SMS GIRL
DATA INSIGHTS:

How has COVID-19 affected support for education at home in Punjab, Pakistan?

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## KEY TAKE-AWAYS

This brief presents initial findings from an ongoing phone survey of families in Punjab, Pakistan designed to assess what is happening to girls’ elementary school education during COVID-19. The data reveal that:

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<td>1. <strong>COVID-19 has hurt households’ ability to earn.</strong> Over a third of households report that they had lost a substantial share of their income.</td>
<td><strong>34%</strong> REPORT LOSS OF INCOME</td>
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<td>2. <strong>Children may not return to school.</strong> Parents of girls and boys are equally likely to say their child will not return to school when it reopens. Almost 7 percent of parents of older children (ages 13–17) report that they will not send their children back to school. In comparison only 2 percent of parents of younger children (ages 5–12) report similar intentions.</td>
<td><strong>7%</strong> OF OLDER CHILDREN WILL NOT RETURN</td>
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<td>3. <strong>Knowledge of available options for remote learning is very low.</strong> Less than a third of the families we spoke to had heard of any of the available opportunities for remote learning. Even fewer families had heard of options provided by the government since the start of the pandemic: Teleschool or Taleem Ghar. On average, few families report their children take advantage of remote learning. However, among those who knew of available remote learning opportunities, take up was higher.</td>
<td><strong>84%</strong> DO NOT KNOW OF TELESCHOOL OR TALEEM GHAR</td>
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<td>4. <strong>Girls report spending just as much time as boys on academic learning (about three hours).</strong> They report spending more time on household chores than boys. In contrast, boys report almost twice as much time spent on work outside the household compared to girls.</td>
<td>BOYS &amp; GIRLS SPENT ABOUT 3 HOURS ON ACADEMIC LEARNING</td>
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<td>5. <strong>While parents report that they have few concerns about school reopening, they express lower expectations about their children’s education.</strong> A quarter of households say that their expectations for the highest grade their child will complete have fallen. Overwhelmingly parents cite the fear that their children will not be able to catch up on the learning they have missed as a result of school closures.</td>
<td>PARENTS’ EXPECTATIONS FOR THEIR CHILD’S SCHOOLING HAVE DECREASED</td>
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This brief covers data collected in the fall of 2020. Further data is being collected and analyzed. Subsequent briefs will provide updates as we learn more.
INTRODUCTION

Policymakers are concerned about the effect of school lockdowns on girls’ enrollment and well-being. This concern is particularly salient in Pakistan where there is a high out-of-school population and children seldom return to school once they drop out.

The data reported in this brief were collected as part of an effort to understand how COVID-19 and the resulting school closures are affecting families and how they are responding.

In Punjab, schools closed on March 15, 2020—just two weeks after the 2020 school year began (figure 1). This coincided with the start of exponential growth in COVID-19 cases across the country. As part of its support to students, the government of Punjab launched the Taleem Ghar program on April 2, 2020. On April 13, this was complemented by an initiative of the Federal government called Teleschool. These initiatives provide students in grades 1–8 with lectures and have been rolled out on television and through online means including an app for Android-based devices, a website, and via YouTube.
This brief presents results from a phone survey carried out between August 21 and October 27, 2020. The survey reached 5,898 families—predominantly those with girls ages 10–14 enrolled in grades 5–7. Approximately 10 percent (536 families) had boys in those grades (figure 2). The survey respondents are from 6 districts in Punjab. The students about whom we present information below are predominantly enrolled in public, private and Punjab Education Foundation schools.

This phone survey is the first in a series of such surveys planned to evaluate whether phone-based messages can help keep girls learning during school closures and whether information shared with parents via these messages might encourage them to re-enroll their girls when schools reopen.

Phone surveys were necessitated by the need to adhere to the government’s Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for student safety. Phone-based messages were chosen as the medium for this intervention given the high feasibility of being able to reach our key respondents and low cost of doing so (approximately PKR 0.25 per message sent).

1 The first round of the survey took several months to complete. This reflects the time needed to obtain all phone numbers to call families, as well as low initial response rates. The overall response rate for the survey was 41.8 percent when considering only respondents who completed the entire survey. 65.7 percent of those we contacted responded to the phone call whereas 52.6 percent went on to agree to participate in the survey.
2 Attock, Faisalabad, Lahore, Muzaffargarh, Rahim Yar Khan and Sargodha.
3 This is equivalent to USD 0.0015 per message at prevailing exchange rates.
How did COVID-19 affect households between August and October?

Less than 1 percent of households in this sample report someone in the household having gotten sick from COVID-19 or having died. Thirty-four percent of parents in the sample reported losing a substantial share of income. This suggests that COVID-19 had predominantly manifested itself as an income shock among these households by the time the survey was conducted.4

Are households aware of and taking advantage of remote learning?

While two-thirds of the households have access to TV or internet, most parents do not know about available options for remote learning. When asked specifically about Teleschool or Taleem Ghar only 20 percent of those with a TV reported that they were familiar with these programs (figure 3). On average, few families report their children take advantage of remote learning. However, among those who knew of available remote learning opportunities, take up was higher.

This is in line with evidence in other surveys such as those conducted by the Center for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP) and the Center for Global Development (CGD).

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*Note: Remote Learning Programs include Taleem Ghar, Teleschool, any learning programs on YouTube/Whatsapp/Zoom, Khan Academy, Radio-My Best Friend (UNESCO)/Listen to Learn.
Will households send their children back to school?

It seems that a substantial share of students may be lost from the education system, particularly in adolescence. Of female students who were enrolled in schools pre-COVID, 3.2 percent in our sample will not return to school after schools reopen. An even greater percentage of boys (6.2 percent) in our sample who were previously enrolled will not return to schools. When we inquire about the siblings of these children, the numbers are higher for older children (7 percent on average for those aged 13–17) than for younger children (2 percent on average those aged 5–12) (figure 4).

Figure 4: The Likelihood That Children Will Return to School Varies by Age—for Both Boys and Girls

Note: Areas denote 95% Confidence Intervals
How are children spending their time while schools are closed?

We asked respondents to report how children in their household spend their time on a range of activities while schools are closed. The findings suggest that time use during the lockdowns is somewhat gendered (figure 5). Boys and girls both report spending almost three hours on academic learning. Girls’ families report that they spend almost an hour and a half per day on household chores compared to an hour for boys. While girls’ and boys’ families report that their children spend roughly equal amounts of time on family care (looking after siblings or elders)—there is a distinct gendered pattern here. Girls’ parents are more likely to report that they are spending time looking after siblings while boys’ parents are more likely to report they are spending time looking after elders. Boys’ parents are likely to report that they spend more time on leisure activities than do girls’ parents (two and a half hours compared to under two hours). On average, the families of boys report that they do two hours and twenty minutes of work outside the household compared to those of girls who report they only spending an hour and a quarter on work outside the household.

Note: Academic learning includes time spent on remote learning, self-study and time with tutor; leisure includes time spent watching television and playing; unpaid work inside the home includes making food, toys, or other materials that are sold by members of the family; work outside the house includes paid and unpaid work such as farm work, livestock, etc.; non-academic learning includes leisure reading, religious learning/activities and learning new skills; family care includes child care and elderly care; and household chores include cooking and cleaning.
What concerns do parents have about sending their children back to school and how have these impacted their aspirations?

Eighty-nine percent of parents had no concern about schools reopening. However, parents of girls were slightly more likely to report being concerned about the health of their child (1.4 percent) compared to parents of boys (0.4 percent).

Despite these low levels of concern about safety, the pandemic has drastically affected parents’ expectations about the future of their children’s education. Twenty-six percent of girls’ parents and 41 percent of boys’ parents report that their expectations for the highest grade their child will complete have fallen as a result of school closures. Households who report having lost income during the school closures are more likely to say their expectations are reduced due to a decrease in household income—22 percent—compared to 15 percent for households that did not lose income. Yet this is not the most common reason: both groups of households are overwhelmingly concerned that their children will not be able to catch up with learning (62 percent and 74 percent) (figure 6).
This brief presents five key findings from the first in a series of phone surveys that have been conducted to assess the impact school closures are having on girls’ education in Punjab, Pakistan. Additional rounds of phone interviews will be carried out to test the effectiveness of phone-based text messages to ensure that girls continue to learn and re-enroll in school once schools reopen.

In subsequent rounds, we seek to engage households in semi-structured interviews to understand the dynamics driving some of the patterns presented here. We will also assess how the patterns presented here evolve as the crisis stretches into 2021.
SMS GIRL
DATA INSIGHTS

This brief is a series produced by the team managing the SMS Girl Impact Evaluation. This includes Tazeen Fasih, Koen Geven, Amer Hasan, Naveed Hussain, Kevin MacDonald, Rabea Malik, Javaeria Qureshi, Ayesha Tahir, and Najaf Zahra. We would like to thank Rohit Chabbra and Sheena Fazili for research assistance.

Figures
Authors’ calculations based on SMS Girl baseline survey data.

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