on getting her Bachelor's degree from Nir-mala Niketan College of Social Work, Mukta loves reading books, journaling and writing blogs to express emotions and feelings which might otherwise be hard to talk about. Mukta loves music and is curious about the link between music, health and wellbeing. "Music keeps us calm, is known to reduce blood pressure, improve alertness, memory and motivate us," she says. Mukta sees herself working on gender issues, believing that LGTBQAI issues are under addressed.



16 YEARS
MUMBAI,
MAHARASHTRA

Nemat Shaikh

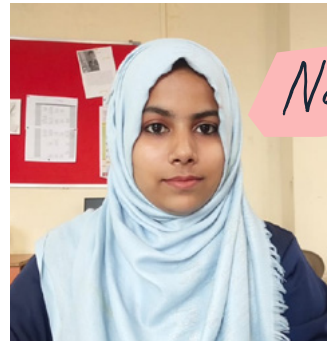
Nemat is in the 12th grade studying Humanities at DG Ruparel College. She was also part of the non-profit Akanksha. She enjoys watching TED Talks as it opens up different worlds for her. Reading and writing about current social and political issues like rising poverty, unemployment and climate change is what she feels strongly about. Her insight from conducting the survey was how people can appear to be very different on the outside but understanding someone's reality and getting close to people actually reveals many similarities.



19 YEARS
KOLKATA,
WEST BENGAL

Madhusree Dasgupta

Madhusree loves theatre, art, culture and has been acting on stage since the age of four. She has played various roles including Sherlock Holmes and Cleopatra. Madhusree loves writing poetry, prose and dancing when nobody is watching. "One of things you learn while working with other performers is that you can trust people, lean on them and they will have your back. The feeling of being part of such a community is amazing. You feel like family and end a performance with a group of close friends," she says. She is also passionate about research and is currently volunteering at a mental health initiative called Safe Space which provides free mental health care for those who need it.



Nasreen Ansari

20 YEARS
MUMBAI,
MAHARASHTRA

Nasreen recently graduated as a Bachelor of Arts from SNDT University. She currently works as a community mobiliser with the non profit, Apnalaya, and still makes time to run her own community project called 'Ladkiyon ki Kahani, Ladkiyon ki Zubani'. Nasreen loves cycling and the sense of freedom that comes from riding one. As a child, she would save up money her parents would give her and rent a bicycle even if it was for 15 minutes. She is inspired by stories about her grandfather who never discriminated between his daughters and sons. His example gives her the confidence to talk about equality in her community.



17 YEARS
MUMBAI
MAHARASHTRA

Nayantara Piramal

Passionate about gender equality, Nayantara believes she has gained most from diving deep into community service projects. From personal experience and through discussions with friends, Nayantara knows that feelings of loneliness, isolation or being separated from peers in situations like a city-wide lockdown can feel overwhelming for adolescents. It is also why this project resonated with her. Her aim is to develop solutions and thus believes that understanding the issue in depth has the potential to add valuable perspective. Nayantara also loves writing stories and articles.



21 YEARS
MUMBAI,
MAHARASHTRA

Priyam Mishra

Priyam is drawn to trying her hand at different things and learning from experience. She enjoys watching cooking videos on YouTube and trying out new recipes. One of the most delicious things she has cooked up is Gajar ka Halwa. The praise by family and friends that follows these cooking experiments is something she enjoys immensely. Through the process of conducting this survey, she got a deeper understanding of why so many girls feel unsafe in their communities and how important it is to always have someone to talk to.



18 YEARS
PATNA, BIHAR

Ravina Kumari

Ravina lives in Pitwans and enjoys spending time with her family in whom she confides her hopes, dreams and fears. She wants to join the police and is supported by her family to continue her education and pursue this dream. She is also an active member of a girl support network as one of its leaders and helps girls and boys identify safe persons in their lives. Her friends describe her as someone who is always game to have fun and who is committed to her goals. She wants to work to help people fight for their rights, one persuasive argument at a time.



18 YEARS
MUMBAI,
MAHARASHTRA

Swati Mishra

Swati loves playing football, meeting new people and making friends. The teamwork that it takes to play a sport and how it demands that everything else is set aside in that moment is what she loves about it. One of the things that strikes her about this survey is how everyone needs at least that one trusted person they can turn to when they feel overwhelmed. She hopes to continue to make connections with more girls and help them feel supported.



19 YEARS
VARANASI,
UTTAR PRADESH

Vaishnavee Gupta

Vaishnavee lives in Sikrol. She enjoys reading and Premchand is at the top of the list of her most-read authors. Her favourite story, *Poos ki Raat*, is about the struggle of a farmer in debt. She also enjoys cooking and her speciality is making idlis, but what she loves most about it is sitting down with her family to eat together. Vaishnavi has a wide social network, she enjoys talking to people and making new friends. She often finds herself going out of her way to help others and hopes to become a social worker.



17 YEARS
MUMBAI,
MAHARASHTRA

Vaidehi Shah

Vaidehi is a national-level tennis player but insists she is just a typical teenager who loves bingeing on Netflix shows, playing field sports, public speaking and breaking stereotypes. She worries about things like gender injustice and unequal pay. With activism already part of her school life, Vaidehi has represented her school in fourteen Model United Nation sessions. She volunteers at a local government school and is proud of how she has faced challenges or bullying with strength and plans to constantly be vocal about injustice.



17 YEARS
MUMBAI,
MAHARASHTRA

Veda Rodewald

While others her age are busy with hobbies like sport or dance, Veda finds herself preoccupied with how to spotlight invisible issues like gender inequality among teens or school bullying. She believes that breaking the silence around such themes is a first and important step. Veda has worked with teenage girls in a Mumbai *basti* to ensure they could get solar lights installed on a risky, unlit route to the community toilet. This mini-advocacy project ended up demonstrating to her that she could use her own voice to impact the everyday lives of hundreds of women and children in the neighbourhood. She is currently engaged in increasing the conversation on mental health and working on various ways to normalise such discussions for young people like herself.

SECTION B

Voices of adolescents

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

"When I feel lonely, I try to do different things I like that make me happy or give me temporary satisfaction. I immerse myself in books and travel to various different worlds that capture my imagination. Sometimes I also find these worlds in my study books and lose myself in them for hours. Books keep me from feeling lonely."



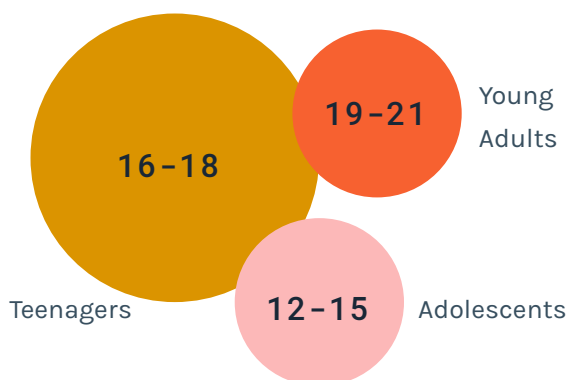
Reaching out to Adolescents and Young Women

There were 255 respondents including adolescent girls and young women – all between the ages of 12 - 21 years. 18 young researchers, all between 17-21 years, designed and administered this survey. They reached out to peers and friends to understand each others' experience of loneliness and community connectedness. The largest group of respondents were teenagers between 16-18 years while the rest were equally distributed between young adults 19-21 years and adolescents 12-15 years.

All those surveyed were from urban locations including Mumbai (Maharashtra), Patna (Bihar), Kolkata (West Bengal), Varanasi and Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh). A significantly larger number of respondents were from Mumbai while the rest were evenly distributed between other cities. Mumbai and Kolkata are two of five mega cities in India, which is defined by the UN¹² as having a population of over 10 million. The others are classified as Tier 2 cities.

The eighteen researchers as well as survey respondents came from varied backgrounds and had a diverse set of experiences related to school, support services, participation and access to protective services in the city where they reside. 51% of respondents were from lower income groups, live in the cities' informal settlements (*bastis*), with family income* at 3000-5000 INR per month (almost \$60 per month), with earning members in their households either unemployed or part of the informal sector. Most of the teenage girls and young women in this group attend free government-funded or low-fee private schools. Another 49% of respondents were from higher income groups, live in buildings, attend the cities' private schools and have access to at least one personal device – either a mobile phone and a personal computer. The report attempts to spotlight the urban adolescent experience for girls across high and low income groups. At the same time, it also aims to highlight some differences that are unique to each group and require unique solutions.

TALKING TO TEENS AND YOUNG WOMEN



*NOTE: UNICEF defines adolescents as 10-19 years and young people 10-24 years

LISTENING TO GIRLS ACROSS INCOME LEVELS



● Respondents were from lower income groups
● Respondents were from higher income groups

Experiencing Loneliness in the City

“

"Loneliness comes in different forms, sometimes it is a small pin-prick of pain. We can listen to music or do something to ignore the feeling. Then it grows bigger and bigger, until we feel very sad and extremely cut off. At such times the more I think about it, the more I feel as if there is no one who understands me, and the feeling just lingers on and on. I have so many people around, and yet I have the feeling that no one will connect to what I am experiencing. I feel a great sense of worthlessness. Everything seems pointless."

”

Abha (name changed), 20, Patna

Much like Abha's expression of loneliness, researchers have also defined loneliness in a multi-faceted manner. While some emphasise the personal experience, other studies imply a systemic response, and focus on the young person's need for community connectedness. One such study describes loneliness as a painful emotional state likely to occur when there is discrepancy between desired and achieved patterns of social interaction (Peplau and Perlman 1982, p.5¹³). Including, but not limited to physical interface and contact, definitions of loneliness also refer to the quality of relationships or the perceived availability of social support (Hawkey et al. 2008¹⁴). A third study called *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (Cacioppo and Patrick¹⁵) focuses on the need for meaningful connections with others and being able to access it

through social memberships, whether it is school groups, peers, family or neighbourhood. "Loneliness is therefore not just affected by the number of social interactions but by the quality and depth of these connections as well," write Cacioppo et al. in a 2015 paper which offers a framework of how loneliness can be understood at the systemic level. It is a framework that moves beyond the arena of the individual and their internal world to understand what shapes this experience. In doing so, it offers an entry point to look at ways in which to plan for systemic responses to address it.

In starting the conversation with adolescents, they were left to define loneliness for themselves. 84% of respondents reported experiencing recurring loneliness. Most of them (76% respondents) felt lonely sometimes, 16% rarely experienced loneliness and 8% always felt lonely. With the largest part of the group answering "sometimes," it would be important to note that the experience can be intense and even chronic. One 17-year-old from Patna, Bihar says: "Sometimes I feel so alone and confused I am unable to express my feelings. I am closed off - even to my sister. I often feel confused about my feelings. People point out that I look dull and that I rarely smile or laugh. This makes me feel worse." Another adolescent says, "Often I just find myself running from conversations, I even tune out of conversations."

84% EXPERIENCED
RECURRING LONELINESS

SOMETIMES:

76%

ALWAYS:

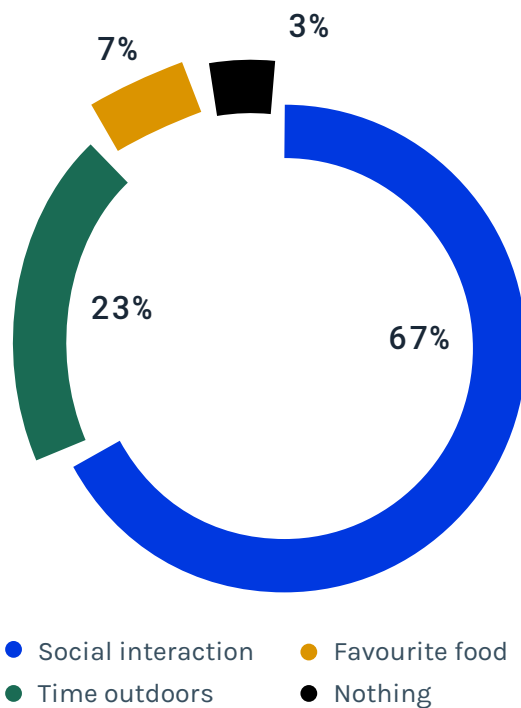
8%

This is not dissimilar to loneliness trends captured through studies in various parts of the world, many of which imply increasing rates of loneliness across age and gender groups – and indicate the need for preventive interventions. A UK based study

(Goosby, Bellatorre, Walsemann, Cheadle¹⁶) also found that 70% of adolescents experienced recurring loneliness at age 18. Another Norway based study with university students found that loneliness increased significantly from 2014-2018.

Lockdown Challenges

DURING LOCKDOWN THE THING I MISS THE MOST IS...



When asked what had been the most challenging aspect of the lockdown, unsurprisingly, for 67% of respondents, it was all kinds of social interaction. Of this group about half spoke about the challenges linked to their disrupted routines, including missing time spent in class with classmates, being part of team sports and meeting friends. The group also shared that two of the most isolating and distressing aspects of lockdown had been conflicts, fights and arguments as well as family stress at home.

Among girls from the lower income group, many experienced gender discrimination at home, finding

themselves overwhelmed while they managed the burden of increased household chores. Many also felt helpless about the financial situation during lockdown. "My father is deeply in debt and there are four of us girls for him to earn for. I know how difficult it is, but in lockdown I can't help or do much," says one adolescent from Patna, Bihar. Another young woman from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh described the stress of being locked down, "My father keeps scolding me about housework even though I have to do so much for everyone. I used to work as a receptionist but during the lockdown I lost my job."

When Loneliness Strikes

Beyond lockdown situations, 70% of respondents were able to identify specific conditions, times or situations when they felt most lonely, while close to 30% of adolescents and young women could not pin-point specific conditions, events or times which they associated with loneliness. Of those who had greater awareness about triggers or times linked to loneliness, most were older teenage girls in the 16-18 years age group. Of the 30% who had been unable to identify or catch warning signs, most of the respondents were younger teens, 13-15 years old. This raises the question about whether it might be important to initiate conversation with younger adolescents as well as pre-adolescents to help them recognise early warning signs or risky situations linked to feelings of isolation. This might help them to seek support or help promptly and preventatively. Research has already established physiological as well as psychological consequences of loneliness like [depression](#), risk of [suicide](#), cognitive impairment, inattention, emotional overeating, excessive drinking, smoking, or drug misuse behaviours. But loneliness is also linked to risks like running away or making young women vulnerable to traffickers, especially in bastis where marginalised families live. One adolescent shared: "A friend of mine often tells me about how she feels lonely at home. She lives in a large joint family but still feels isolated. She feels nobody understands her, says her brother is harsh with her and that her parents don't support her. She plans to leave home and maybe even go to another city."

25% of respondents reported that they feel most disconnected or lonely at night. This group primarily included adolescents and young women from higher income households. "At night, silence gives us an opportunity to really concentrate on our own thoughts," said one respondent while another adolescent from this group said, "At night we would most



likely spend time on social media, phones or the computer." There seems to be some link between loneliness and time spent on social media. However it is unclear whether loneliness leads to more use of social media or whether social media increases a sense of loneliness.

33%

FELT MOST ISOLATED
DURING THE DAY, AT
A TIME THEY WOULD
TYPICALLY BE IN SCHOOL

One third of respondents, 33%, felt lonely during the day. These respondents were mainly from low-income groups (80%). Keeping in mind that a typical adolescent schedule would place teens in school/college and among peers during morning and afternoon, the data implies school-related challenges which include adolescents being out of school or unable to attend regularly. One respondent reveals: "The responsibility of the house and family is on my shoulders. My entire day is spent cooking, cleaning and taking care of everyone. Even though this keeps me very busy and I am with family and siblings, it also makes me feel alone. I have no one to support me," says Meena (named changed), an 18-year-old from Varanasi, referring to how her out-of-school status deprives her of an education as well as time to spend with her peer group. For the other 20% of students from higher income groups who feel lonely during the school day, the data raises a question about whether schools can take more specific concerted steps to build a greater sense of inclusivity and connectedness. Addressing social emotional factors and ensuring teachers are trained to identify and respond to those who need help is essential. Schools could also take proactive steps to build supportive student communities through work with family and children.

What the Experts Say

HEAR FROM DR NISHA DHAWAN

Dr Nisha Dhawan is Country Director at [EMpower](#), the Emerging Markets Foundation and a Tedx speaker

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women and girls. From having increased burdens and responsibilities to diminishing opportunities in relation to school and future employment, the way girls have experienced COVID-19 is drastically different to their male counterparts.

A salient issue that the pandemic has laid bare is the need to focus on the mental health of adolescent girls. While girls across the world are the demographic most impacted by mental health issues, this has been exacerbated by the pandemic with a severing of local networks, peer groups, friends and school.

On the job front and as well as the job prospect front, women and girls will be the first to lose their jobs and the last to be re-hired. This was the case even before the pandemic. The solution lies in creating effective interventions that focus on increasing the employability prospects of women and girls and creating avenues for effective placements.

In relation to school, it is a space that provides much more than curricula to students—it is a site for co-learning, partnerships, social capital and role models. Not only are girls removed from this environment, girls (in comparison to their male counterparts) are less likely to access online learning because of the digital divide and because of how power relations are enacted in relation to the use and control of technology within households (i.e. men and boys have greater access to smartphones). Additionally, as data has shown us in previous pandemics (Ebola) and now with COVID-19, girls shoulder additional caregiving responsibilities including caring for those who are unwell during these times, thereby limiting their ability to exercise agency in relation to their own lives.

When we think about girls in urban environments, we must recognise that cities have been made for certain demographics. Women and girls from low income communities are the invisible citizens of the city. By intentionally centring them in relation to (re)claiming the city, through art, through being visible and claiming public space - women and girls are not only becoming visible citizens but this can have the potential to shift narratives in relation to their right to the city. Additionally, cities are shared spaces, therefore creating bridges between divided socio-economic echelons enables citizens to understand that their city is shared with others. There is a vital role that civil society organisations, corporates and local (municipal) governments can play in fostering collaboration and understanding so that citizens of the city can truly SEE each other.

MORE ABOUT DR NISHA DHAWAN

Dr Nisha Dhawan is Country Director for India at [EMpower](#) – The Emerging Markets Foundation. She holds a PhD from the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. Her doctoral research focussed on the role that non-traditional livelihoods play in advancing the project of gender equity. Nisha has an MSc in Gender, Development, and Globalisation from the London School of Economics and a BA from McGill University in International Politics and Women's Studies. She is also a [TEDx speaker](#) – where she shared her passion for amplifying girls' voices.

The Most Difficult Situations

Describing situations linked to feeling disconnected and isolated,

71% NAMED SOCIAL
EMOTIONAL FACTORS

15% NAMED PHYSICAL
FACTORS

15% reported that physical separation and distance from family and friends made them feel most disconnected. However 71% described situations which referred to social emotional factors, linking them to the most intense feelings of isolation and distress. Echoing this, Laing writes in her book, *The Lonely City*: 'Loneliness doesn't necessarily require physical solitude, but rather an absence or paucity of connection, closeness, kinship: an inability, for one reason or another, to find as much intimacy as is desired.' Thus, the quality of social connections are just as vital as the number of such relationships. Robert Waldinger, current director of a study called the Harvard Study of Adult Development (cited in Ortiz-Ospina and Roser, 2020¹⁷) reiterates the importance of social associations, stating that they are one of the most significant components for individuals' happy and healthy life.

I FEEL ISOLATED AND ALONE...

When I am sitting at home, unable to attend school/college

When I have to study alone

When I am bored

When I am in crowded unfamiliar surroundings

If somebody scolds me, criticizes me

Amidst stress or conflict.

If I am bullied, excluded, ignored

When I am criticized and feel like I am not good enough

When nobody listens to me

When I am not actively engaging with friend circles

When I am anxious about work. For eg: if I can't finish domestic chores, complete homework, fail an exam

This reflects the need to think beyond physical infrastructure for cities and points to the need to create city spaces which build social associations and meaningful engagement for young people. Cities could do more for adolescents by providing public spaces that offer adolescents (across income groups) and young people to gather (physically or virtually) and engage meaningfully as citizens.

What the Experts Say

HEAR FROM SONALI GUPTA

[Sonali Gupta](#) is a clinical psychologist, author and columnist who is passionate about ending the stigma around mental health

In my experience of working with young adults, loneliness reflects in ways where they often struggle to be seen or even understood. It is an age group that is already vulnerable to existential questions of meaning and purpose. In this context, the absence of friendships or even having relationships but not feeling heard in them increases feelings of loneliness. Perceptions and assumptions about peers living ideal lives can further exacerbate this sense of being cut off. The lack of solidarity and absence of safe spaces where girls have the freedom to express, share their concerns whether it's about friendships, lack of friendships and desires makes them feel more alone and impacts their self esteem.

Community support groups can play an important role in carving out safe spaces for girls. Whether this is formally or informally conducted, consciously creating groups that help girls find a sense of belonging and build solidarity are crucial. Similarly, in schools and colleges, these groups should be created and facilitated in a way that guarantees safety. Being part of spaces like this allows girls and young women to talk about concerns that are not always visible, it helps dispel myths and makes room to hear from others who might be experiencing similar feelings. In hostels for instance, homesickness is one such issue that is not easily spoken of but plays a big role in how a young person is able to adjust and cope with a new living situation. Curriculum on social emotional learning (SEL) must be part of modules conducted in school and college so that narratives of self esteem, identity are part of conversations with young people.

At a city level, art and theatre can be ways in which to create support groups and build programmes that provide young girls an opportunity to find community and more so to feel heard, seen and understood.

It also becomes a space to develop age appropriate social-emotional skills that help them deal with bullying, cyberbullying and develop autonomy. In the context of online communities, there is a need for more open source learning / content in regional languages that addresses questions, feelings and even gives examples of conversations which young girls aspire to have but don't have an outlet for.

MORE ABOUT SONALI GUPTA

[Sonali Gupta](#) is one of India's leading clinical psychologists with 16 years experience. Her new book *Anxiety: Overcome It and Live without Fear* was released in May 2020 by prestigious publisher HarperCollins in both paperback and Kindle. She has been a weekly columnist for the Mumbai Mirror titled "*Terms of Engagement*" which focuses on love, intimacy, relationships and mental health at large since 2018. She advises several leading businesses and organizations in addition to her own practice at Khar and Mahalakshmi and has been a consulting psychologist for Tinder since 2018. She works with young adults, artists, couples and corporates to enhance their emotional well being at the intersection of relationships, grief and anxiety. With over 50,000 subscribers, her YouTube channel "[Mental Health with Sonali](#)" is one of, if not the largest for a mental health professional in India. She is passionate about causing a breakthrough and ending the stigma around mental health in India.

Social Exclusion, Bullying and Marginalisation

51%

HAVE EXPERIENCED BULLYING OR FELT EXCLUDED AND THIS INTENSIFIED THEIR FEELINGS OF LONELINESS

Respondents linked these factors to bullying:
Introvert qualities
Caste differences
Different abilities

I THINK PEOPLE ARE BULLIED OR EXCLUDED MAINLY BECAUSE...

INTROVERT QUALITIES

”

If they are shy, don't talk much, don't initiate conversations, or hesitate to make their voices heard then people will bully them.



47.84%

CASTE DIFFERENCES

”

In Mumbai, Patna and Varanasi, girls felt excluded because of caste. Some referred to being discriminated against for their skin color. Others felt excluded in the way they are treated in social situations. "Sometimes if we visit a friend's home, they give food in a separate kind of dish or avoid eating with me. Immediately, I know it is because of my caste and I feel excluded and humiliated," says a teenager from Patna, Bihar.



30.98%

DIFFERENT ABILITIES

”

"If people have learning difficulties or seem to be different in others ways from the rest of the class, then the group will leave them out usually." says one respondent, demonstrating that schools need to work with families and children in a concerted manner to create a genuinely inclusive community that celebrates diversity



27.84%

What the Experts Say

HEAR FROM MONEISHA GANDHI

Moneisha Gandhi is the parent of a teenager with Down syndrome, and recently started [Buddy Up](#), a peer network for young people with disabilities

I found the data relating to bullying and exclusion in the survey quite eye opening and surprising. I would have thought that being different would have been the biggest factor leading to loneliness. But surprisingly, being introverted accounts for almost 50 percent of the cases.

Introversion which I feel was a neutral term in the past has now taken on a negative connotation. Perhaps it's related to how the world we live in has changed where visibility and self advocacy have become increasingly important. Today, if one is shy there's a real chance that one will simply be left behind. In schools, it's not just about knowing, it is about being seen to know things.

Social media has made the difference between introverts and extroverts even more stark. The latter have platforms to broadcast their views and talents, making those that are uncomfortable doing this come across as less able and less desirable as friends. The data suggests that this is a very real problem when it comes to loneliness. Self worth seems to be affected and introverts seem to be finding it hard to connect to others in this rather loud and vocal new world.

Two possibilities exist to help alleviate this problem. One, giving introverted individuals tools to overcome their hesitation to engage with others. This could involve confidence building activities for groups that are the most affected (teenage girls, women). Schools/colleges could be a good place to put in such programmes. The second solution applies to any group that feels different by offering them a larger pool from which to find those that they can connect with. This wider net could be online using social media to find those that would be a good fit for themselves. Considering apps like Tinder help so many meet their life partners there's every possibility that one can use similar modes to find individuals that are a good friendship fit to one's personality. Perhaps such fora already exist and could be tweaked to make them more accessible in the local context.

The data on loneliness felt by those with learning difficulties was not surprising. With obvious differences, exclusion tends to occur frequently as often there is reduced common ground over which those friendships can be sustained. Loneliness amongst this group is a very real problem. While building sensitivity amongst the typical population is an obvious need, it will not be a solution. Teens and young adults with disabilities need to actively seek out relationships where they are equals. Again, with the smaller pool available in most communities one often needs to look beyond the immediate circle and disability networks could help connect individuals based on common interests.

The third category mentioned by the data is downright heartbreaking and shocking. The fact that 30% of respondents felt excluded from friendships due to their caste was disturbing. The discrimination is all the more hurtful and humiliating because it occurs amongst peers who are supposedly interacting as equals (visiting each other's homes). This problem is so steeped in certain communities that a quick fix is going to be hard. There is the issue of upper caste individuals being discriminatory coupled with an ingrained notion amongst lower caste individuals of their own inferiority. Lower caste individuals often know their place and have a fear of speaking out – in a way making their problems similar to those of introverts. They probably have learnt it is best to stay under the radar and not to draw attention to themselves.

Centuries old beliefs are hard to overcome and the only long term solution is truly liberal education reaching these communities. Meanwhile, for those that feel excluded and lonely one can only reinforce the pride that they should have in themselves. Make them believe that they need to seek out those that value them for who they are as people. Also, understand that perhaps their peers are members of casteist families and bear no grudge themselves but are limited about what they do in their own homes. Again, building communities of support is the only way to help alleviate this sense of isolation.

MORE ABOUT MONEISHA GANDHI

Moneisha Gandhi is the parent of a teenager with Down syndrome. Over the years she has been an informal advisor and active ambassador on challenges related to school inclusion. Surprised by the lack of social networks for teens or young adults with disabilities, Moneisha co-founded [Buddy Up](#), a Facebook group to connect young people with similar interests, help teens with disabilities form enduring friendships and create an active, engaged community.

Coping Strategies

When asked about ways in which adolescents and young women cope with their feelings of loneliness and isolation, the top five most-mentioned strategies include:

ENTERTAINMENT

Distracting oneself by watching movies or listening to music, games on a mobile phone, music and reading books. One teenager shares, "When I feel lonely, I try to do things that give me temporary satisfaction, make me happy even for that moment."

LEARNING & CHALLENGING ACTIVITY

Writing, exercising, focusing on work at hand, spending time studying and doing something creative, like cooking were also named as ways to cope. Watching Youtube videos to learn a new skill, especially cooking was popular. "I immerse myself in books [...] sometimes even in my study books. Learning can keep me feeling positive," she says.



SHARED INTEREST

Finding opportunities, platforms, online communities to meet people with shared interests, can be very effective for urban adolescents. One of the respondents described, "After six months of feeling very lonely in junior college, I joined a coaching centre. Another student and I would study together and help each other with the work. This helped," she said.

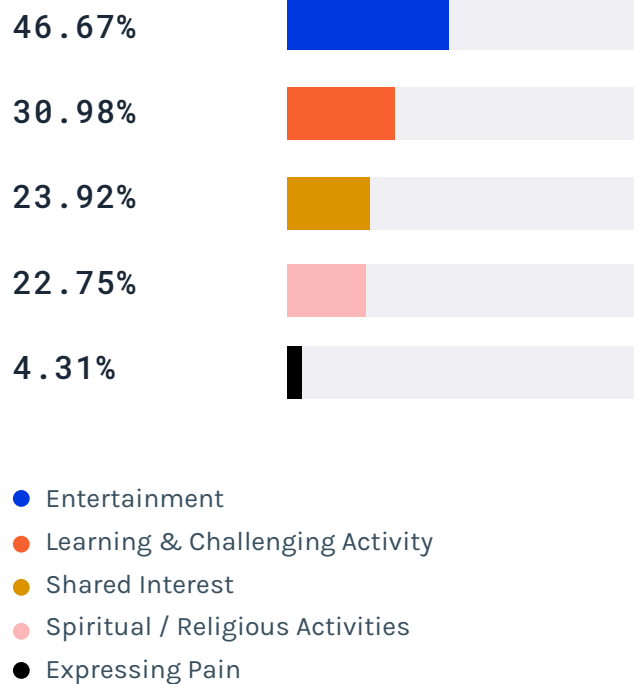
SPIRITUAL/RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Meditation, praying, finding ways to help others, small acts of kindness are effective as strategies, according to some adolescents.

EXPRESSING PAIN

Crying, feeling sad, sleeping, thinking, venting anger is also used by some respondents.

HOW I COPE WITH FEELINGS OF LONELINESS



Peplau and Perlman (1998)¹⁸ note that while the causes of loneliness are varied, recognising this diversity and planning for different interventions to respond to loneliness is crucial. This includes initiating and maintaining relationships so that social needs are met through a network of relationships. One of the respondents in the study described how she coped with loneliness through social interaction. *"After six months of feeling very lonely and not making any friends in junior college, I joined a coaching centre. There I met a girl who was in my college and we got friendly. We would study together and help each other with the work. Sometimes, joining a class to learn*

something new can put you in touch with new friends, who might have the same interests as you," she says.

Another respondent said that finding ways to distract herself from feeling lonely helped alleviate the experience. *"When I feel lonely, I try to do different things I like that make me happy or give me temporary satisfaction. I immerse myself in books and travel to various different worlds that capture my imagination. Sometimes I also find these worlds in my study books and lose myself in them for hours. Books keep me from feeling lonely,"* she says.

Reaching out for support

56% of girls and young women surveyed were unlikely to express, share or reach out for help when they were lonely and sad. Of these respondents, 15% said they tend to ignore their feelings of isolation and revealed they did this by finding ways to distract themselves. 40% said they would typically acknowledge they are lonely, but would always make it a point to have to keep it to themselves, rather than let others know. *"It is embarrassing to have to tell somebody that you feel alone and don't have friends. Some might feel sorry for you but others might blame you for being a shy person or a loner and say this is your own fault,"* says 14-year-old KG.

Adolescence is often described as a lonely time, because of the heightened complexity in the social worlds of adolescents combined with expectations from peer relations, roles and relationships. Houghton et al¹⁹ write that it is a period in which adolescents begin to move away from family and home centred activities to develop closer ties with peers and peer groups and achieve greater intimacy in their relationships with peers. This move

WOULD I REACH OUT TO OTHERS FOR SUPPORT...



- Would not reach out
- Would reach out

is however, accompanied with the risk of increased feelings of separateness [...] and vulnerability to, emotional and social loneliness (Brennan,1982)²⁰. It could explain why loneliness is particularly present in adolescence (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006²¹; Quarter et al., 2013 cited in Roekel et al, 2014)²². It is also linked with what makes it difficult for adolescents to seek support and access help.

FROM THE GROUND

Aangan's Lockdown Helpline



Between May 2020 and July 2020 during the lockdown, Aangan started a Lockdown Phone Support warmline for adolescent girls who were feeling lonely, isolated or depressed during lockdown. The phone line was introduced to girls who are members of Aangan safety networks in Patna and Varanasi and was manned by local Aangan trainers and community volunteers.

During these lockdown months more than 400 adolescents spoke about what was on their minds.

ISOLATION

They expressed sadness and pain about missing their friends. Many girls who live in informal settlements rely on living in close proximity, and were used to seeing friends in their daily life. They have little access to a phone, even if they are allowed some infrequent use of a parent's phone.

INFORMATION ABOUT COVID

Many used the space to express stress and worry about getting infected by the virus. They felt very cut off from their regular life and the lack of information about things getting back to normal also impacted them.

CONCERNS AROUND SCHOOL AND EDUCATION

Adolescents across all states were disturbed about their regular school/college routines being disrupted, wondering how they would manage exams and getting passing results.

QUESTIONS ABOUT FREE RATIONS AND WORRIES ABOUT LACK OF FOOD AT HOME

Girls shared concerns about a shortage of ration at home and their parents being unemployed during the lockdown.

OVERBURDENED BY HOUSE WORK

Chores, sibling care, cooking and cleaning kept girls very busy as they tended to the needs of the family. Some also had to go to agricultural fields with their mothers to work with them. With more family members, especially the males in the house now home and rarely contributing to housework, girls from low income groups were overwhelmed with housework.

TURBULENCE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Girls reported domestic violence at home, with frustration high among parents. Many families' incomes reduced or stopped during the lockdown and there was immense pressure on them. Many families also reported violence due to alcoholism.

CHILD MARRIAGE

A large number of marriages were being planned in bastis, and girls wanted to talk about how to cope or stop them. They also wondered what to do if they found themselves in such situations.

Aangan's Lockdown Phone Support Helpline was designed by Chaitali Sheth as a timely response to a ground-level understanding of challenges faced by girls in safety networks

Connecting and Communicating

57% of respondents said face-to-face discussion was very crucial for them to feel connected. Seeing first hand the expression of someone actively paying attention and listening makes respondents feel heard, supported and connected. 41% preferred online spaces. For them the anonymity felt comfortable and they said that it helped them express feelings of loneliness or sadness without fear of stigma. Clearly online spaces are extremely important for young people today. Thus ensuring safe online communities or encouraging supportive online communities could be the need of the hour.



I FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE CONFIDING IN SOMEONE WHEN...

I SPEAK FACE TO FACE:

57%

I COMMUNICATE ONLINE:

41%

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY, SOCIAL MEDIA

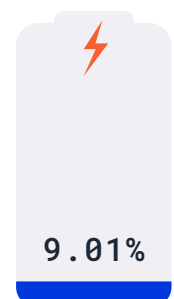
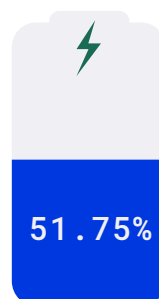
64% of girls had access to either a phone or a tablet. 34% did not, the majority from the lower income group. Almost all the respondents from higher income groups had a mobile phone for personal and individual use.

TIME SPENT ON A DEVICE

0-2 HOURS

2-6 HOURS

6+ HOURS



Respondents currently spend time on a phone or device for the following reasons:

INTERACTING WITH A LARGER COMMUNITY

Social media sites that allow respondents to interact along with browsing are most popular, and posting in the comment section. Close to 55% say they get online to communicate and connect with a larger community.

COMMUNICATION IN SMALLER GROUPS OR ONE TO ONE

Finding peers on more public platforms and reaching out to them individually through direct messaging, texting. Social media is convenient and widens the circle of accessible peers. Respondents appreciate that along with texting, these sites also provide options to send photos, videos, audio chats.

LEARNING

YouTube, Pinterest, Tumblr, TikTok* have various tutorials and instructional videos on cooking, crafts, music, dance, etc. Girls across income groups are able to access these free classes, enjoy learning and keep oneself engaged.

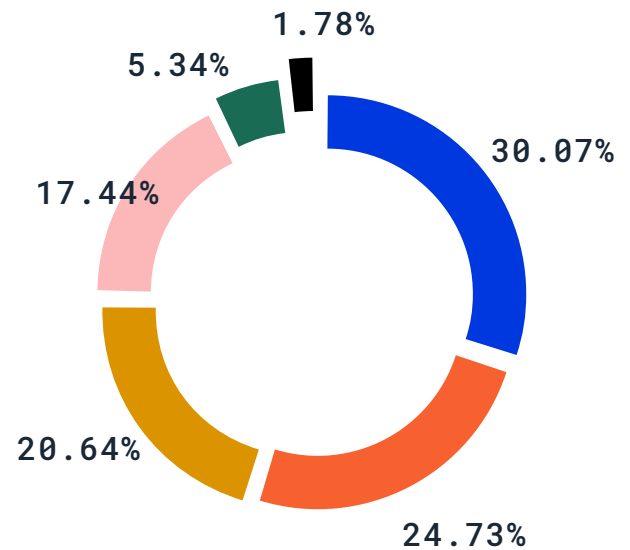
GATHERING INFORMATION AND READING

GAMES

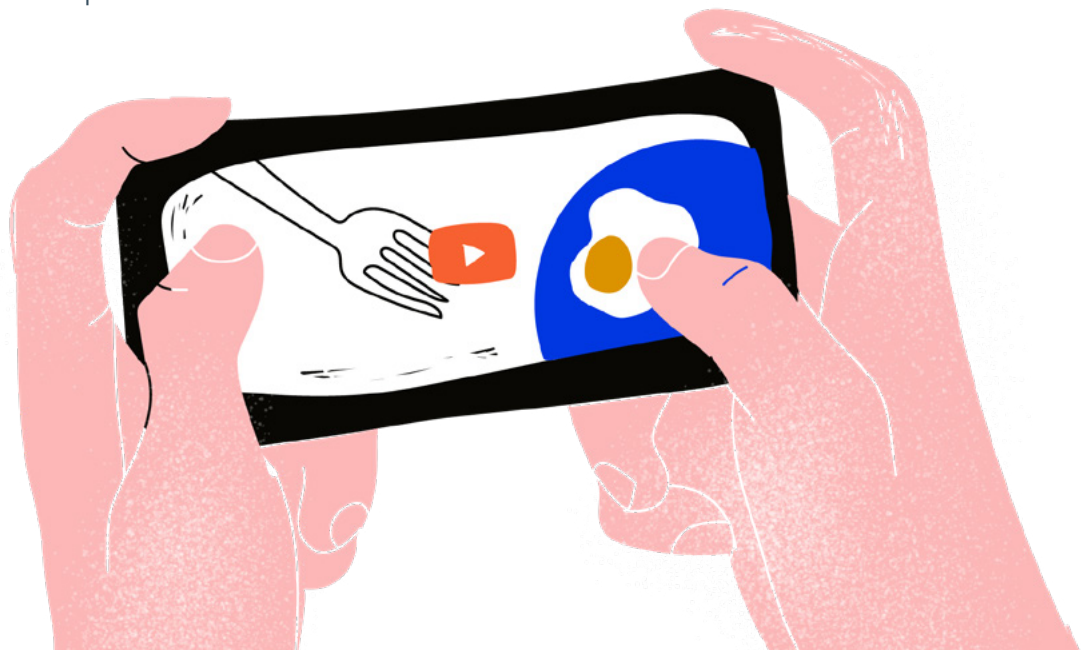
An online community for multiplayer online games has been around for sometime now. Recently, PUBG has become a rage among young adults and was named a favourite among some respondents from low income groups.

OTHERS

I AM ONLINE MAINLY FOR...



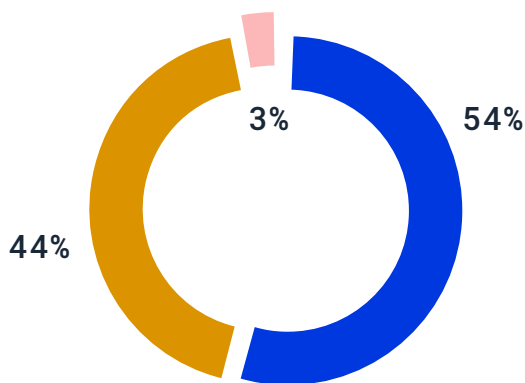
- Interacting with a larger community
- Communication in smaller groups or one to one
- Learning
- Gathering information and reading
- Games
- Others



CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT ONLINE

When asked about teens and young women who tend to get more "likes" or positive comments for their posts, there was a somewhat equal split between the number of negative and positive responses.

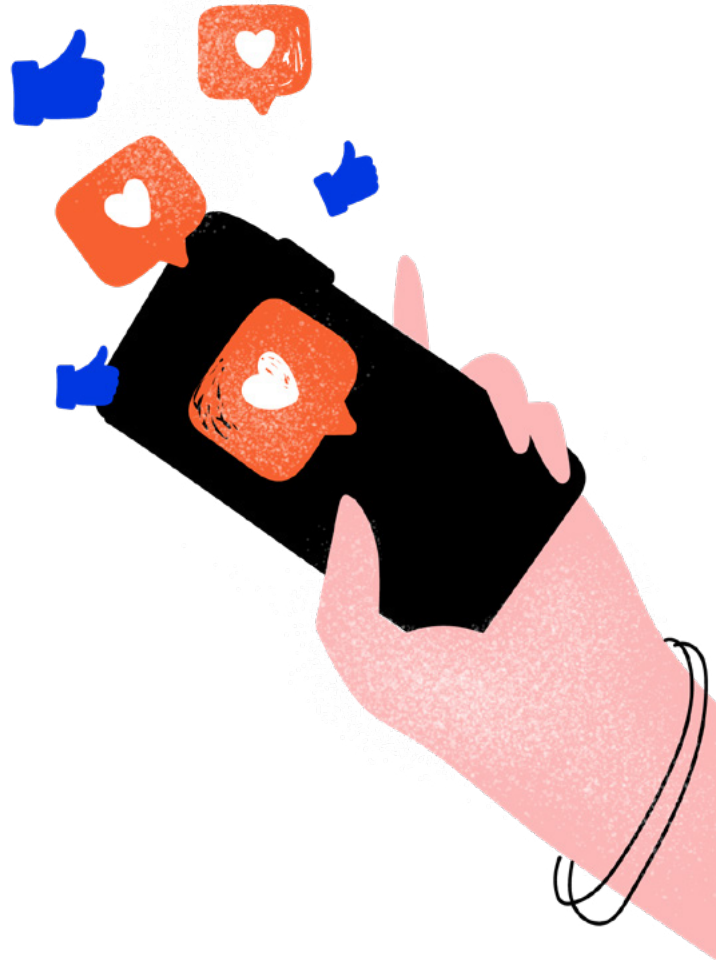
On girls or young women who have large numbers of followers and "likes" on social media.



- Negative statements
- Positive statements
- Neutral: Don't spend much time on social media

The group that made negative comments about peers who are popular on social media were primarily from higher income backgrounds. These include statements like:

- They might be liked online, but I think they don't connect with people in real life
- They don't really know or connect with the people who follow them, not real friends
- They only do what they do for likes
- They are probably really lonely
- Social media is a place where anything and everything can happen
- Somebody getting a huge number of likes doesn't necessarily portray anything except for the fact that maybe they are online a lot



Most girls from the lower income group made more positive appreciative comments about those who were popular on social media. Four times the number of girls in lower income groups believed they would "be happy for girls who got a large number of likes on social media."

- I feel great looking at them
- When I see them, I wish I was there at their level
- These girls are able to demonstrate their passion - that's why they are popular. If they didn't show such talent and drive, why would so many people like their work
- It is related to the good content they put out, so it's great

More than ever it has become essential to address online interaction as an integral part of adolescent and young people's lives. Helping them to navigate their online lives could include work around building supportive online communities so that it becomes a platform that help teens connect and support each other. It is also important to include education about the medium.

What the Experts Say

HEAR FROM BISHAKA DATTA

Bishakha Datta works at the intersection of gender and sexuality and runs the non-profit [Point of View](#)

When we think about cities, we tend to think only about physical spaces. What 2020 and the pandemic have shown, however, and what we have known for the last 10 years, is that the digital space is a big part of our cities. It is a counterpart to the physical space. All the connections and the web of networks between devices, which are essentially people talking to and communicating with each other, comprise invisible digital currents. They are facilitating different things just as physical spaces do, whether it is education, romance or unsafe situations like abuse – all this is being experienced through technology. It has brought a new layer to cities which are not yet recognised as being part of the urban landscape.

On the one hand, technology and these digital currents facilitate building connections and reaching out to others across physical space because it collapses that dimension. However, it can also exacerbate feelings of loneliness, inadequacy or of not belonging based on comparisons with peers and what is projected online through channels like social media. Thus, while technology gives you freedom and access to online communities, there are also dangers in this space if one does not know how to handle them.

Girls and young women locate themselves in multiple ways in this space based on their access to technology. There are young women who use devices and media to build a sense of identity, to explore and to even build livelihoods. They are able to use its features to learn about different worlds and experience a sense of freedom by navigating these digital currents and shaping them.

There are also girls who have limited or restricted access to technology. In low income settings, for instance, they are likely to get access to a device only after male members of the family. Even in these cases, it is usually a shared device. It implicitly becomes a way of reinforcing to a girl that technology is not for her and that she does not belong in this world. Getting a phone much later also means a girl might not have the

technical confidence as peers who have had access sooner. So while many girls and women would like to see themselves as digital actors, they are actually digital bystanders. They are part of the digital current but they do not necessarily know how it works. All these are factors that isolate girls in the digital world and potentially puts them at risk. Through workshops with adolescent girls and women which involves digital storytelling workshops on Zoom or trainings like 'Feminist Forwards' which involves building capacity to make whatsapp creative cards, girls are equipped to express themselves in this online language. It enables them to go from a place of not belonging to understanding and participating in this universe. Other ways to engage and build supportive online communities is to adopt the hybrid model which combines digital and physical spaces. For instance, community meetings can be organised partly digitally through Whatsapp or Google meet. This allows for weekly online meetings and smaller group meetings in person which could be held once a month. For an adolescent girl who is experiencing loneliness and disconnection, having access to online groups like this can be transformative and empowering.

Perspective building sessions are another way in which to make online spaces safe for girls and young women. They are structured ways to understand social media, the architecture and design of the space and therefore how it can make you feel. The aim of these sessions is to help young people grasp and recognise what they are experiencing in this world so that they are better equipped to navigate it.

The future, even post pandemic, is likely to be a combination of approaches—addressing the need for connection across distance which technology allows for while also planning for face-to-face interaction and establishing ongoing relationships.

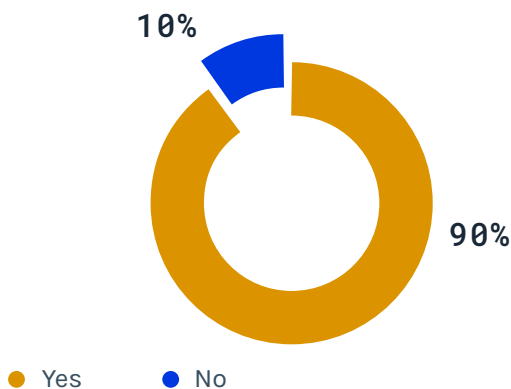
MORE ABOUT BISHAKHA DATTA

Bishakha Datta (@busydot) works at the intersection of gender and sexuality, runs the non-profit [Point of View](#) in Mumbai, writes and films non-fiction, and is perennially interested in what's not freely expressed. Her documentary work includes *In The Flesh*, a film on the lives of three sex workers, and *Taza Khabar*, which delves into a unique women-run rural newspaper. Books she edited include *Nine Degrees of Justice*, a collection of essays on the struggle against violence on women in India, and *And Who Will Make the Chapatis?*, an anthology on rural women's political participation.

Reaching Out to Parents and Peers

Almost 90% (229 respondents) reported that they share a close bond with one or more than one of their family members and feel supported by them. Close to 78% named parents as their key supporters.

THERE IS AT LEAST ONE PERSON I CAN TURN TO WHEN I FEEL LONELY OR SAD



WHEN I NEED SUPPORT, THE ONE OR TWO PEOPLE I WOULD PROBABLY REACH OUT TO...

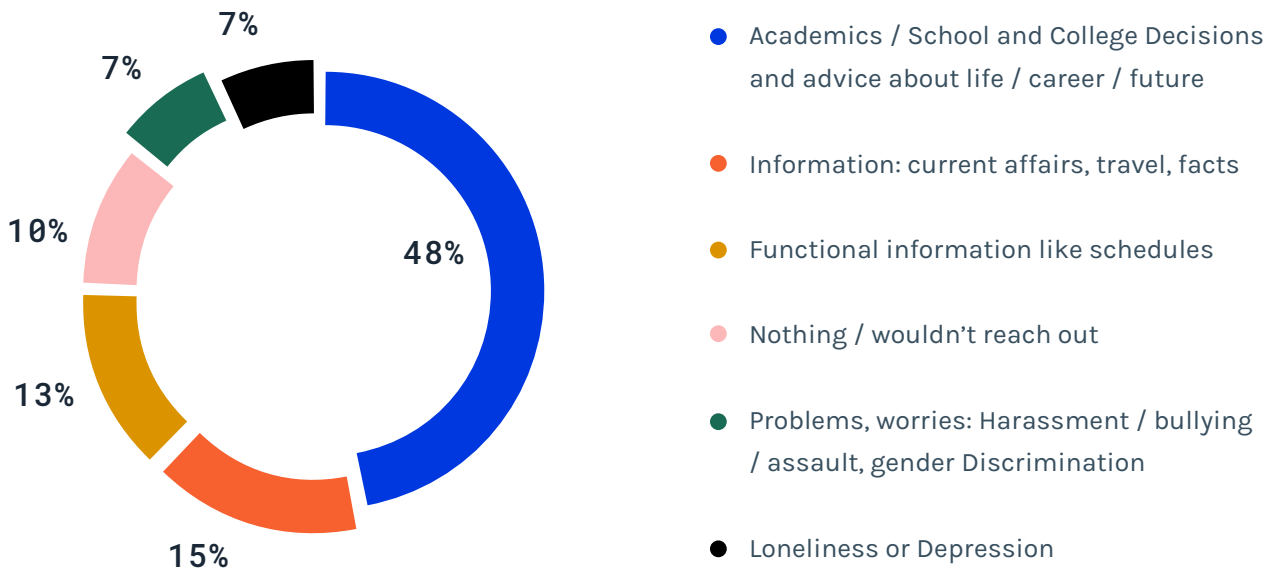
54.51%	Mother
44.31%	Sibling
23.92%	Father
15.29%	Extended family (cousins)
14.51%	Extended family (aunts/uncles)
8.24%	Others

Note: Based on 410 statements from respondents

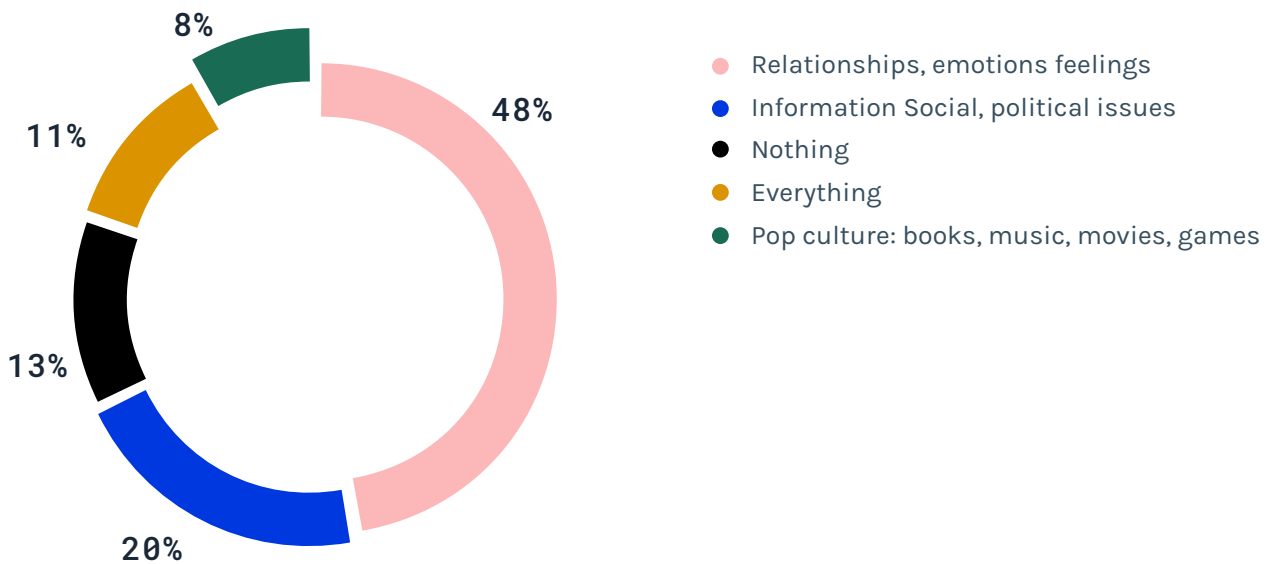
Despite most of the group claiming they have access to supportive adults, especially parents - only a small number of respondents - 7% of girls and young women would approach their parents for support on sensitive or personal issues like gender-based discrimination, harassment, threats or violence. An even smaller number of girls (6%) said they would talk to adults about feeling anxious or depressed. Respondents chose their friends and peers to share more personal, emotional issues.



THE MAIN REASONS I WOULD SEEK OUT PARENTS FOR SUPPORT...



I WOULD APPROACH FRIENDS AND PEERS TO DISCUSS...



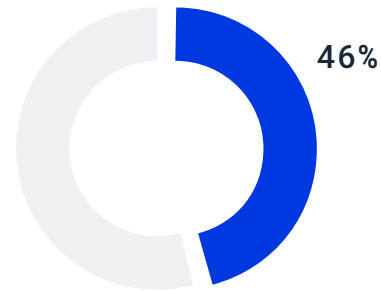
Staying Silent

While designing the survey, young researchers were unanimous in their opinion that girls and young women were given the message to stay silent on issues related to emotional health or mental health. This they agreed might play a part in leaving the issue under-addressed.

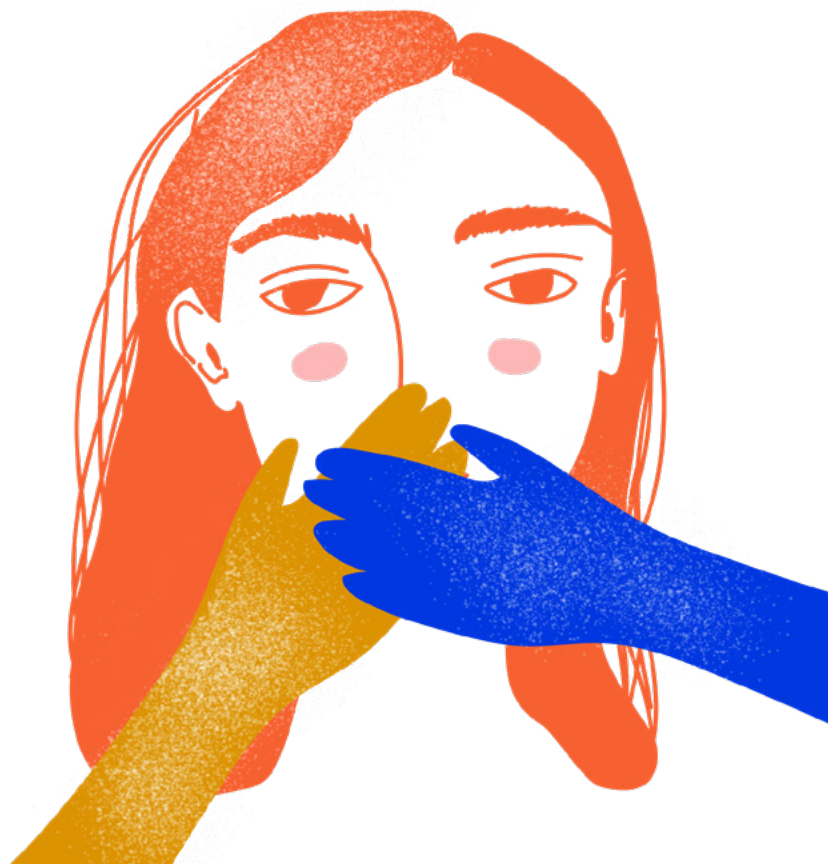
Girls themselves believed that it would help if they were encouraged and supported to talk more openly about suffering through anxiety, loneliness or depression. **46% of girls and young women interviewed across both high and low income groups often felt silenced by family and adults.**

This was common across income levels. Talking about "messages received" from family, one young researcher from a high income group spoke from personal experience about how adults around her usually dismissed her struggles with anxiety, exclusion or loneliness with the message, "It is all in your head," signalling that she should avoid expressing her pain - making it difficult for her to express vulnerability. Another teen from Varanasi, this time from the lower income group, shared a similar experience. She talked about how she felt silenced when she tried to bring up her feelings or experience of stress. Describing how she often feels immense fatigue and stress as the primary caregiver in her family, she is usually told to stay strong, and not speak ill of family. The lack of acknowledgement about her suffering makes her feel even more isolated.

I FEEL "SILENCED" BY FAMILY AND ADULTS ON THIS ISSUE



- Girls and young women interviewed across both high and low income groups who felt silenced by family and adults



Conversations that Count



When asked what kind of interaction or connections had been most helpful, respondents identified the kind of support that helped them to cope.

PROVIDING INFORMATION

Some respondents said it helped to have their questions answered when they reached out. The simple act of providing information reduced feelings of isolation and anxiety, especially about things like school schedules, exams, or other themes related to daily life.

ESTABLISHING BONDS

A respondent shared, "When a friend I was talking to told me a joke and made me laugh, I just felt connected to her." Another said, "A friend explained to me that we should divert our minds and think of fun things," and we both connected at that point.

ACKNOWLEDGING FEELINGS

Being seen, heard and acknowledged was also considered helpful. One respondent shared, "When a mentor and I spoke, she heard me, made me feel like my problems matter and assured me I was not burdening her. She really understood."

LISTENING

A respondent shared that just being able to express herself without fear of judgment was helpful. "My friend just heard me out in silence and eventually we spoke." Another respondent shared, "The way my sister always listens, I know she understands me."

WORDS OF SUPPORT

Expressions of support were effective in alleviating feelings of loneliness. One respondent mentioned how she was offered support: "My friend said, We could face every difficulty together." Another mentioned: "I am there for you; you are not alone." Another 14-year-old from Patna shared, "When someone says they are here for you, that's all you need to feel okay at that moment." A fourth respondent from an informal settlement in Patna, Bihar said, "When my father would come home drunk, I would be distressed, but there were a number of community women volunteers I could call and they would support me. Just hearing from them helped me get by."

ACTIVITY

Respondents shared that it helped to plan an unrelated activity together. Even if it was something they would do together later, it gave them something to look forward to.

SECTION C

Connectedness
and the Need
for a Third
Space



"I imagine looking after
a city garden, or
cleaning the beach, or
painting a wall [...]
We should get together
with friends our age and do
something for the city."

Connectedness and the Need for a Third Space

As adolescents undergo significant changes in social roles, expectations and identity, the prevalence of distress and loneliness is high. Coupled with exposure to adversities that many adolescents living in low and middle income countries face in their daily lives, this experience is further amplified. Participants in the study, for instance, shared how triggers included stress or conflict at home such as financial difficulties or violence and feeling burdened with domestic work. Given the links between loneliness and a wide range of mental health difficulties and physical health issues such as depression, anxiety, self harm, sleep deprivation (Heinrich and Gullone, 2006 cited in Jose and Lim, 2014²³), it is crucial to build support systems to alleviate loneliness.

The added impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the isolating effect it has had in cutting off adolescent girls and young women from existing networks like school groups and community peer networks, has only served to increase this isolation. Consequently, there has been a rise in mental health issues. A study conducted in Hubei province in China for instance found that of the 2,330 children surveyed, 22.6% reported depressive symptoms while 18.9% were experiencing anxiety (Xie et al, 2020²⁴). Responding to this growing yet unseen crisis is therefore key to build support systems that adolescent girls and young women can access.

Research conducted over the past few decades points to social connectedness as a protective factor to buffer adolescents from the negative impact of loneliness. Connectedness is defined by Barber, Stolz, and Olsen (2005²⁵) as 'a tie between the child and significant other persons (groups or institutions) that provides a sense of belonging, an

absence of aloneness, a perceived bond. Depending on the intimacy of the context, this connection is produced by different levels of consistent, positive, predictable, loving supportive, devoted, or affectionate interaction.' In one of the earliest studies, Resnick et al (1997²⁶) reported that family and school connectedness had a powerful role to play in acting as a negative predictor of adolescents maladjustment, that is, substance abuse, emotional distress and self harm or suicidal ideation.

The power of being connected to supportive groups is something the young researchers conducting the study also identified as being key to responding to this silent crisis. As part of a reflective exercise, one of the researchers was asked what she would say to someone if she found out they were lonely. She responded, "*Be in touch with people who can make you feel safe and comfortable. Try and find those people.*" Another added, "*Don't isolate yourself. Talk about your feelings. It is the only thing that helps.*" A third said, "*Take time to be by yourself, take a walk, meet neighbours, share and talk.*" Echoing the same sentiment, they all encouraged seeking connectedness and establishing a sense of belonging through it.

The question this in turn raises is where and how do adolescent girls and young women access spaces and places for connection and what does a city designed for this look like. Leslie Kern, author of the 2020 book, *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Manmade World*²⁷ explores what this city might look like and its role in shaping an urban future. She argues that friendships and space to facilitate these relationships is essential as it often determines how girls find space in the city. She writes, 'The power of female friendship is typically either underestimated, undermined, or ignored altogether

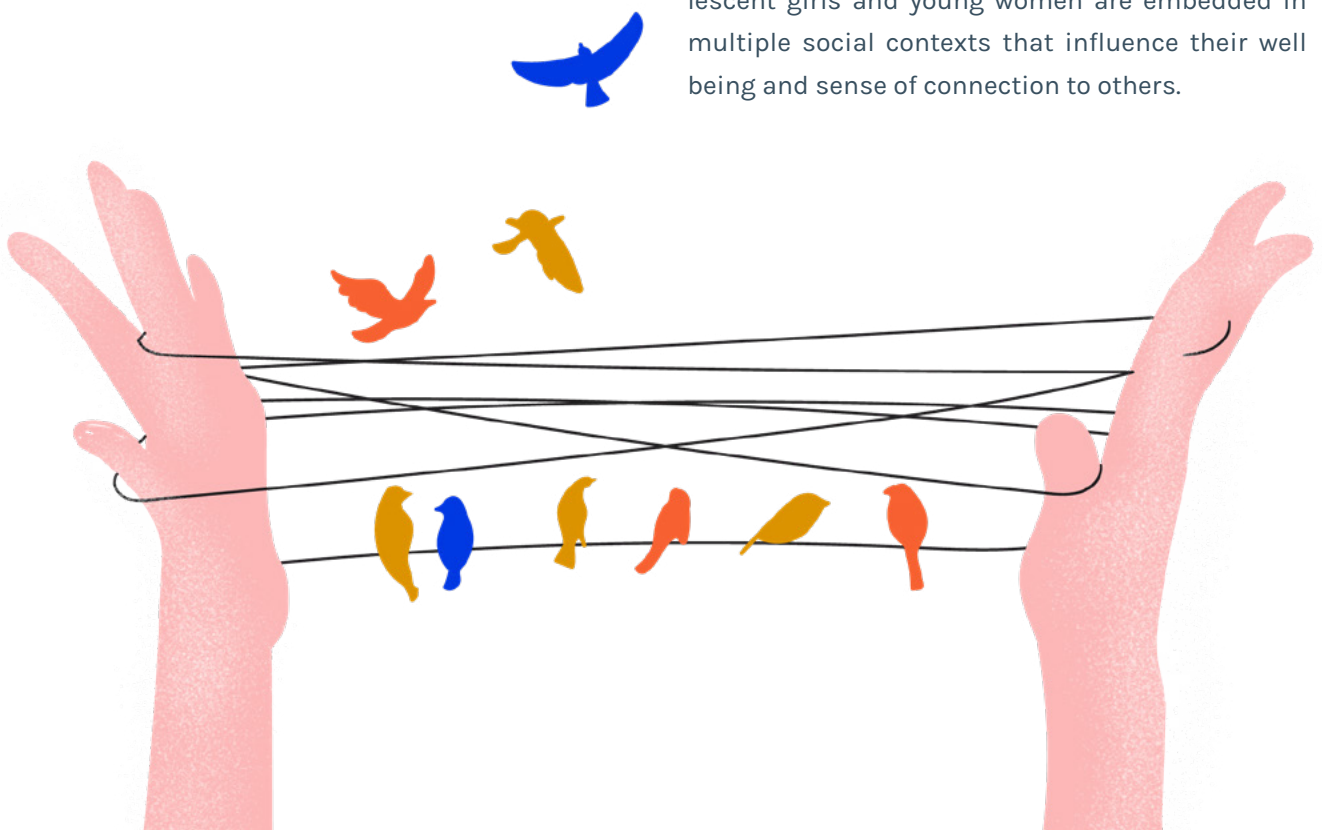
in cultural narratives [...] For many women, friendships are also part of our urban survival toolkits.' In the work Aangan does with at-risk communities, for instance, the power of these friendships in acting as survival toolkits is evident in how peers often negotiate with a girls' family in the neighbourhood to delay a marriage or for her to continue to stay in school. Being part of a group and having multiple social memberships allows adolescent girls to navigate an otherwise lonely urban landscape.

Kern adds that while thinking of and planning physical spaces in a city, girls are not usually thought of as being part of this urban space. As a result, public spaces reflect boys' and male youths' activity. She writes, 'When communities advocate for "spaces for youth," the kind of spaces they come up with are skate parks, basketball courts, and hockey arenas. In other words, spaces that have boys in mind as users, and where girls have trouble finding access, acceptance and safety. When Swedish architect firm White Arkitekter actually approached teenage girls to design scale models of public space, the girls came up with "places for sitting together face to face, protected from weather and wind, to see without necessarily being seen, a sense of intimacy without being constrictive; and most of all, to be able to leave an imprint on their city."

Three decades earlier, urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his 1991 book *The Great Good Place*,²⁸ wrote about the need for informal, public gatherings and how crucial they are for people to engage with each other. Describing it as "third places", he identified them as neutral grounds to "host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work." This included gardens, parks, main streets, community centres and coffee houses. In contrast to "first places" or home and "second places" or work, "third places" were envisioned as being a leveller—a space promoting leisure, relaxation and social equity. A place to form and maintain friendships and build connectedness.

Oldenburg discussed only a few physical aspects of third places. Proximity or easy access to home and work featured in this. In a 1996²⁹ article, however, he described why these spaces are important to individuals and communities, stating, 'They give the gift of friendship and help care for the neighbourhood.' Both factors are important to establish the connectedness of adolescents and build feelings of inclusion, belonging and interpersonal support.

Actively planning for spaces and places like Kern and Oldenburg describe is therefore crucial as adolescent girls and young women are embedded in multiple social contexts that influence their well being and sense of connection to others.



What Can Cities do for Young People

The recommendations in this section emerged from a reflective exercise with the young researchers who conducted the survey, after the data was collected. The consolidation of their responses in the points below reflects what they want from their homes, neighbourhood and city towards acknowledging their needs and facilitating their demands through community and government action. The different examples of best practices illustrate how to enact and implement these solutions, whether it is community led efforts or through government initiatives so that young women and adolescent girls can access support and claim their right to flourish and thrive.



- 1 CLAIMING THE RIGHT TO PUBLIC SPACE
- 2 SAFETY MAPPING
- 3 CREATIVE SPACES
- 4 NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECTS
- 5 BREAKING THE SILENCE
- 6 NETWORK OF SUPPORT
- 7 ANTI-BULLYING ACTION
- 8 ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

1. Claiming the Right to Public Space

I just want to go out in my neighbourhood to walk, run have fun and feel free.

VOICES

"Only boys hang around the local playground. Girls also feel like playing but our parents do not give us permission to go and play, saying it is unsafe."

"My mother told me that I should stay home in order to stay safe, since our basti is unsafe. I realised it meant that I wouldn't get to see anybody, which is very unfair. We get locked into our homes, isolated and alone, while men who harass us get to roam around freely, doing exactly as they please. I know that our parents have the best intentions - they want to keep us safe like fragile delicate flowers, but I believe we should all get together and be lionesses instead! Girls who can take on anything, fight against all sorts of risks."



EXAMPLES

Our presence is our protest reads the tagline of the Why Loiter Movement. In 2011, Shilpa Phadke, Shilpa Ranade and Sameera Khan published *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets*.³⁰ The book explored the absence of women in public spaces and how they need to "demonstrate a purpose" to be in public such as going to work, the market. It made a case not just for women to be out in public spaces but also for groups of women that are further excluded based on caste, religious and class lines. The book spurred the [Why Loiter Movement](#)³¹ in Mumbai, started by Neha Singh and Devina Kapoor, to gather together every month in public spaces ostensibly to do nothing but loiter. The idea was simple - to find pleasure, relaxation and fun again in a city. Sometimes this meant having a late night cup of tea at a chai tapri, playing a game of badminton in a deserted neighbourhood street, or to sit down in a municipal park - all ways in which men habitually occupy spaces.

While these might seem like simple, everyday activities, what is powerful about them is exactly that. Adolescent girls and women are so rarely to be found in public spaces merely for the pleasure of it, that the act of slowly walking the streets, of hanging around in a park or cycling in the early hours of the morning becomes a way to claim space and make room for those whom the city never quite planned for. It is a bid to normalise being in public spaces. Since the movement began in Mumbai, women in other cities like Jaipur, Pune and Aligarh have also come together to claim their right to be in public spaces.

The *Why Loiter* book also set off another movement in Karachi - [Girls at Dhabas](#)³² - started by Sadia Khatri. Reflecting on how spaces outside the home are perceived as dangerous or unsafe for women and girls when in fact statistics show that violence is primarily experienced inside the home, she began to question these assumptions by reclaiming the public. Together with her friends, she started hosting workshops and meetings in *dhabas* where otherwise it would be in someone's house. These gatherings also led to an Instagram [page](#)³³ encouraging women to share photos having chai at *dhabas*. Through this simple action, it has brought other young women out of their homes to stake their claim to find pleasure in the city with something as simple as chai at the *dhaba*.

In a similar vein, [Blank Noise](#)³⁴ in Bengaluru, founded by Jasmeen Patheja, urges women to occupy public spaces through different activities, including sleeping. Meet to Sleep, invited women and girls to come together to sleep under an open sky. Often, while men are seen sleeping on benches or in parks, it is rare to see a woman doing so. Sleep, in this movement, is a form of protest to live free from fear. It asks women to become 'Action Heroes' by occupying public spaces that should be the right of all citizens. On another occasion, tables and lamps were placed on dark streets and passersby were invited to sit across from women to have conversations. The [Hahaha Sangha](#)³⁵ was another initiative motivated by the need to bring groups of women and girls of different age groups together in the neighbourhood to build a sense of friendship, belonging and familiarity. Similar to laughter clubs, it looks to build safe spaces for women to meet and have a laugh, all while being in a public space.

In Mumbai, adolescent girls living in a high risk neighbourhood have come together to form Sunday Clubs where they address this fear of being in public spaces. By going to the local playground to play games, learn and practice karate and have discussions with special guests like the local police on safety, they are taking a collective step in the direction of normalising how girls and women inhabit these spaces. A playground that previously had only boys in it is now a space used by girls as well.

RECOMMENDATION

Through simple but strategic action like forming community groups that gather once or twice a week to walk, cycle, play or laugh together, it is possible to change how girls and women are perceived in public spaces. Even if activities like these are for a few hours, the regularity with which they occur helps to make it just as normal as seeing men

and boys outdoors. From that place of normalcy, a sense of safety and comfort can follow and alleviate the loneliness of being restricted indoors in homes with little access to community or support groups. Initiatives like these are also possible to execute without a large investment but have huge transformative potential.

2. Safety Mapping

I used to go out and meet my friends in the neighbourhood, but with the increasing number of incidents of harassment, she didn't allow it any more.

VOICES

"My father forced me to drop out of school in the 10th grade because the neighbourhood was unsafe and I would get harassed. I tried my best to convince him not to pull me out of school but he didn't listen to me. It is very isolating to be out of school when all your friends are in school."

"I used to go out and meet my friends in the neighbourhood, but with the increasing number of incidents of harassment cases, she didn't allow it any more."

EXAMPLES

Taking a step in the direction of making cities safer and more inclusive for women, Delhi-based [Safetipin](#)³⁶, founded by Kalpana Viswanath and Ashish Basu, conducts safety audits to assess public spaces using an app. The idea emerged from the [Women's Safety Audits](#)³⁷ that non-profit Jagori was conducting since 2005 in different cities. Using technology tools, Safetipin identifies and maps safe and unsafe areas: 'The audit, which can be crowdsourced, generates a pin which is visible on the app. Based on safety audits conducted, a safety score of an area is generated for people to see and use for making safer decisions.' The data can in turn be used by city planners and law enforcement



to respond to areas identified as hotspots. Street-score, Harassmap, Safetipin and Crowdspot are similar applications being used in different parts of the world. By conducting safety audits and mapping exercises, it becomes possible to take specific actions towards increasing safety, usability and therein access for girls and women.

In Barcelona, a feminist collective of urban designers, [Punt 6](#)³⁸ has been working to map communities and everyday life spaces of the neighbourhood to understand how a space is used and what remains inaccessible. As part of this mapping exercise, it asked questions like, 'Why do you choose certain

streets to walk down?’ ‘Where do you meet friends?’ ‘Where do you rest?’ Perceptive Maps were also used to understand physical and social limits that determine how a space is accessed and experienced. Something as simple as the addition of benches in a [Superblock](#)³⁹ (comprising 9 blocks which are closed off for through traffic), meant that many more women were now able to come outdoors. This included carers of children, people with disabilities and to socialise.

Another organisation in Barcelona, Equal Saree, began working with schools which are often

gendered spaces, to reexamine how playgrounds are used. They found that playgrounds with benches looking in often meant that girls would not use that space because they felt watched. Instead, they spoke to children in different age groups to understand what they wanted from the space. The result was a mixed use space- now divided with benches, paths, allowing for different kinds of play and also offering safe spaces where they did not feel watched.

RECOMMENDATION

Asking adolescents and young women to map their neighbourhoods and participate in collecting data to report to officials or provide information to peers has been used effectively to share with urban stakeholders to plan and take safety actions. Several groups including Safetipin (which uses an app to conduct safety audits) successfully used mapping to provide feedback to city officials and police on experiences and perceptions of safety

and accessibility of public spaces for women. Initiatives like this allow for and ensure an immediate response such as an increase in patrolling along identified routes and planning group/supervised walks and activities in these areas. It also offers a crucial insight to reimagine how these spaces are organised so that they facilitate different sorts of interactions--whether for leisure, child care, play or just to rest.

3. Creative Spaces

My neighbourhood should have a place where young people can spend time with others and enjoy themselves

VOICES

"When you are lonely or depressed, doing something creative really helps. It is recreational, relaxing, satisfying, and sometimes can be life changing."

EXAMPLES

Research points to the role of creative arts in reducing the effects of psychosocial issues such as depression and chronic stress (Stuckey and Nobel, 2010⁴⁰). A 2011 study⁴¹ by the Mental Health Foundation in the UK reiterates this, observing that engaging with participatory art can improve well-being. Creative arts expression is one of the ways in which adolescent girls and young women can be engaged to participate in community life and build support networks. This could include visual arts, music and expressive writing.

The [Dharavi Art Room](#)⁴² founded by Himanshu S. in Mumbai, for instance, seeks to provide this space in India's biggest slum. It aims to 'utilize the medium of art to empower children and women of marginalised communities [...] to promote a unique and fun community participatory approach which enables the community to take control over their



lives.' From 'Ladies Only-Stories for All' photography workshops for women to use the camera lens to tell their own stories, creating self sustaining community centres where children can tell stories through art, to bringing the community together to paint murals, Art Room is holding space for children and women to reimagine their community. By working with municipal schools in different parts of the city, they are also looking to build value for play and creative expression in education.

Another place that provides space for adolescent girls and women to engage with their neighbourhood is community libraries. In his 2018 book, *Palaces for the People*⁴³, Eric Klinenberg writes about how 'social infrastructure – the physical places and organizations that shape the way people interact' (such as parks, child care centres and libraries) have a direct role to play in the resilience of

a community. He explored how libraries are not just places to read and borrow books but instead act as a safe space for community members both young and old to converse, participate in games and activities and build social cohesion. He found that smaller, branch libraries rather than large central hub libraries were effective in building this sense of community as they offered interactions with smaller groups and the likelihood of meeting the same people. This in turn built a sense of connection.

[Sister Library](#)⁴⁴, a travelling library (with a home in Mumbai), founded by Aqai Thami is one such space. Envisioned as a community-owned feminist library to celebrate the voices of women through books and literature authored by them, it has also become a hub to gather and have conversations

on gender, safety and access. It is an initiative she describes in an [article](#)⁴⁵ as a safe space for the ‘marginalised and those in need of healing’.

In Bengaluru, the [Buguri Community Library](#)⁴⁶ (meaning spinning top) set up by non-profit Hasiru Dala, acts as a space for children from a community of waste pickers to come together to read. With over 2000 books in Tamil, Urdu and Kannada, they have transformed what used to be an empty room above an old age home to a thriving space where children not only read, but bring these stories alive through art, storytelling, theatre and discussions. For communities living in at-risk situations, having access to safe spaces like this means a place to find support and build bonds with peers. Through pop-up libraries, they are also reaching out to children in other marginalised communities.

RECOMMENDATION

Activities like these not only provide space for creative expression, but also serve as opportunities for new social contact and access to multiple support networks. As a result, it plays an important role in alleviating social alienation and loneliness. It is important that cities invest in providing things like community centres where interactions

like these can take place and where adolescent girls and young women can spend a few hours together. Using spaces like public parks, government schools, railway stations, bus stops, even the streets as spaces that bring together young people can play a big role in responding to feelings of loneliness and building connection.

4. Neighbourhood Projects

As young people, we want to do something good for our cities...

VOICES

"When there is a festival, it is a great time for us to do something for our communities and neighbours. All of us get together and prepare entertainment and make plans together. It is our chance to do something for the basti (settlement)."

"I wish there were more city events that could be places for us all to get together to do something good."

"I imagine looking after a city garden, or cleaning the beach, or painting a wall [...] We should get together with friends our age and do something for the city."

EXAMPLES

To create vibrant, inclusive social spaces, the city has to plan for how those who have been historically overlooked or kept on the margins can participate in city life. Festivals and projects like community gardening or clean-up drives are one way in which to do this. Events like these have been identified as having a powerful role to play in creating a sense of inclusion for people from different backgrounds and make space to facilitate social interaction (Hixson, 2014⁴⁷). In Johannesburg for instance, the [Fiestas Festival](#)⁴⁸ uses art exhibitions,

storytelling and poetry readings to commemorate black people who were forcibly removed and moved to other areas in the 1970s. The festival is now a way to bring people and communities together to talk about displacement and exclusion.

In Mumbai, [beach clean-ups](#)⁴⁹ started by one started by lawyer Afroz Shah in Versova beach have led to a citizen movement where children, students, older and younger people all come out week after week for clean-up drives. It is a movement that has



led to other such clean-up drives in the city. From being completely buried under a plateau of 4-foot high garbage, it has been cleared through massive community engagement, so much so that the Olive Ridley turtles were spotted again on the beach after many years. Being out in the open, working together as a community and doing something for the city is what many echo brings them out to do this. In *Cities for the People* (2010)⁵⁰, architect and urban designer Jan Gehl writes, "People are attracted to other people. They seek to place themselves near others. New activities begin in the vicinity of events that are already in progress."

The [Edible Schoolyard Project](#)⁵¹ started by chef and author Alice Waters in Berkeley, California is another example of how the process of transforming a vacant lot into a garden brought students, teachers and community together to claim a patch of the city. They write on their website, 'In the Edible Schoolyard, students are farmers, cooks, learners and teachers. In the kitchen classroom, our chef

teachers are guides to the explorations of how culture and identity shape our personal relationship and access to food. Students, teachers and community volunteers gather around the table to share meals and conversation.' Working together in a garden enables this sense of collaboration and equity and becomes a means to creatively engage with the city.

[Rooftop gardens](#)⁵² in São Paulo in Brazil are another example of how women in one of the poorest favelas are coming together to reimagine and engage with their neighbourhood through community action. What began as an online platform for people gardening at home grew into an 82-000 member network which then mobilized to create the *Horta das Corujas* (Garden of Owls) in 2012, the first community garden in Brazil's largest metropolis. Visone and Nagin (2019)⁵³ write, 'urban community gardens help democratize urban space, allowing the population to exchange information and experience the city, also offering more leisure options.'

RECOMMENDATION

Planning for spaces and activities in which adolescent girls are young women can come out of their homes to participate in, can change the way they relate to the city. This could include painting murals, clean up drives, community gardening.

It can also include festivals and art and cultural events that encourage expression through creative arts and act as spaces where young people can gather and socialise.



IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR HELP!

5. Breaking the Silence

Girls should be able to speak up freely about mental health issues

EXAMPLES

Shifting the narrative and creating space to talk about issues that are neglected or treated as taboo subjects poses an immense challenge. Particularly when issues are deeply embedded in social practices that are considered the norm. Public campaigns have a significant role to play in this regard to lift the curtain on what otherwise remains hidden away, and in doing so, makes room to address difficult issues.

[It's Ok to Talk](#)⁵⁴ (#ItsOkBaatKaro), India's first youth only mental health campaign started by Goa based non-profit, [Sangath](#)⁵⁵ and launched by the Public Health Foundation of India in 2017 is one such effort. It encourages and supports young people to share their experiences of mental health and well-being stating that 'talking about it is the first step towards breaking the stigma'. In doing so, it

VOICES

"Ever since COVID I have found that more people are talking about mental health. They are actually talking about things like, "feeling low, feeling down." Online too people are being more open - you see motivational quotes on social media. Or sometimes there are practical things like how building a daily routine can help."

"It is important to help girls feel free to talk about feeling lonely or depressed - there is no shame or stigma in it. Campaigns help normalise and to talk openly about these things."

"Mainstream media should increase coverage of issues like this to help people talk more openly. Films, television and celebrities should touch on the issue."

also aims to build a community which helps others to cope and where young people feel heard and find support. By featuring real stories, it allows others who come to the space to feel less lonely in their experience and promotes action focused information and learning resources. [Mann Mela](#)⁵⁶, a virtual museum of these stories and experiences is an extension of the campaign. Using art and technology, it urges people to access help.

Having public figures openly talk about issues that have stigma attached to them also makes room to change the discourse. Comedians Mallika Dua, Vir Das and Tanmay Bhat for instance, have spoken about anxiety, depression and giving mental health as much importance as physical health. Their connection with young people and social media reach makes it possible to normalise these

experiences and conversations. Campaigns supported by celebrities also take this a step further. As the data in this report revealed, factors like skin colour are linked to exclusion and isolation. Lending her voice to address the bias against dark skin in India, Nandita Das has been campaigning for 'Dark is Beautiful' since 2013, an advocacy campaign that was started by Kavitha Emmanuel, the founder of Chennai-based non-profit, [Women of Worth](#)⁵⁷, in 2009. Since then it has received support from other celebrities as recently as the 2020 [India's Got Colour](#)⁵⁸ video.

One of the issues that girls spoke of in the survey was caste and how caste biases and discrimination increases loneliness and social isolation. An independent Chennai-based music band, [The](#)

[Casteless Collective](#)⁵⁹ is using sound rooted in Chennai's Dalit community to question the caste system, inequality and oppression. Formed in 2017, singing the musical form Gana, which has its roots in funeral music, they are using their platform and immense popularity to challenge caste practices and start conversations about equality.

Other forums like Spoken Fest by [Kommune](#)⁶⁰ which holds festivals in different cities, provides a stage and space for young people to listen to and engage with poets, storytellers, comedians and musicians on what they grapple with in their lives. With workshops, art zones, performances in multiple languages, and by speaking from the personal, it provides a platform to normalise conversations that are otherwise not easily spoken of.

RECOMMENDATION

Campaigns have the power to shape public perception on issues that are stigmatised or invisible. With the support of celebrities like actors, sportspersons or others who garner large followings, it becomes possible to start conversations on issues like loneliness and mental health and normalise it. Campaigns like #It'sOkBaatKaro or those

that have the support of celebrities like India's Got Colour have been successful in doing this. It is important for public service advertisements to take this into account and create an enabling environment to break the silence on the loneliness of adolescent girls and their needs.

6. Network of Support

INSIGHT

Sometimes all you need is to know that somebody has your back, and will support you in difficult times

VOICES

"Simply spending more time and being more sensitive to children - parents actually have to talk or they will never know how their daughters are really feeling.

"At the same time, they have to be sensitive and not push confidences - we need our space too. Sometimes getting pressured to speak worsens the situations. It will help if parents understand that we may not always approach them because we would rather talk to others or peers."

"If parents nag harshly that isn't helpful. Maybe it is important to discuss, but we shouldn't be forced - in fact sometimes we should be allowed to feel what we feel."

"What counts is having someone to approach, someone who makes you feel safe and gives you the space to speak if and when you are ready. It could also be someone you have a connection or relationship with. We may not always speak about our feelings, maybe talking about movies, books, articles you have read."

"What counts for me is that family and community members show their acceptance of our problems."

"Sometimes we want to talk to parents, but it's important we feel comfortable, not judged. It's not that we always want solutions."



EXAMPLES

A 2011 meta analysis by Masi et al.⁶¹ identified different strategies to address loneliness and social isolation. This included enhancing existing social support and increasing opportunity for new social contact. Mentor programs are one way in which adolescent girls and young women can be linked to adults for support and concentrated attention. The impact of mentoring has been well researched. One study by Sipe (2002)⁶² found, ‘The participating youth felt more competent about their ability to do well in school and received slightly higher grades by the end of the study. They also reported more positive relationships with their friends and parents. These results were sustained for both boys and girls and across races.’

[The Lighthouse Project](#)⁶³ in Mumbai, founded by Trishya Screwvala in 2013 has been linking children and adolescents to mentors in partnership with other non-profits like Akanksha Foundation and Apne Aap Women’s Collective. The program has an activity bank that is used to initiate the mentor-mentee relationship and build trust. Largely working professionals in the age group of 21-31 act as volunteer-mentors for children and adolescents in living in vulnerable communities for a period of 8 months which coincides with the academic year. Access to mentors not only creates access to a safe

and trusted adult, but also helps mentees receive the support and encouragement they need to pursue their goals.

Another way to build support and understanding for the needs of adolescent girls and young women is through workshops for parents. In Reay Road, Mumbai, for instance, one mother who is trained to be a child protection leader by Aangan, is engaging with other parents to facilitate conversations on responding to the needs of adolescents. Living in an at-risk community, she observed how the struggle to earn and survive often resulted in parents harshly reacting to their children. This in turn was only pushing them away and increasing their sense of feeling unheard. The ‘Mothers for Mothers’ parenting workshops she now conducts act as a safe space to talk about the special needs of adolescents whether it is in terms of health, behaviour or emotional issues. As a result, it has become easier for these parents to have closer relationships with children so that they can be their safe persons. A similar initiative in Kenya, the Young Mothers Cohort formed by [Global Communities](#)⁶⁴, is creating safe spaces for young women to come together once a week to talk about parenting, relationships and to access support.

RECOMMENDATION

Through initiatives like these, it becomes possible to connect adolescent girls and young women to supportive social contact. Setting up mentorship programmes or even weekly or monthly meetings

of parents to better listen to and respond to the needs of adolescents can improve and deepen relationships so that girls know where and whom to turn to when they want to access a safe person.

7. Anti-Bullying Action

I wish my school would take bullying much more seriously

VOICES

"It should be compulsory for teachers to be trained on how to support students emotionally."

"Teachers should take the issue of bullying seriously and they should be trained on how to work with those who get bullied."

"Government could make it mandatory for all schools to do social emotional work or life skill work, setting some time aside for sessions on these subjects."



EXAMPLES

The role of school connectedness in buffering peer rejection or loneliness has been well researched as having an important role to play in acting as a protective factor against school violence and student mental health concerns (Baskin et al. cited in Carney, 2020⁶⁵). For school authorities and teachers to be able to recognise and take action against issues like bullying and peer victimisation is therefore critical as it not only affects the well-being of a child but also increases the risk of psychosocial issues like depression. Since school is the site where children spend most of their time (second to home), what transpires in this space is a big factor in determining how a child feels. Having school systems that value and prioritise the safety of all

children can therefore determine whether a child has access to support or is isolated.

Recognising the importance of having safe systems to address harm, [Windsor House School](#)⁶⁶ in Vancouver, Canada is illustrating how to do this through [justice councils](#).⁶⁷ In this model, 'any student who experiences harm can "write up" the other person who they feel harmed them. When someone is written up, they are required to go to what the school calls justice council, which is a circle of their peers who then help repair the harm. Going to that circle is not an option. It is a requirement for anyone who wants to be a member of the school community,' writes Nora Samaran. The aim is to

stop the same harm from happening again, and for the child to understand that they are part of a community and responsible for their actions, whether it is bullying, excluding another or gossip. By having systems like this in place, students know they can access support and feel heard.

Including social and emotional learning (SEL) as part of a child's development in school has been recognised by Pratham's *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019: Early Years*⁶⁸ and has been introduced in Delhi government schools as Happiness Curriculum. The rationale is that through this training, children are better able to understand their emotions and those of others and thus able to

manage their feelings and maintain better relationships - all skills that carry through to adulthood.

Having robust anti bullying policies in school is also a critical way in which to make schools supportive communities for adolescent girls. When teachers are trained to spot signs of trauma and harm and girls know there are functioning systems to report harm or bullying, it is possible to access support. Campaigns like non-profit Leher's *No Bullies Allowed*⁶⁹ are important tools that can be used by schools to create awareness, dialogue and offer tips and solutions on how to have reporting and response systems in place in school that children can access.

RECOMMENDATION

School is where children spend much of their time, so having supportive systems that build connectedness and address harmful behaviour like bullying and caste based stigmatisation is crucial for an adolescent girl to feel safe. Teachers are also best placed to often spot harm and take action.

Anti bullying policies, school safety and inclusivity audits and social and emotional learning and a few ways in which to create this space and should be mandatorily part of teacher training and school curriculum.

8. Access to Technology

Having a phone means I can call a friend, ask for help, use the internet to learn something



VOICES

"Most girls don't have access to the internet so during the lockdown they couldn't attend online classes, which is making them feel sad."

EXAMPLES

While there is ongoing debate about the role of technology in the lives of young people, there is acknowledgement that technology can positively affect the quality of life for city residents. For adolescent girls public safety, health, well being and connectedness can be significantly improved.

Finding ways to ensure girls' access to technology including smart phones or computers can be empowering. Designing programs, services and support that are so that they are accessible through phones or online can be effective.

In the digital society that many adolescents and young people inhabit, supportive online communities can have a big role to play in building a sense of community and belonging. The access this world offers in terms of interacting with others who are physically miles apart but sharing similar experiences can create room to form support networks.

[Project Anti Caste Love](#)⁷⁰ for instance is one such space on Instagram that is talking about what is still a highly taboo issue - caste and love. Founded by Jyotsna Siddharth, it shares letters written by inter-caste couples on its handle with the aim to spotlight the stigma around it. Forums like this not only provide space for young people to find a starting point for conversations on caste, but also to derive comfort in knowing that they are not alone in their experience of discrimination. It therefore becomes a safe space to turn to when the home or immediate environment feels alienating.

Another initiative, [Going Online As Leaders](#)⁷¹ or GOAL by Delhi-based Digital Empowerment Foundation is using technology to facilitate access for girls to a wider community. Through a cross-cultural and intergenerational mentorship project, it is connecting young girls to women in cities and through these interactions is also increasing their digital education.



HiDidi (hididi.org⁷²) is an online peer mentoring program that connects adolescent girls from low income schools to young women of Indian-origin studying in the West (primarily in colleges in the United States). It builds a supportive online student community - across countries and income groups. Time difference and the fact that a large percentage of program mentees do not have a phone for personal use pose two big challenges for this programme. To overcome these, appointments and prescheduling conversations help. *HiDidi* also uses free communication technology like Whatsapp, making it more sustainable and accessible, than other donor-dependent mentor programs. Most importantly, it centers around building mutually supportive relationships. "I think it is a genuine desire to connect with their roots that motivates mentors. Most of them are young women in very challenging academic programs - some are even recently graduated doctors. But they find the time to mentor the young women in India," says the Founder, Divya Sahney. The impact of the program is tangible, with mentees securing scholarships and admissions into Indian and international colleges. But describing the depth and breadth of relationships, Divya acknowledges the role of both practical and emotional support. She says, "Didis (mentors) were with their mentees right through the stressful college application process providing great encouragement and emotional support. Through the program we have seen great friendships formed. COVID has also strengthened bonds, highlighting a common vulnerability. It might even have brought mentor-mentee pairs closer."

RECOMMENDATION

Facilitating access to technology is a necessary first step for adolescent girls and young women to form connections to online communities or to access support. This can be in the form of continuing their education or reaching out to mentors or

groups where they feel heard. Initiatives like *HiDidi* is one example of how existing technology can be used to facilitate this process. As the digital era is poised to expand further, this will be a crucial resource for girls agency.

CONCLUSION

No money came home today
Guess it's okay

We line up for NGO-donated food,
Guess it's okay

You say crowding around isn't good
Guess it's okay

We're right here in Govandi,
do you think of us at all

Poor people voted you in-
do you see our tears fall?

You say you're busy now,
your promises are done,

You're a big shot leader,
with all the votes you won

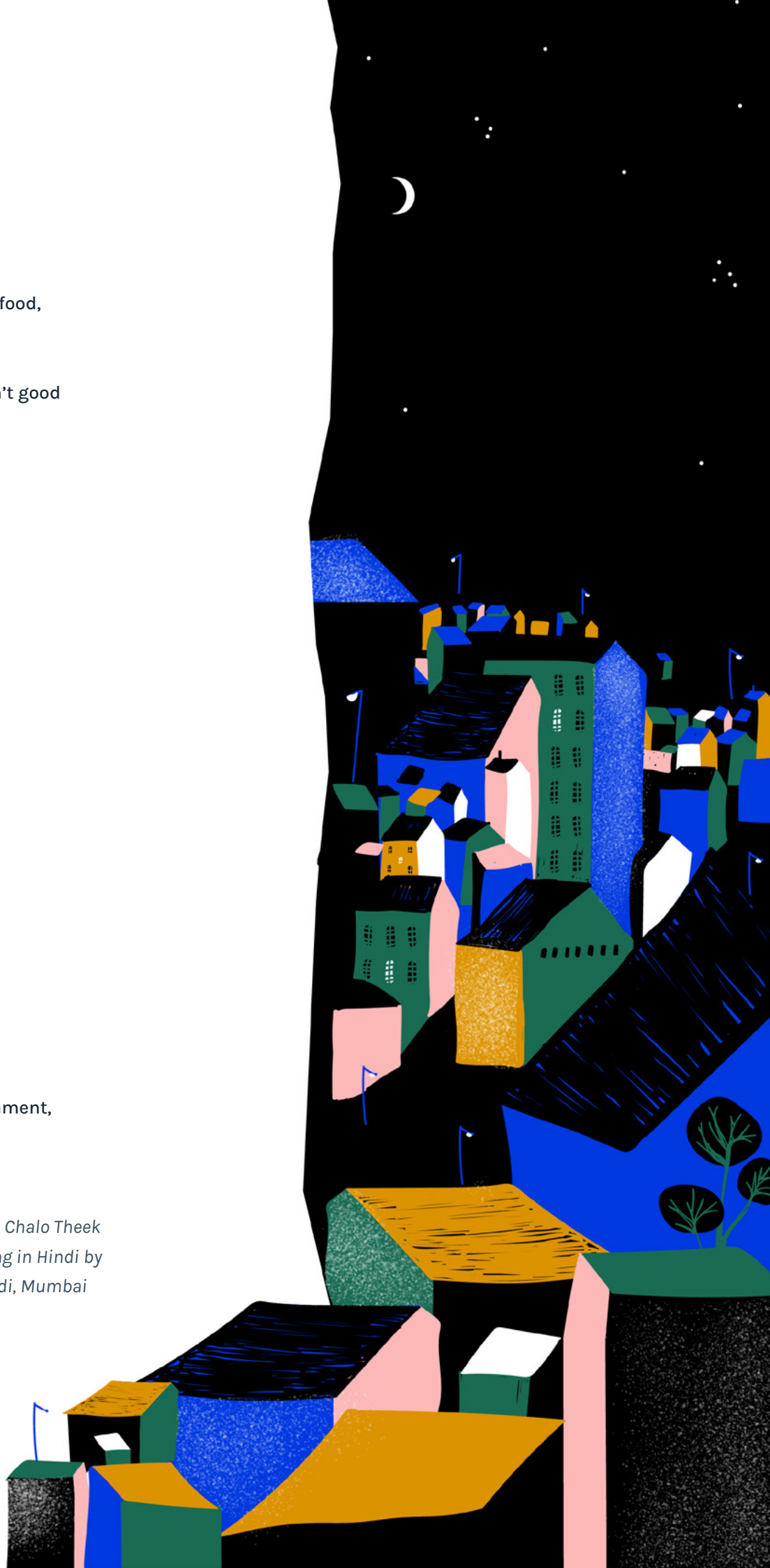
You turn your back on us,
all you have to say

I don't have time for you,
just get out of my way [...]

Nobody speaks up,
but it's true I must insist

When it comes to the government,
don't people like me exist?

Excerpted and translated from Chalo Theek Hai (Guess it's Okay), a rap song in Hindi by 15-year-old Saniya from Govandi, Mumbai



When it comes to the government, don't people like me exist?' asks the 15-year-old Saniya in a searing testament of how unheard and unseen she feels by those elected in power. Her voice echoes what many adolescent girls and young women respondents in the survey shared about their experience of the pandemic. Feelings of being trapped by their isolation with no access to friends and community or even a space in the neighbourhood to meet others. For many, it was a denial of something as simple and essential as being able to talk to someone they trust about their anxieties, or to relieve loneliness by sharing a few laughs with friends. Instead, the absence of systems, services and support structures to facilitate these interactions alleviated the sense of loneliness that girls experienced.

While these might be perceived as 'soft' issues and are often relegated to the bottom of development agendas, recognising the unique needs and identities of adolescent girls and young women and putting them at the centre can be transformative. It has the power to make girls agents of change in their homes and communities and for the wider ripple effect to be felt. Listening to what girls have to say is not only a way to increase their agency in their own lives but also shines the spotlight on obstacles they face and provides opportunities for creative responses.

To actively create this space, however, elected representatives and local government officials have to be held accountable for putting the needs of adolescent girls and young women on the agenda. Can local elected representatives and local governments listen to adolescents, respond to them and consult them for solutions? Bringing girls to the table in any real sense has to go beyond tokenism and actually be backed by investment and resources.

Resource pools like the Local Area Development Fund that corporators and representatives like Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) receive, for instance, can be used to respond to the

needs of adolescent girls. The funds are to be spent as per the discretion of these officials on specified development work. While the quantum of funds varies from state to state, it is a pool available to all and each state has rules that indicate how it can be used. Assam, for example, lists community halls, cultural centres and public libraries while Karnataka includes playgrounds, sports and youth services, cycle stands and mobile libraries on its list of projects where funds can be spent. Yet, funds are largely spent on roadworks or drain repairs and in many cases, it remains underused or wholly unspent.

By focusing on adolescent health and well-being, it becomes possible to think of creative solutions in which to build spaces for connection. In some cases, this could take the form of community centres with designated times allocated as a girls-only safe space to meet, participate in activities or even gather to do homework. It could also be identifying spaces for play where girls can inhabit outdoor, public areas to play sports or exercise. Or as councillors in Chandigarh used their funds to develop parks and open air gyms, similar initiatives could offer spaces for girls to come together. By tracking and ranking councillors and MLAs based not only on the usage of funds but how these funds are being employed, organisations like Praja Foundation that works in urban governance, can share this data with the public to ensure accountability of officials.

With one of the largest populations of adolescent girls in the world, bringing girls on the agenda has never been more urgent. Strategic investment in community-led initiatives and a robust and responsive government is what it is going to take. With even a little space, girls themselves have the potential to create incredible change in their homes, families and communities. All it takes is to listen, listen deeply and take action, so that girls are empowered with resources, opportunity and a strong network. Question is, are we listening?

Endnotes

- 1 Hartberg S. and Hegna K. (2014). Listen to Me: The youth survey in Stavanger 2013. Centre for Welfare and Working Life Research. The Welfare Research Institute NOVA. Accessed from: <http://www.hioa.no/Om-OsloMet/Senter-for-velferds-og-arbeidslivsforskning/NOVA/Publikasjoner/Rapporter/2014/Hoer-paa-meg>
- 2 Myklestad I, Røysamb E, Tambs K. Risk and protective factors for psychological distress among adolescents: a family study in the Nord-Trøndelag Health Study. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol*. 2012 May;47(5):771-82. doi: 10.1007/s00127-011-0380-x. Epub 2011 Apr 16. PMID: 21499806.
- 3 Laing, O. (2016). *The lonely city: adventures in the art of being alone*. First U.S. Edition. New York: Picador.
- 4 UNICEF (2012). *The State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an Urban World*. Accessed from: <https://www.unicef.org/media/89226/file/The%20State%20of%20the%20World's%20Children%202012.pdf>
- 5 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, Online Edition*.
- 6 McKinsey Global Institute. (2010, April). *India's Urban Awakening*. http://www.mckinsey.com/-/media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/Urbanization/Urban%20awakening%20in%20India/MGI_Indias_urban_awakening_full_report.ashx
- 7 PricewaterhouseCoopers & Save the Children. (2015). *Forgotten Voices: The world of urban children in India*. <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/urban-child/urban-child-india-report.pdf>
- 8 World Health Organization. (2019). *Suicide in the world: global health estimates*. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/326948>. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO
- 9 Nair S. (2020). 'In India suicide peaks in young people'. *Times of India*. September 10. Accessed from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/in-india-suicide-peaks-in-young-people/articleshow/78033732.cms>
- 10 National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015-2016 Prevalence, Patterns and Outcomes, Supported by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and Implemented by National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) Bengaluru: In Collaboration with Partner Institutions; 2015-2016.
- 11 Hari, J. (2018). *Lost connections: Uncovering the real causes of depression-- and the unexpected solutions*. London: Bloomsbury.
- 12 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects. From <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>
- 13 Peplau LA, Perlman D. *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research, and Therapy*. New York: Wiley Interscience; 1982.
- 14 Hawkley, L. C., Hughes, M. E., Waite, L. J., Masi, C. M., Thisted, R. A., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2008). From social structural factors to perceptions of relationship quality and loneliness: the Chicago health, aging, and social relations study. *The journals of gerontology. Series B, Psychological sciences and social sciences*, 63(6), S375-S384. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/63.6.s375>
- 15 Cacioppo, J. T., & Patrick, W. (2008). *Loneliness: Human nature and the need for social connection*. New York: Norton.
- 16 Goosby, B. J., Bellatorre, A., Walsemann, K. M., & Cheadle, J. E. (2013). Adolescent Loneliness and Health in Early Adulthood. *Sociological inquiry*, 83(4), 10.1111/soin.12018. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12018>
- 17 Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2020). *Loneliness and Social Connections*. OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from <https://ourworldindata.org/social-connections-and-loneliness>.

- 18 Esteban Ortiz-Ospina (2020) - "Loneliness and Social Connections". Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Accessed from: '<https://ourworldindata.org/social-connections-and-loneliness>' [Online Resource]
- 19 Houghton S., Hattie J., Wood L., Carroll A., Martin K., Tan C. 2013. Conceptualising Loneliness in Adolescents: Development and Validation of a Self-report Instrument. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* 45(5). Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259335779_Conceptualising_Loneliness_in_Adolescents_Development_and_Validation_of_a_Self-report_Instrument [accessed Nov 11 2020]
- 20 Brennan T. (1982) Loneliness at adolescence. In: Peplau LA, Perlman D. (eds) *Loneliness: a sourcebook of current theory, Research and Therapy*, Wiley New York
- 21 Heinrich, Liesl & Gullone, Eleonora. (2006). Heinrich, L.M. & Gullone, E. The clinical significance of loneliness: a literature review. *Clin. Psychol. Rev.* 26, 695-718. *Clinical psychology review.* 26. 695-718. 10.1016/j.cpr.2006.04.002.
- 22 Roekel E.V., Scholte R.H.J., Engels, R.C.M.E, Goossens L. and Verhagen M. (2014). Loneliness in the Daily Lives of Adolescents: An Experience Sampling Study Examining the Effects of Social Contexts. *Journal of Early Adolescence* 1-26. Accessed from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/34639812.pdf>
- 23 Jose, P.E., & Lim, B.T. (2014). Social Connectedness Predicts Lower Loneliness and Depressive Symptoms over Time in Adolescents. *Open Journal of Depression*, 3, 154-163. Accessed from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojd.2014.34019>
- 24 Xie, X., Xue, Q., Zhou, Y., Zhu, K., Liu, Q., Zhang, J., & Song, R. (2020). Mental Health Status Among Children in Home Confinement During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak in Hubei Province, China. *JAMA pediatrics*, 174(9), 898-900. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1619>
- 25 Barber, B., Stolz, H., Olsen, J., Collins, W., & Burchinal, M. (2005). Parental Support, Psychological Control, and Behavioral Control: Assessing Relevance across Time, Culture, and Method. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 70(4), 1-147. Accessed from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3701442>
- 26 Resnick, Michael & Bearman, Peter & Blum, Robert & Bauman, Karl & Harris, Kathleen & Jones, Jo & Tabor, Joyce & Beuhring, Trish & Sieving, Renee & Shew, Marcia & Ireland, Marjorie & Bearinger, Linda & Udry, J.. (1997). Protecting Adolescents From Harm Findings From the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *JAMA: the journal of the American Medical Association.* 278. 823-32. 10.1001/jama.1997.03550100049038.
- 27 Kern, L. (2020). *Feminist City Claiming Space in a Man-Made World*. Verso Books.
- 28 Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The great good place: Cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community*. New York: Marlowe.
- 29 Oldenburg R. 1996. Our Vanishing "Third Places". *Planning Commission Journal*. Number 25. Accessed from: <http://illinois-online.org/krassa/ps410/Readings/Third%20Places/Oldenburg-Vanishing%20third%20places%201997.pdf>
- 30 Phadke, S., Khan, S., & Ranade, S. (2011). *Why loiter?: Women and risk on Mumbai streets*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 31 Why Loiter Movement: <https://twitter.com/whyloiter?lang=en>
- 32 Girls at Dhabas. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://girlsatdhabas.wordpress.com/>
- 33 Girls at Dhabas: <https://www.instagram.com/girlsatdhabas/?hl=en>
- 34 Blank Noise. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <http://www.blanknoise.org/home>
- 35 Hahaha Sangha. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <http://www.blanknoise.org/hahahasangha>
- 36 Family, GPS Tracker and Personal Safety App for Women. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://safetipin.com/about-our-company/>
- 37 Women's Safety Audits. (2017, May 17). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <http://www.jagori.org/womens-safety-audits>
- 38 Col·lectiu Punt6. (2015, September 7). *Women Working*. Urban assessment guide from a gender perspective. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from https://issuu.com/punt6/docs/ww_issuu_simple

- 39 O'Sullivan, F. (2020, November 12). Barcelona Will Supersize its Car-Free 'Superblocks' [Editorial]. Bloomberg CityLab. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-11/barcelona-s-new-car-free-superblock-will-be-big>
- 40 Stuckey, H. L., & Nobel, J. (2010). The connection between art, healing, and public health: a review of current literature. *American journal of public health*, 100(2), 254–263. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2008.156497>
- 41 McLean, J. (2011). *An Evidence Review of the Impact of Participatory Arts on Older People*. Mental Health Foundation, Edinburgh.
- 42 Dharavi art room on Strikingly. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://artroom.mystrikingly.com/>
- 43 Klinenberg, E. (2018). *Palaces for the People*. Random House US
- 44 Sister Library: <https://www.instagram.com/sister.library/?hl=en>
- 45 Agrawal, A. (2019, June 4). Artist Aqui Thami's Sister Library is a community-owned space bringing together books by, of and for women. Firstpost. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://www.firstpost.com/living/artist-aqui-thamis-sister-library-is-a-community-owned-space-bringing-together-books-by-of-and-for-women-6643181.html>
- 46 The Buguri Children's Initiative. (2020, October 31). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://hasirudala.in/initiatives/buguri/>
- 47 Hixson, E (2014) The impact of young people's participation in events: Developing a model of social event impact. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, 5 (3). 198 - 218. ISSN 1758-2954 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-09-2013-0026>
- 48 Perry, B., Ager, L., & Sitas, R. (2020). *Festivals as Integrative Sites Valuing Tangible and Intangible Heritage for Sustainable Development (Rep.)*. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from JPI Heritage Plus and Mistra Urban Futures website: https://realisingjustcities-rjc.org/sites/default/files/FESTIVALS_AS_INTEGRATIVE_SITES_FINAL_REPORT_0.pdf
- 49 Martinko, K. (2020, May 30). Mumbai Is Home to the World's Largest Beach Cleanup. Treehugger.
- 50 Gehl, J. (2010). *Cities for people*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- 51 Our Story The Edible Schoolyard Project. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://edibleschoolyard.org/about#mission>
- 52 Claudia Visoni and Gustavo Nagib, << Reappropriating urban space through community gardens in Brazil >>, *Field Actions Science Reports* [Online], Special Issue 20 | 2019, Online since 24 September 2019, connection on 02 February 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/factsreports/5778>
- 53 Claudia Visoni and Gustavo Nagib. 2019. Reappropriating urban space through community gardens in Brazil. *Field Actions Science Reports* [Online], Special Issue 20. Accessed from: <http://journals.openedition.org/factsreports/5778>
- 54 It's Ok To Talk. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <http://itsoktotalk.in/>
- 55 Sangath. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://www.sangath.in/>
- 56 Mann Mela. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://www.mannmela.in/>
- 57 Emmanuel, K. (2020, November 13). Women Of Worth. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://womenofworth.in/>
- 58 Das, N. (Director). (2019, September 25). *India's Got Colour* [Video file]. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_LIWPEvJOY
- 59 Ranjith, P. (2018, March 29). The Casteless Collective. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPFcjjFtoTPCHgYP_y5MvSg
- 60 Spoken. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://kommuneity.com/spoken/>
- 61 Masi CM, Chen HY, Hawkey LC., Cacioppo J.T. (2011). A meta-analysis of interventions to reduce loneliness. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15(3): 219-266. Accessed from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1088868310377394>

- 62 Sipe C.L. 2002. Mentoring Programs for Adolescents: A Research Summary. Journal of Adolescent Health. 31:251-260. Accessed from: <https://www.youthmentoring.org.nz/content/docs/Sipe%20review.pdf>
- 63 Our Programme. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://lighthouseproject.in/our-programme/>
- 64 Kenya. (2019, October 04). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://www.globalcommunities.org/kenya>
- 65 Carney J.V., Kim I., Bright D., Hazler R.J. 2020. Peer Victimization and Loneliness: The Moderating Role of School Connectedness by Gender. Journal of School Counseling, v18 n8. Accessed from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341030382_Peer_Victimization_and_Loneliness_The_Moderating_Role_of_School_Connectedness_by_Gender
- 66 Democratic Governance. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <http://windsorhouseschool.org/core-principles-2/#DemocraticGovernance>
- 67 Samaran, N. (2019, July 16). On a Radical Model of Education: The Free School. Literary Hub. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://lithub.com/on-a-radical-model-of-education-the-free-school/>
- 68 Pratham. (2020). Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2019 'Early Years'. New Delhi: ASER Centre. doi: <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER2019/ASER2019report/aserreport2019earlyyearsfinal.pdf>
- 69 #NoBulliesAllowed - NGO in India - Child Rights Organization. (2017, October 17). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://leher.org/campaigns/nobulliesallowed/>
- 70 Project Anti Caste Love: <https://www.instagram.com/projectanticastelove/?hl=en>
- 71 GOAL Digital Empowerment Foundation. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.defindia.org/goal/>
- 72 Mentorship for India HiDidi. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <http://hididi.org/>



PUBLISHED BY
Aangan in January 2021

EMAIL
contact@aanganindia.org

WEBSITE
www.aanganindia.org

**YOUNG
CITIES**

Aangan
PROTECTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN