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**PRIA**

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## **Our Health; Our Voice: participatory research with adolescents in Gurugram, India**

*Online Focus-group discussions with adolescents*

## **Our Health; Our Voice: A participatory research study in Gurugram, Haryana, India**

**Aim of the project:** The participatory research study aims to improve adolescent health in urban informal settlements and amplify the voice and adolescents with regard to their health needs. The project will incorporate the voices and perspectives of marginalized adolescents into the planning and designing of adolescent specific health policies and programmes and builds their capacity and agency to become active stakeholders in matters that affect their well-being.

## **Online Focus Group Discussions: Exploring perceptions of safety with the adolescents in Sikanderpur and Nathupur. Gurugram**

### **Introduction:**

In the wake of the second wave of the pandemic, online Focus group Discussions were organized by the research team at PRIA and conducted via Zoom. The focus-group discussions, which were planned as a face-to-face activity, had to be deferred due to the imposition of lockdown in Gurugram and adjoining areas. The discussions revolved around the topics of nutrition and safety. While nutrition-related discussions were conducted with the ‘mother’ group, the latter was discussed with the adolescent group.

In order to explore the topic of violence and safety from the perspective of adolescents, the facilitators proposed arts-based methodology as an effective tool to identify the social determinants behind adolescent perception of safety. The arts-based discussion was adapted to suit the requirements of virtual platform.

### **Methodology:**

**The following section details the methodology adopted by the facilitators to explore the topic of safety among the adolescents in Gurugram. The FGDs were conducted on April 25, 2021.**

### **Learning Objectives**

To explore perception of safety among adolescent boys and girls living in urban informal settlements in Sikanderpur and Nathupur

### **Time Duration**

60-90 minutes

### **Group Size**

Mixed group- 8 participants from Sikanderpur and 5 from Nathupur

### **Session Requirements**

Zoom cloud-conferencing application (participants must have smartphones with pre-loaded zoom app.)

### **Number of facilitators required**

2 (One facilitator can conduct this session, along with a co-facilitator, who will assist with screen-sharing and note-making)

### **Instructions**

- The facilitator begins the session with a brief introduction where each participant is given a chance to introduce themselves (name, age and their current status of schooling or occupation)

- The session proceeds to explain to the participant the objectives of the session and the topic of discussion. A brief about ‘safety’ is given by the facilitators, post which the participants are encouraged to talk about their perception of safety and how they view it in their everyday life.
- After understanding the perception of safety from the viewpoint of adolescents, the facilitators will ask the participants to list down the places that they frequent on a daily basis, e.g.: Home, school, community, market, parks, etc. (While the participants talk about these places, the facilitator share his/her screen with the participants and list down these in the online whiteboard in the below format)

Places →	Home	School	Community	Roads	Market	Parks
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- After preparing the following chart, each participant is asked to mark all listed places as safe, unsafe, or moderately safe (based on their experience or understanding of that place) with the help of mood stickers. The participants would be required to identify the reasons for assigning the sticker to the particular location.

...is residing within these safety. Youth, especially girls, d) Mapping exercise  
The realities of men and boys ar  
Separate groups should be crea  
unique experiences. Each group

- *Smiling mood sticker to identify a safe space.* These are spaces that the participants feel comfortable with visiting, even if they are alone. Being in these spaces does not induce a feeling of fear or of being scared.
- *Sad mood sticker to identify an unsafe space.* Unsafe spaces are described as a space where adolescent do not venture during the day or night, alone or in groups. Being in these spaces gives them a feeling of fear, tension and discomfort.
- *Moderate mood sticker to signify a space which is sometimes safe and sometimes unsafe.* These are spaces that adolescents can go to with a group of friends or with their parents or guardian. They would however not prefer to venture into these spaces alone.
- Each participant is individually asked to mark stickers for each place with a valid reason for choosing that particular sticker. While putting the stickers, the facilitator will count the responses for each sticker and then put the corresponding number of stickers in the specified cell, e.g., if 5 five participants have said that home is safe for them then in that case 5 ‘smiling’ smiles will be put in the safe cell. Likewise, corresponding stickers will be put for all the places in each column with a reason for each.

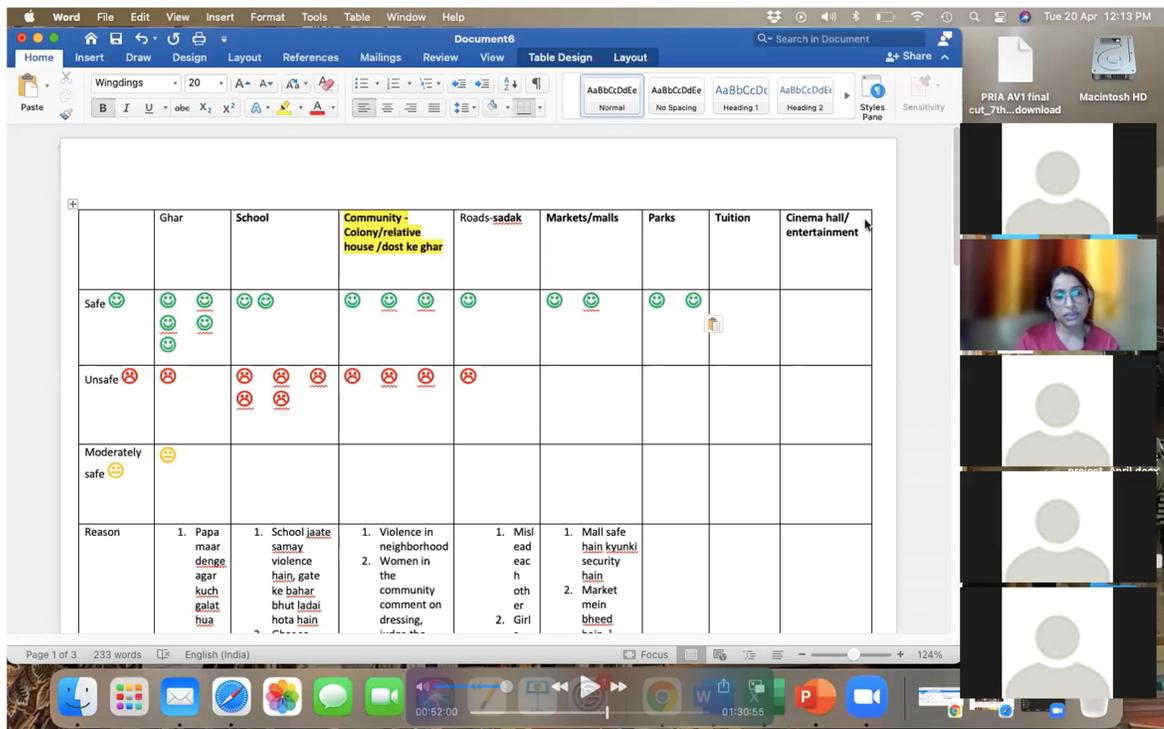


Fig. Online FGD- Arts-based methodology

## Findings

The facilitator started the discussions around safety of adolescents by encouraging them to identify the places that were frequented in their everyday life. The participants identified school, community, home, market/mall, park, tuition and cinema halls as the public spaces they visit regularly. The following analysis explores safety from the perspective of adolescents, according to the places that they frequent.

### Home and school

Since the first point of contact for the adolescent is the home, the facilitator enquired about the perception of safety within four walls surrounded by the family. Majority of the participants reported to feeling safe within the confines of their homes. The adolescents, who participated in the discussions live in single room accommodations and that increases the feeling of security.

*“Home is a safe space for me, since I can disclose any unwanted happenings that take place on the road, with my parents.”*

The adolescents did not report any hesitation in communicating to their parents about incident where they may have felt threatened or unsafe. Similarly, like the home, the school was also considered by the adolescents to be a safe space. The installation of security features and the culture of discipline imposed within the educational institutions made the school safe in the eyes of the adolescents.

*“School is safe for me; I have all the facilities. I normally go the school with my friend’s father. Camera is also installed and there is a culture of discipline.”*

However, for some of the adolescents, it was not the school but the route to the school that threatened their safety. One of the major reasons for adolescent girls dropping out of school, as reported by the mother, was the lack of schools within the community. In the absence of schools within the precincts of the homes, the mothers raised concerns about sending their girl children to schools situated far away from the community. Even the female participants reported the ‘commute to school’ an ‘unsafe’ experience.

*“My school is in Chakkarpur and is at a considerable distance from my home. I don’t feel safe on the way to school. There are brawls and violence almost every day. We have to walk with considerable restraint, so that we are not hit.”*

### **Road**

In addition to incidents of violence reported from the school premises, the participants also consider heavy traffic on the congested roads unsafe. In some instances, one of the participants said that cars or two-wheelers come from all three sides that she can’t cross the road without the fear of colliding.

*“I have to take care of traffic in the busy Gurugram roads. Sometimes, cars run at such speed that I fear that I may meet with accident on the way to school.”*

In addition to vehicle traffic induced hardships, the participants also reported verbal abuse and lewd remarks. One of the participants remarked:

*“Passersby in bikes use abusive language while on the move. Some of them use this pretext to pass lewd remarks against women.”*

Instances of verbally abusive behavior was reported by the participants, not only on the roads, but also in the school, mostly by fellow school mates.

*“In school, boys indulge in violent behavior and even use abusive language. They make fun of each other or tease fellow school mates.”*

However, when the facilitator probed if such incidents constituted violence, the participants seemed to have normalized the behavior. The trend of normalizing a lot of behavior was observed among boys, especially passing unwarranted comments on physical traits associated with the body like weight.

### **Community**

The community was construed by the participants to be a ‘peaceful’ zone and an extension of their homes. However, even instances of violent or anti-social behavior like ‘fighting’ were reported by the participants. The girls, in particular, felt threatened by the attitude of the women in the community, which they perceived as an attack on their ‘morality’.

*“Women in the community judge the girls based on their clothes. They stare at us and evaluate us on our morality. Even if we go to some place with a boy, the women make a big deal out of it. Even elderly men do the same.”*

Being 'judged' on the basis of clothes they wore and interaction with boys in the community was perceived unsafe by the girls. The adolescents reported to being affected by such behavior and as a coping mechanism, they cry and take out their anger on their friends and the persons they closely interact with. Some of them also report incidents to their mother. However, many of them prefer to ignore incidents, where the community members 'talk behind their backs'. One of the participants said:

*"In case they choose to make provoking statements about us upfront, we would give it back on them (on the spot). For those who talk about us to others in our absence, why should we be bothered?"*

#### **Markets and malls:**

Closed shopping spaces are called 'malls', as opposed to the more open markets. Since this was reported as one of the spaces that the adolescents frequented, the facilitators decided to explore the safety profile of malls and markets from the perspective of the adolescents.

Malls are perceived to be safer by the adolescents, as opposed to the markets, since they are less crowded and security cameras are installed. Markets are considered to be unsafe, since incidents of physical abuse, groping and unwarranted staring were reported by some of the participants.

#### **Key findings:**

- **Majority of the participants rated their 'home' as a safe space. However, the fear of being punished or reprimanded by parents was a concern for some of the adolescents.**
- **Even though the school was perceived to be safe, the route to school was not considered safe by majority of the participants. Violence within the school premises, traffic congestion and rash driving, abusive language and unwarranted comments by pedestrians and riders were reported by the participants.**
- **Mixed responses were evoked from the participants regarding their perception of community that they live in. While some of the participants perceived their community to be a safe space, violence and fear of being judged made the girls perceive their community to be 'less space'.**
- **Malls or gated shopping centers were perceived to be more safe than open markets. The facility of security provided within the premises of the mall made it safe for adolescents, while in the open market, there was no restraint on unsafe behavior, most of which is covert like pickpocketing, inappropriate touch etc.**

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