

“Listening to Young Lives at Work: COVID-19 Phone Survey” Fourth Call and Fifth Call.

COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have substantial implications for the population around the world even in the year 2021. The COVID-19 scenario made it very difficult to plan for a round of in-person visits to Young Lives (YL) families in 2021. Therefore, we decided to reach the YL families once again through a phone survey with the promise to get back and visit them in person as soon as the situation improves and is stable, for the Round 7 survey. The purpose of the YL COVID-19 survey is to capture the medium-term impacts of COVID-19 on education and transitions to higher education; on labour market and participation in income generating activity; on the welfare of the household (economic consequences, food security and consumption, overall health, and access to public programs to cope with the pandemic) and on the mental wellbeing of the YL respondents.

The 2021 Phone survey took place in two steps:

- i. A fourth phone call with the YL respondents to follow up on the last call last year (October-December 2020) and explain the need to takeup a phone survey. This call briefly covered migration, marital status, household composition and household access to vaccination. It also included an invitation to participate in the following survey, which aimed at covering a much broader range of topics. This survey was planned to be 15-30 minutes long.
- ii. A fifth call to administer the main phone survey. This call included some of the time sensitive questions asked during the 2020 calls to better understand whether the respondent’s situation has changed in the meanwhile. It also covered a reduced version of what we had planned to cover in Round 6. This fifth call was planned to be 45 minutes long.

For calls- 4 and 5, the project used Survey CTO which allows data collection using the web or mobile devices. We used Survey CTO collect App which is a mobile app that data collectors can use to fill out forms on their phones or tablets without needing to have an internet connection. After data has been collected, it is uploaded to the Survey CTO server when an internet connection is available. It can also be transferred to a supervisor’s laptop over a local (offline) Wi-Fi connection.

The findings of the Fifth call are as following

1. There has been a significant increase in overall levels of perceived poverty during 2021: struggling or poor/ destitute households increased from 36 per cent before the pandemic, to a staggering 52 per cent in August– October 2020, with only a modest reduction (to 46 per cent) by October–December 2021.
2. Of particular concern, the number of young people belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes who reported that their households were poor or destitute increased from 12 per cent before the pandemic to 16 per cent by August–October 2021, with a further increase to 19 per cent by October–December 2021 (compared to 7 per cent across all other groups).
3. Inequality in the rollout of the national vaccination programme led to those living in poorer households being less likely to have received a first vaccine dose by October–December 2021 (only 56 per cent, compared to 74 per cent of those from wealthier households). Vaccination rates were also lower among women and respondents from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
4. A growing digital divide is limiting young people’s chances of a successful education and increasing their likelihood of dropping out. More than 1 in 5 (22 per cent) of 19–20-year-olds who did not have access to the internet at home had left education by October– December 2021, compared to only 7 per cent of those with access.
5. The quality of teaching (currently online) had fallen by October–December 2021, compared to before the pandemic, according to almost half (47 per cent) of 19–20-year-old students.
6. There has been a substantial increase in the gender employment gap among 19–20-year-olds, from 16 percentage points before the pandemic to 36 percentage points in October–December 2021. Similarly, the gender employment gap among 26–27- year-olds has also increased (from 39 to 49 percentage points).
7. Mild food insecurity is extremely widespread and increased significantly during 2021, with 44 per cent of respondents worried about running out of food (compared to 13 per cent in 2020). Those in the poorest households and those belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes were most affected.
8. Young people’s mental health has worsened slightly as the pandemic has progressed: 11 per cent reported symptoms of depression in October–December 2021 (compared to 9 per cent in November 2020) and 10 per cent reported symptoms of anxiety (compared to 8% in November 2020).

Team: E. Revathi and P. Prudhvikar Reddy
Supported by: ODID, Oxford University, UK