



THROUGH HER LENS:

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FILIPINO GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 has affected all Filipinos, in varying degrees, in all aspects of their lives. This study zooms in on the effects of the pandemic on girls and young women, as told from their own perspective. Girls and young women also stated how they viewed the responses of the government and private sector, and what they think could be done to improve that response whether for the general populace and for their specific group.

The online survey among girls and young women between the ages of 13 and 24, conducted between April 20 and May 15, 2020, yielded 1,203 valid and complete responses from all 17 regions across the country.

A PROFOUND IMPACT



“As much as it’s important to learn about what COVID-19 is, personally for me, I’d also like to learn more about where to seek medical help on how I can mentally cope with the situation.”

- Bam, 21, Cagayan De Oro

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I am concerned about finances and how my education will be continued, because I am worried that my age will not match the grade level anymore.

- Ashley, 13, Cavite

The survey found that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the girls and young women’s health and well-being, education, and safety and protection.

Girls and young women worried about the health of their family (68%), about the duration of the quarantine (53%), slim chances of returning to school and being able to leave one’s house (both almost 49%). These were more pronounced over their concerns of contracting the virus (40%). After these come their worries about human rights violations and gender-based violence against girls and young women.

FORTY-TWO PERCENT

of respondents reported feeling sadness, followed by frequently-changing emotions (40%). Many respondents also felt bored, afraid and anxious. Some felt happy, uncertain, irritated and angry.

The pandemic has significantly reduced the number of hours that girls and young women devote to learning. Twenty-eight percent of respondents said they studied for one to two hours a day. Twenty percent said they studied for less than an hour. Only around 12% said they still studied between three and five hours a day.

This inability to study at home has two main causes: Internet connectivity problems and the need to help with household chores.

A good percentage cannot study or work as they want to because they are given responsibilities around the house more than the male members of their families.

While a majority of the surveyed girls and young women did not observe, first hand, violence at home or their immediate environment, some 56% reported observing violence on social media or television. Such violence occurs in the form of cyberbullying, trolls and fake news, indecent photos, video or messages, online sexual harassment, and messages of threat and violence.

“I personally think that it would just better if we would communicate and cooperate with our local government units or even barangays to make a move and create innovative ways to fight this pandemic, instead of just waiting for help and relying on the government's response.

—Andrea, 17, Cebu

Some of the respondents who observed violence in their homes or environment did report the incident to authorities but had no way of knowing whether these were acted upon. Many did not know where to go or how to report, thus preferring to keep quiet instead.

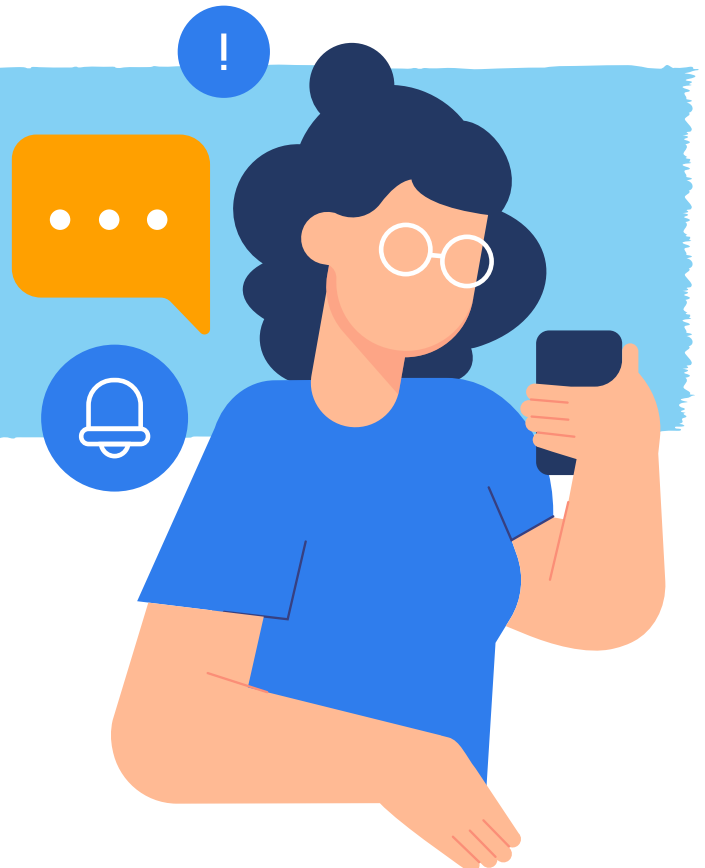
UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

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Young women deserve accurate information from legitimate sources to avoid panic and fear, at the same time.

—Dianne, 14, Rizal

Data suggest that girls and young women are potential communicators and advocates, specifically because of their approach to receiving information and verifying it. They could definitely contribute in efforts against COVID-19 more than what they are already doing by staying at home, following health protocols, doing advocacy on social media, and for some, repacking and distributing relief.



Most of the respondents are able to receive news and information about COVID-19. This includes the current situation of the country, what to do about the current situation, and about the government's response. The primary source of information is television, followed by social media and family members.

Two-thirds believe they have information on COVID-19 sufficient to protect themselves.

The girls and young women are generally confident about their ability to distinguish legitimate information from fake news. More than three-fourths immediately verify the information they receive before sharing them with others.

They also want continued access to quality education through stronger and reliable Internet and communication signals.

RESPONDENTS INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE MORE INFORMATION ON:



where to access hygiene and sexual and reproductive health items and services



how to protect themselves from harassment and violence



how to report cases of gender-based violence



how to protect themselves from the pandemic including psychosocial support and coping mechanisms

GIRLS AND WOMEN IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

"Girls and young women should receive support from other girls and young women by educating them on how to live a healthier and more productive life. Also, support women's rights by voicing out their opinions on important issues that women face, volunteering in women's rights advocacies, and empowering each other."

— Raeven, 15, Nueva Ecija

Inequities have placed girls and young women at a disadvantage during this time of the pandemic. The survey also reveals the gaps in social protection and relief assistance for them at this crucial time. Moreover, their capacities are undervalued and they are consigned to performing household chores despite their continuing desire to learn and be productive, and their potential to become good communicators and channels of information.

The study offers recommendations for the government, for civil society, and for the private sector in addressing the gaps identified in the study. These recommendations generally take on the form of collaboration among different sectors in addressing the girls and young women's need for mental well-being and education, as well as the gender inequalities prevalent in the home and the community. Violence online should also be checked. Poverty and social inequality which were worsened by the pandemic, need to be addressed as well, hand in hand with the provision of social protection and relief assistance.

Finally, girls and young women are able and willing to contribute to the community during a crisis. They should be given the opportunity to air their views and to live up to their role for themselves, for their families and for the bigger society at this time of the pandemic and after it.