

COVID-19: Inequalities widen for poorest young people in developing countries

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Credit: University of Oxford

COVID-19 could reverse important gains in educational attainment and future life chances for young people in developing countries—particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, according to Oxford-led research.

Despite many young people in developing countries now returning to education or employment, interrupted learning, less reliable work, [food shortages](#) and significant mental [health](#) issues are widening inequalities,

according to a COVID-19 phone survey from the long-standing Young Lives research team.

This latest research shows that, despite encouraging signs, many young people are getting their lives back on track, a complex and uneven picture is unfolding.

"On the surface, things are improving for many, following the initial shock of the pandemic, but beneath that, inequalities are clearly widening. COVID-19 could not only halt progress but could reverse important gains in [educational attainment](#) and future life changes," says Dr. Marta Favara, Deputy Director, [Young Lives at Work](#).

The Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Girls' Education, Helen Grant, MP, says, "Coronavirus has made [girls'](#) education an even more urgent priority, with 1.6 billion children around the world out of education at the peak of school closures. For the world's poorest girls, being out of school puts them at even greater risk of early marriage, forced labor and violence.

"The UK is backing research by Young Lives better to understand how to overcome the barriers stopping girls from realizing their full potential. We are determined to get 40 million more girls in school in low and [middle income countries](#) by 2025 and a third more girls reading by the age of 10.

"That is why UK and Kenya are co-hosting a Global Education Summit in July to urge world leaders to invest in getting children into school and learning—to help economies grow, tackle poverty and empower women everywhere."

Young Lives' researchers asked more than 9,000 young people in two cohorts aged 19 and 26 years old in, India (Andhra Pradesh and

Telangana), Peru and Vietnam about their education, employment, access to food, mental health and well-being. They found:

- Education: Encouraging signs of return, but learning issues remain.
- Gender: Poorest girls and young women may find it particularly hard to return to education.
- Employment: Return to work continues but less reliable and informal and a clear gender gap emerging.
- Food security: The poorest households are most likely to go hungry.
- Mental Health: The pandemic is taking a heavy toll on mental health.

Dr. Favara says, "Our findings show that the poorest, most vulnerable [young people](#) are struggling to recover from the pandemic. Additional stress caused by interruptions in their [education](#), increased food insecurity and increased household duties may be directly contributing to worsening mental health amongst the poorest young women."

More information: Young Lives at Work Phone Survey results Young Lives at Work (YLAW) | www.younglives.org.uk

Provided by University of Oxford

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