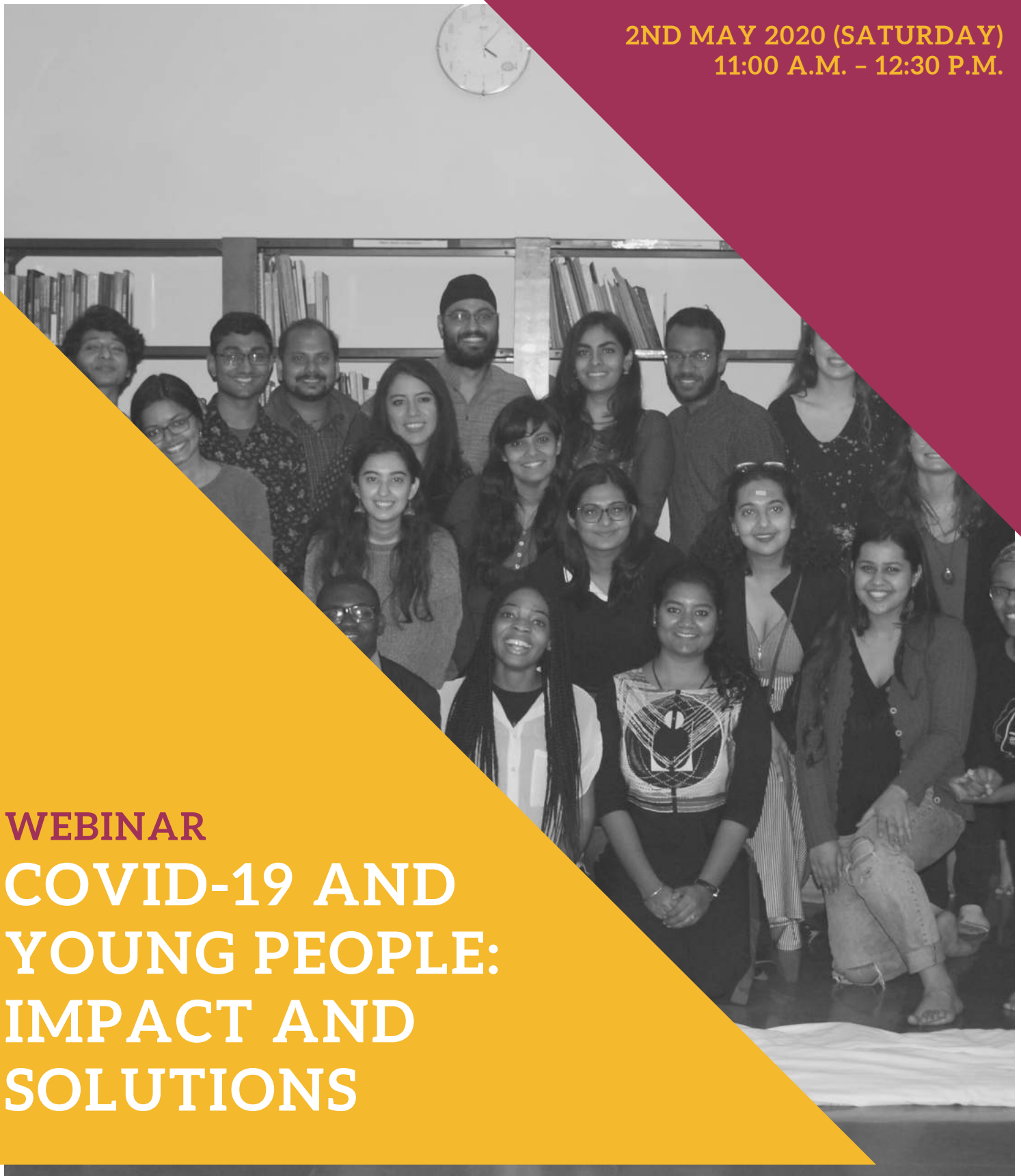


2ND MAY 2020 (SATURDAY)  
11:00 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.



WEBINAR  
COVID-19 AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE:  
IMPACT AND  
SOLUTIONS

CONVENED BY

*PRIA Youth*



**PRIA YOUTH**

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# WEBINAR REPORT

The COVID-19 pandemic has engulfed the globe, cutting across all sections of society in varying magnitudes. The pandemic has introduced a new normal for the world which translates into **social distancing, distance education, contactless deliveries and remote working.**

For India, the lockdown and social distancing norms have introduced a variety of novel techniques that the people have had to adopt rapidly. While the most hard-hit section of the Indian population has been that of the migrant workers, the youth of India has been severely impacted by the pandemic as well. The young population of India has had to grapple with a sudden shift in education calendars, new methods of learning and working, as well as coping with issues of mental health.

Since 2017, **PRIA Youth** has overseen all of PRIA's youth programming, which is led by and for the youth. PRIA Youth has engaged with young people across India through the **Youth-n-Democracy (YnD)** initiative, in the form of a campaign, a forum, a fellowship as well as Youthra, an annual street theatre competition. The vision of PRIA Youth is to support and foster young, aware and active citizens to imbibe the values of democracy and practice them in their everyday lives. Through our YnD initiative, we focus on building capacities and leadership of young people across the country, provide open spaces to voice their concerns, formulate youth-driven projects and policies and become truly aware of the dynamics of the political, economic and social spheres affecting the youth of India today. To continue our efforts even during the lockdown, PRIA Youth organized a Panel Discussion on - **COVID-19 and Young People: Impact and Solutions on Saturday 2nd May 2020.**

The webinar was an effort to gauge the **'Impact'** of COVID-19 on young people from different regions and sections of society, and the possible **'Solutions'** that are being used by them to overcome issues arising from the pandemic. The webinar also focused on discovering the nature and **type of interventions** that the government, civil society organizations, NGOs and individuals are undertaking in relation to young people during the COVID-19 crisis.

The webinar witnessed a panel consisting of a mix of young people from different educational and professional backgrounds. Please find below brief profiles of the panellists:

- **Sourya Reddy** is the co-founder and CEO of **Bastion Media**, a media, research and technology organization. Bastion Media publishes The Bastion, a digital magazine that focuses on covering developmental issues in the fields of education, environment, sports, healthcare (upcoming) and technology (upcoming).
- **Sweta Pal** works as a communications professional with **Sangath**, where she manages the youth mental health campaign **'It's Ok To Talk'** along with digital and community outreach and partnerships. Sangath is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation committed to improving health across the lifespan by empowering existing community resources to provide appropriate physical, psychological and social therapies. Its primary focus areas include child development, adolescent and youth health, and mental health and chronic disease.



- **Bhavishya Sharma** is a Hindi Honours student of **Jamia Milia Islamia** and a **Youth-N-Democracy (YnD) Fellow**. He is a debater, a news panelist and an established stage poet under his pen name 'Das Aaruhi Aanand'. His poetries cover a wide range of topics be it societal issues, nationalism or current affairs.
- **Gargi** is a Journalism student of **Delhi University** and a **Youth-N-Democracy (YnD) Fellow**. She is currently working on the issue of Family Planning in Peeragrahi, Delhi as part of her fellowship project.
- **Akash Banjare** is a Computer Science student from **Chhattisgarh**. He is engaged as a Program Coordinator at **People's Organization** and has initiated a CRCW (Career Research and Counselling Wing) program that aims at providing a platform for young people to explore their career aspirations.
- **Nasreen Ansari** is a third year B.Com student from **Mumbai**. She is an active member of the NGO **Apnalaya** and plays a prominent role in their Youth Civic Action Group (CAG). Nasreen and her fellow CAG members work on a variety of civic action issues in their community such as water connections, solid waste management, reconstruction of roads, installation of street lights, cleaning of drains etc.



Worldwide registrations spanning major cities of Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, London, Vancouver, Dhaka, Jaffna, Montreal & Riyadh, among others.

248 Total Registrations



128 Active Participants

Questions raised in the live Q&A- 39

# WEBINAR OUTREACH

# IMPACT

"Younger people are seen as an excess crop, as they are not as valuable for the organization which makes them more prone to lay-offs", **Sourya Reddy**.

"People who are already dealing with mental health issues are not able to access their regular support systems", **Sweta Pal**.

"Students who have family pressure and financial pressure have been left stranded in terms of placements", **Bhavishya Sharma**.

"There is a big pressure of productivity on students despite the ongoing pandemic", **Gargi**.

"Thousands and lakhs of students are waiting for clarity over their exams and results",  
**Akash Banjare**.

"The youth of urban slums living in compact spaces and big size of families are facing verbal and non-verbal abuse", **Nasreen**.

The discussion began with outlining the impact of COVID-19 on the youth of India. In this light, **Sourya Reddy**, highlighted that COVID-19 has impacted the youth within the twin sectors of **Education** and **Employment**. Young students engaged in education have not been able to attend classes and those with plans of pursuing higher education abroad have had to defer their plans indefinitely. Similarly, young working professionals have been exposed to vulnerabilities of lay-offs and salary cuts as their lack of experience makes them prone to being more of a liability than an asset.

Elaborating on the above issues, our YnD Fellows on the panel, who are also current university students, put forward some very pressing points in this regard. **Bhavishya Sharma**, mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of students in a monumental way. Students are uncertain about the pending **exams** as well as future school and college schedules. Apart from this, students living away from home are facing **food shortages, inability to travel home** and an **increase in stress** due to which they are not able to focus on entrance exams and college studies. Those students pursuing education in regional languages have had to experience a **divide in terms of e-learning** material, as the focus has mainly been on generating resources in English.

Similarly **Gargi**, another YnD fellow, highlighted the impact on students from personal anecdotes. She commented that as a third year college student on the brink of entering the job market or a Masters course, the pandemic has brought a situation of uncertainty. She mentioned that despite the challenging times, education institutions, social media and peers are putting **unreasonable pressure** on students to be productive during the lockdown. Therefore, one needs to keep in mind the impact of the pandemic on the **mental health** of students.

**Akash Banjare**, expressed the situation of COVID-19 on young people from Chhattisgarh. He noted that although there were only 41 cases of COVID-19 in Chhattisgarh (with more than 50% recovered), the resultant lockdown has impacted the lives of young people across the state in a massive way. The shut-down of schools and colleges all over the state have brought the system to a halt, and on top of that a **lack of awareness** and penetration of **e-learning platforms makes it difficult** for students to continue learning. Another major cause of worry in Chhattisgarh is the **fear of losing jobs** for the youth who are engaged in small scale industries and semi-skilled jobs.

Speaking on the behalf of youth from the urban slums of Mumbai, **Nasreen Ansari**, highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on the youth in informal urban settlements. She commented that as the population in urban slums live and earn on a daily basis, with many youth engaged in education alongside being daily wage-labourers, the sudden **unavailability of education spaces** and **livelihood** has led to an upheaval in their lives. On top of that, the close proximity of houses, cramped living spaces and high density of the population not only exposes them to the danger of the COVID-19 but has also impacted their freedom to use open spaces in the city as a respite from their homes and **suffocating living conditions**, along with **high instances of domestic abuse**.

A major impact of COVID-19 that emerged from the discussion was of the mental health of the youth. In this regard, **Sweta Pal**, pointed out that a pandemic of this magnitude is going to affect the **mental health** of young people all over the country massively. She stated that according to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data from 2018 more than 10,000 young people committed suicide in India, which is expected to magnify in this pandemic if not given due importance. She also highlighted that there are a disproportionate number of mental health professionals with respect to the massive size of India's population and the pandemic has meant that reaching out to such professionals has become even harder for young people. Apart from the above impacts, a pattern that has emerged due to the lockdown has been the increasing cases of **abuse** of young women, queer individuals and minors in households with abusive family members and perpetrators.

# INTERVENTIONS

"Education institutions should pair with NGOs and grassroots organizations for delivery of educational material in areas like urban slums.", **Sourya Reddy**.

"Not much is being said about the burnout and mental health of those organizations and individuals who are providing day-to-day care amidst the COVID-19 crisis.", **Sweta Pal**.

"Our university and colleges are scheduling regular online classes and uploading educational materials online. Our professors and teachers are working hard to provide learning.",  
**Bhavishya Sharma**.

"People's organization is using SMS to reach their student network for essential information related to announcements and rescheduling of their educational calendars by the government.", **Akash Banjare**.

"Women are facing issues with respect to menstrual hygiene, sanitation and availability of sanitary napkins. There has been no effort from the government's side in this regard, however local CSO's have shown some efforts to meet this issue", **Nasreen**.

After thoroughly understanding and sharing the impact that the pandemic is having on the young population in India, the panellists delved into exploring the interventions that have been made with regards to the youth by the Government, NGOs, CSOs and other individuals.

In this regard, **Sourya Reddy** pointed out that the situation in India right now is geared towards fighting the pandemic instead of its aftermath; the focus has been on enforcing the lockdown which has led to uncertainty with respect to policy decisions about the youth. However, despite these challenges, CSO's and individuals have been at the forefront to combat the pandemic through **food delivery**, **provision of ration** and **health services**. Sourya expressed his concerns over the inadequate intervention by the government in the relief effort, and also expressed that even though there is availability of central and state funds they are not being allocated efficiently to meet the last person in need.



- One of the participants **Nirmala Kumari**, raised the concerns of *shortage of funds* for youth and NGOs in Rajouli, Bihar and asked solutions to address the issue. **Sourya** expressed that shortage of funds is a problem being faced by smaller states and towns at the moment, however states have released funds to tackle the situation. Similarly, international organizations like Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation partner with small organizations across the country and provide them with funds; it is important to find such partner NGOs and collaborate with them for funding.
- Another participant, **Shila** of Rajouli, Bihar working as a youth leader in her area voiced concerns on the issue of the youth in Rajouli. She expressed that youth in Rajouli work part-time to generate additional income for their families, and the pandemic has taken away their jobs due to which their financial situation has dwindled. **Sweta Pal** responded by saying that there are CSOs working in this regard, and mentioned 'Haqdarshak' as one of the leading organization that provides *relief* to migrant workers and farm workers through helplines in various regional languages. Local leaders and local community organizations should also be approached as they serve as a bridge between the provider and recipient.

**Sourya** also pointed out that in terms of education institutions, online learning efforts are being made but there is a digital divide with respect to *connectivity* and *accessibility* of e-learning resources. To meet this gap of last mile connectivity, the education institutions should collaborate with organizations and collectives working on ground to deliver learning resources. Speaking of educational interventions, **Bhavishya** mentioned that the government has swiftly made *available resources online* for students through their portals like NYKS (Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan) and SWAYAM. Similarly international organizations like UN have introduced resources catering to the lockdown, namely '*Lockdown Learners*' to raise awareness about rising domestic violence owing to the lockdown.

Talking about interventions by their own organizations, **Akash** explained how People's Organization is using their network of 3,500 students to *disseminate information* about education and also address their grievances through direct calling. This has helped students to have a trusted outlet for their issues, and also act as messengers for People's Organization to reach more students in Chhattisgarh. **Nasreen** also noted the importance of NGOs in *disbursal of ration* and *relief packages* in urban slums of Mumbai. NGOs like Apnalaya have distributed rations to 12,000 families so far. She also expressed that on the government's part there is timely provision of 'Khichdi' for the slum residents, however little has been done to provide dry ration or essential supplies.

On the mental health front, **Sweta Pal** pointed out how community organizations and NGOs have reacted swiftly to address the issue of mental health in light of the pandemic. New **helplines** have sprung up, individuals have been trained to function from remote locations through **web-based** and **tele-calling platforms** in order to support youth with mental issues. Sangath has also started a web-based platform where young people can seek **free psychological help** and interact with mental health experts. Apart from organizations, youth collectives and individuals have been organizing weekly **peer-support meetings** and **webinars** to provide support to those dealing with mental health issues, all over the country. As an organization running a mental health campaign, Its Okay to Talk is also leveraging its networks and large volume of data to connect people with the right information and experts in the domain of mental health, through their website and Facebook group.



# SOLUTIONS

The webinar till now had focused on the impact and interventions relating to COVID-19, but a pandemic of this magnitude cannot be challenged unless individuals come to the forefront and lead by example. This led to the final leg of the panel discussion where panellists discussed the efforts on the part of the youth to combat COVID-19.

**Sourya** noted that despite the grim situation, it should be looked as an **opportunity for the youth** to learn new soft skills and employable skills to be geared for the future after COVID-19. Similarly, young people can also act as frontline members to kick-start a process of **behavioural change** with respect to sanitation, hygiene and information use by leveraging innovative and engaging platforms like Tik-Tok, Instagram etc. Speaking from his experience of being in the media industry, **Sourya** commented that there is a plethora of false information on the internet and as the youth it is our responsibility to lead this **fight against false information and fake news online**. Young people should use sources of fact checking and actively put forward real news to their peers and family. **Bhavishya** pointed out that in a time like this, it is important to be present as a friend for one's colleagues and peers. The more fortunate youth must leverage their accessibility to technology and educational materials to **help out those who are not able to access it**; this should be done through mediums like phone calls and text messages available to their peers.

**Akash** and **Nasreen** opined that the youth should get active in their own capacities and help the local community organizations, even if that means helping through virtual networks. **Nasreen** pointed out that the unemployed youth of urban slums can channelize their energy to help NGOs to **deliver relief services** to the community.

Speaking with regards to mental health, **Sweta** expressed that as youth, it is imperative to use a neutral perspective and **break the stigma** around mental health. Similarly as active internet users the youth should collate and disburse information related to mental health and services to those who need it. The youth should **advocate** for allocating more funds to set up more mental health outreach programmes and streamline treatments at local and district levels, so that it reaches the grassroots. Similarly, the youth can build their capacities and become certified trainers of '**Mental Health First Aid**' to address immediate challenges of those suffering from mental health issues.

On similar lines, **Gargi** pointed out that '**Social Distancing**' should not mean '**Emotional Distancing**' and the youth should check up on their friends, family and peers regularly. Similarly, as active consumers of information, the youth should use their position to combat false information and fake-news; instead they should play an active role in disseminating correct and factual information. It is important for the youth to **dispel communal** and **hateful rumours** in such times and raise voices against injustice and unequal delivery of services to the disadvantaged groups.

In the end, all the panellists agreed that enterprising youth should use their voice and observation for **advocacy** and **change**. They should shoulder responsibilities as responsible citizens of the country.



# WAY FORWARD

The panel discussion was an enriching experience for the participants as well as the panellists. The discussion helped us gain insights into various situations that youth find themselves in across India, and gave us the foundation on which more such engaging webinars can be organized.

The panel discussion led to the following key messages and points:

- **The impact of COVID-19 has been massive on students due to the shift in academic calendars, uncertain future and shift in sources for learning.** However, the impact has been disproportionate as students in the hinterland and from economically weak backgrounds are facing added challenges of accessibility.
- **COVID-19 has impacted the lives of working professionals in cities, towns and rural areas.** The pandemic has left many previously booming industries in a lull and those youth with part-time, low skilled jobs are the most vulnerable. This calls for a concrete strategy on the part of the government to revive the economy and especially MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises). Similarly, avenues should be made for those students joining the workforce in the coming time.
- **The pandemic has had a universal impact on the mental health of young Indians. Along with this incidents of abuse are on rise for youngsters and women.** There is an urgent need for setting up country-wide helplines and relief centres for mental health. The youth should play an active role in addressing mental health through technology for themselves, but also for people around them. Education and awareness to normalize mental health is of crucial importance at this time.
- **The relief work of COVID-19 is being championed by civil society organizations and individuals through the support of the general public.** It is important for the youth to play a central role in helping these organizations through available resources.

We hope to take these conversations forward on a larger scale in the coming period and use our platform to engage with even more people from a diverse range of backgrounds. We hope to get on board not just youth perspectives but also domain experts to support the issues being faced by youth in India in light of the current crisis. We truly believe, there is no better time for the youth to channel their energies and capabilities to heal the world and make it a better place to live!