

Ensuring adolescents stay—and learn—in school

Background

The Government of India has invested in improving education through two key programmes, the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* established in 2001 for elementary education (class 1–8) and *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* initiated in 2009 for universal access to, and retention in, secondary education. National statistics indicate that educational attainment levels have increased, and the proportion of children who has never been to school has declined.¹ In Uttar Pradesh, the Population Council found high levels of enrolment amongst younger adolescents, with limited gender disparity: 91 percent of boys and 86 percent of girls in ages 10–14 were enrolled in school.² Retention beyond elementary school, however, was low: unmarried girls and boys typically only stayed in school for nine years, and married girls for eight years. Further, learning outcomes—literacy and numeracy—were poor, bringing the quality of education inputs into question. This policy brief focuses on two challenges to preparing Uttar Pradesh’s adolescents for the future:

- Universal enrolment and retention in secondary school
- Improving learning outcomes

KEY FINDINGS

- Despite high enrolment in primary school, secondary school enrolment was low. Amongst adolescents in ages 15–19, about 2 in 3 boys, 1 in 2 unmarried girls, and 1 in 20 married girls were currently enrolled in school.
- Between 55–62 percent of adolescents (15–19) were currently enrolled in private schools.
- School attendance was poor: only about 1 in 2 older unmarried boys and girls and about 1 in 3 married girls reported attending school regularly.
- Of unmarried adolescents (15–19) who had completed elementary school, about 4 in 5 boys and girls could read a simple class 2 Hindi text, while about 1 in 2 boys and 1 in 3 girls could solve a simple division problem.
- Key opportunities for the state are to improve school facilities, enhance teaching quality and remove the economic and social barriers to enrolling in, attending, and completing secondary school.

The UDAYA study

Understanding the lives of adolescents and young adults (UDAYA), a programme of research conducted by the Population Council, seeks to explore the situation and needs of younger (10–14 years) and older (15–19 years) adolescents, describe changes in their situation and needs over time, and assess factors that determine how they transition from adolescence to young adulthood. In Uttar Pradesh, the study includes cross-sectional surveys, a policy and programme landscaping and qualitative sub-studies. In 2015–16, the Population Council collected quantitative data from a sample of unmarried girls and boys (10–14 and 15–19 years) and married girls. In 2018–19, we will re-interview this group, when they will be in ages 13–17 and 18–22, and collect data from a fresh sample of unmarried boys and girls (10–14 and 15–19 years) and married girls (15–19 years). This brief presents findings from the landscaping exercise and descriptive and multivariate analyses of the 2015–16 survey of a representative sample of 10,161 adolescents.

Secondary school: enrolment, attendance and completion

Approximately 2 in 3 unmarried boys and 1 in 2 unmarried girls (15–19 years) were currently enrolled in school, with a slightly higher proportion of girls who had dropped out (Table 1). Only five percent of married girls were currently enrolled in school – most had either dropped out (69%) or never enrolled (21%). Boys dropped out of school primarily due to lack of interest in studies or to engage in paid work. For both unmarried and married girls, housework, economic reasons, lack of parental priority for education and transportation/distance to school were the leading reasons for dropping out.

Table 1: Current schooling status, adolescents 15-19 years

Current schooling	Unmarried boys (15-19)	Unmarried girls (15-19)	Married girls (15-19)
% currently in school	63.4	52.2	5.2
% in distance education	4.2	5.5	5.3
% dropped out	28.3	35.4	68.6
% never enrolled	4.1	6.9	20.9
Total	2,064	4,338	1,798

School infrastructure—the availability of drinking water, working toilets, a playground and library—was moderate: almost all respondents in ages 15–19 reported the availability of drinking water, and at least 4 in 5 reported a working toilet in their current school (or last school amongst those who were no longer enrolled). Over three-quarters of girls in school reported that their school had a separate toilet facility. Playgrounds were also available to a large majority of boys and girls, while libraries were in short supply. Overall, 36 percent of boys and a little more than 40 percent of unmarried and married girls reported being enrolled in a school with all four facilities, with little variation between government and private schools.

School attendance was far from regular. About one-half of older boys and girls reported missing at least one day of school in the previous week (Figure 1). Domestic responsibilities, lack of interest, economic compulsions and illness were the leading reasons for not attending regularly (Table 2). There was limited variation in attendance between students who attended government or private schools.

Figure 1 Attendance patterns amongst unmarried adolescents, 15-19 years

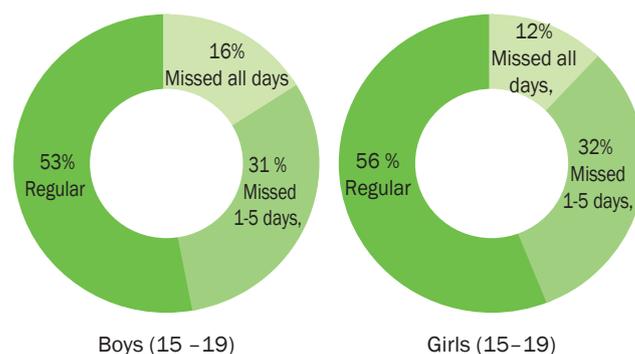


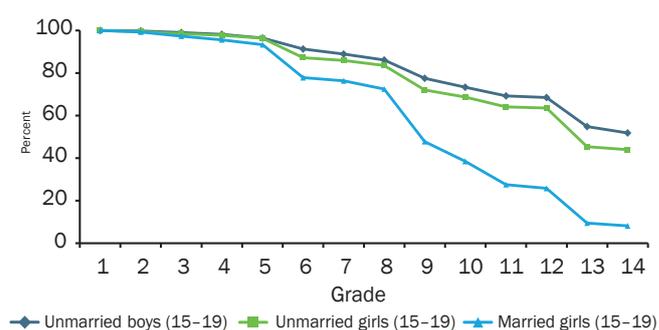
Table 2: Leading reasons for not attending school regularly amongst adolescents, 15-19 years

Reason reported	Unmarried boys (15-19)	Unmarried girls (15-19)	Married girls (15-19)
Paid work	32.7	10.1	3.4
Did not want to attend	15.5	20.2	26.3
Respondent's illness	13.5	19.2	6.8
Domestic chores	22.5	23.1	31.9
Lack of transport	4.6	12.2	15.7

Educational attainment, the highest level of schooling completed, steadily decreased after elementary education (Figure 2). While initial drops emerged after five years in primary education, the sharpest declines were after class eight, along similar levels for unmarried boys and girls. Married girls discontinued schooling in lower grades compared to unmarried girls, with overall lower levels of attainment.

Boys reported dropping out of school primarily due to lack of interest in studies or to engage in work, either for the family or outside the home. For girls, family-related reasons – the cost of schooling, being required for housework, and schooling not considered a priority by parents—along with distance from school were the four leading reasons for discontinuing.

Figure 2: Cumulative percentage of adolescents (15-19) who had completed each year of education, 2015-16



What factors are linked with secondary school enrolment and retention?ⁱ

■ Family characteristics: socio-economic status and parental education

Better-off families were more likely to send their daughters and sons to secondary school. For adolescent girls, having parents who had completed at least ten years of schooling was associated with reaching similar or higher levels of education.

■ School infrastructure

Adolescents who had been enrolled in a school with all four facilities (drinking water, toilet, playground and library) had higher odds of currently being enrolled in school, compared to those who had been enrolled at some point but eventually dropped out.

■ Engaging in paid work

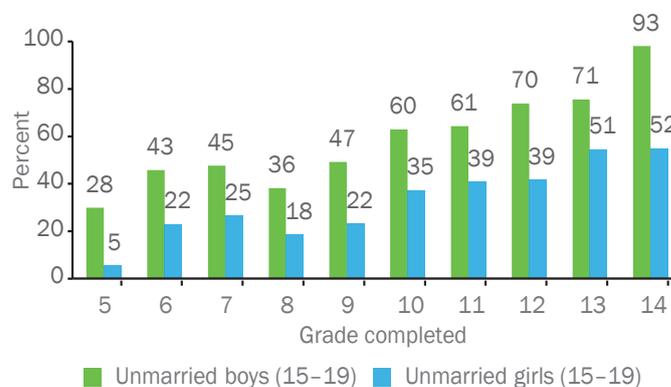
A considerable proportion of adolescents had already worked for remuneration: 41 percent of boys, 25 percent of unmarried girls and 22 percent of married girls. Engaging in paid work at any point was associated with having dropped out of school, after accounting for wealth and other demographic characteristics.

Learning outcomes

UDAYA's findings highlight serious challenges in the quality of education. For most adolescents, the ability to read in Hindi and solve a division problem was far below the corresponding schooling level (Figure 3). Amongst unmarried adolescents who had completed elementary school or higher, 83 percent of boys, 81 percent of unmarried girls and 65 percent of married girls could read a class two Hindi text—with worse outcomes amongst those who were currently in lower grades (Figure 4). Further, 53 percent of boys, 32 percent of unmarried girls and 13 percent of married girls (15-19 years) who had completed at least eight years of schooling could solve a simple division problem. Levels varied

across type of school: 44 percent of boys and 24 percent of girls with elementary education in government schools could both read and divide, compared to higher proportions amongst those in private school: 56 percent of boys and 37 percent of girls.

Figure 3: Ability to solve basic division, by grades completedⁱⁱ



What factors are associated with learning outcomes?ⁱⁱⁱ

■ Private tuition

After adjusting for demographic characteristics, private/government school, school infrastructure and attendance patterns, evidence indicated that receipt of private tuition in the previous month was associated with better performance in reading and division — suggesting that the quality of inputs or supplementation afforded by tuition makes a difference. Neither type of school nor school infrastructure emerged as an independent factor associated with learning outcomes.

■ Household wealth and maternal education, amongst girls

Girls' learning outcomes were associated with their household wealth. Also, girls whose mothers had at least eight years of education were twice as likely to be able to read and perform division. A father's education level did not influence learning outcomes for either girls or boys.

ⁱ Statistical analyses controlled for demographic characteristics (wealth, urban/rural location, caste, religion and maternal education).

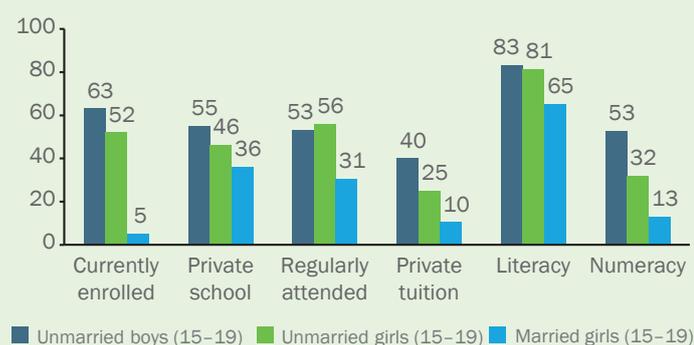
ⁱⁱ Data are presented only for unmarried girls.

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistical analyses controlled for demographic characteristics (wealth, urban/rural location, caste, religion and maternal education) amongst those who had completed at least five years of schooling.

An overview of gender disparities

Girls lagged behind boys in almost every area of education, except regular school attendance. By secondary school, girls dropped out sooner and in slightly higher proportions. While there was a narrow gap in literacy outcomes between unmarried boys and girls, performed considerably worse in numeracy. Families appeared to invest less in girls: fewer girls were enrolled in private school, and even less received private tuition compared to boys.

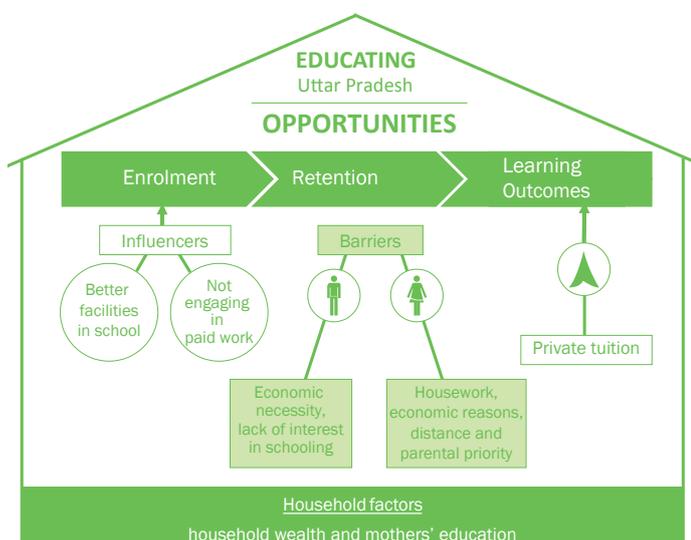
Figure 4: Gender disparities amongst adolescents, 15-19 years



Notes: Currently enrolled is % of all adolescents. Private school enrolment is amongst those who have ever enrolled in school. Regular attendance and private tuition are amongst those currently enrolled in school. Numeracy and literacy are amongst those who have completed class 8 and above.

Educating adolescents of Uttar Pradesh: opportunities

Educating UP adolescents: Opportunities



Programme and policy insights

Interviews with policymakers and programme implementers in Uttar Pradesh indicated that improving learning outcomes was a top programming priority for the state, through inputs into the quality of education and improved monitoring for greater transparency and accountability. Quality improvements include emphasis on information communications technology, introduction of English earlier in the curriculum, and enhanced tracking of teacher attendance and school facilities. Further, programme implementers noted that improved monitoring data are required to track progress and promote better ownership by the state of centrally sponsored schemes. One suggestion was that extension of benefits to both government and private schools could help promote improved enrolment and retention in secondary schools. As UDAYA's data confirm, considerable gaps remain in removing economic barriers to retention—suggesting the need for re-evaluation of both the content and structure of schemes for secondary schooling.

Invest in first-generation learners

More than 26 percent of unmarried adolescents were first-generation learners: neither their mother nor father had any schooling. Given patterns that indicate higher educational attainment for adolescents whose mothers attended school, an overarching priority must be to target this group of adolescents. Schemes, incentives, and media messaging can be tailored to highlight the importance of first-generation learners—for families today, future generations, and the progress of the state.

Recommendations

Invest in secondary schooling

Budgetary allocations in 2017-18 were heavily focused on primary schooling, with a considerably lower allocation to secondary education.³ Given that most drop outs and the gender gap increase after elementary school, increased resources towards secondary school are required to

support equitable enrolment, retention and quality improvements.

Improve school facilities

Implementation of RMSA provisions for complete school infrastructure – drinking water, functional toilets, a playground and library – is critical. Less than two-fifths of adolescents in school reported attending a school with these four facilities. Having better facilities was associated with likelihood of being currently enrolled compared to less-equipped private or government schools, suggesting that infrastructure investments are critical.

Support quality teaching inputs and curriculum changes

Given evidence of an association between receipt of tuition and learning outcomes, interventions to enhance in-school teaching inputs may improve poor literacy and numeracy. Evidence from India indicates that inputs may include:

- (a) curricular innovations to ensure materials are appropriate to students' actual learning levels.⁴
- (b) expanding ongoing initiatives to provide extra support through additional teachers^{5,6} and remedial education through teachers or volunteers.^{7,8}
- (c) introducing teacher incentives linked to student performance.⁹
- (d) ICT-based instruction^{7,10} and
- (e) increased parental/community involvement to enhance accountability of teachers and schools.¹¹

Remove economic and social barriers to enrolment and attendance

Efforts must be made to address the economic pressures that dissuade parents from keeping their children in school. Economic support to alleviate financial burdens for boys will be critical for increased retention, along with ongoing state programmes to reduce the cost of education. Experience from conditional cash transfer schemes for girls such as *Dhanlakshmi* and *Apna Beti Apna Dhan* suggests that incentives may affect girls' aspirations and help to delay marriage. Further implementation calls for restructured incentives,

simplified procedures, targeting to include the most vulnerable, and a focus to promote retention in secondary school as an outcome along with increased age at marriage.^{12,13} More research is required to examine what economic incentives will be effective in retaining both boys and girls, particularly the most vulnerable, in secondary school.

Promote regular school attendance

Regular school attendance must become a high priority for adolescents and their families, potentially through interventions such as: low-cost benefits linked to attendance, monitoring teachers, de-worming, nutritional supplementation, and engaging parents and school management committees.^{11,14}

Engage parents to prioritise and celebrate girls' secondary education

Efforts must be made to examine why adolescents lack interest in schooling as well as to develop programmes that promote a positive environment in school, with parents, and in the household. Particularly for girls, a family's support at home is critical for girls for enrolment and retention. Intensified social messaging and campaigns such as *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*, television-based inputs and awareness efforts may promote social norms that value education for the next generation of girls. Evaluating the impact of these efforts will be critical.

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This brief is based on data collected by the UDAYA study, the report of which is available at www.projectudaya.in.² For more information about the Population Council's global work in education, please see our website (<http://www.popcouncil.org/research/girls-education>).

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