

# An analysis Report of Information Collected During The COVID-19 Lockdown Children with Auditory and Intellectual Disability

Between 15 and 17 April 2020

## 1. INTRODUCTION

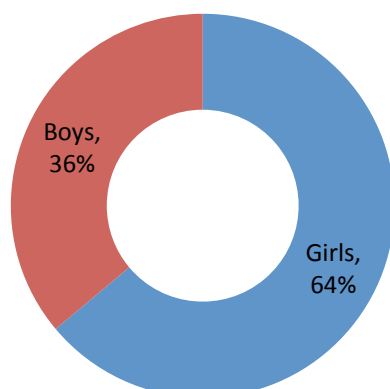
Save the Children India (STCI) works with underprivileged children with hearing impairment and intellectual disabilities, to detect, treat, and create a safe learning environment for their growth and development. From early March 2020, when the coronavirus reached pandemic status and the media started reporting it, there was a recognition that persons with disability may be impacted more significantly by COVID-19 for a range of reasons. This included the higher risk of infection and the additional pressure on caregivers thereby resulting in the exacerbating the already existing health inequalities. In order to explore the tangible impacts STCI along with Praxis organised a rapid assessment of the situation faced by children.

The research team interviewed **56** children in Mumbai between 15 and 17 April 2020. They were interviewed about the status of receipt of free ration under Public Distribution System, central government sponsored welfare schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Ujjwala Yojana, Kisan Samman Yojana, Disability allowance and Elderly pension and burdens of loan and the reasons for availing loans from different sources during the lockdown period. They were also asked about the challenges they faced while accessing relief and entitlements.

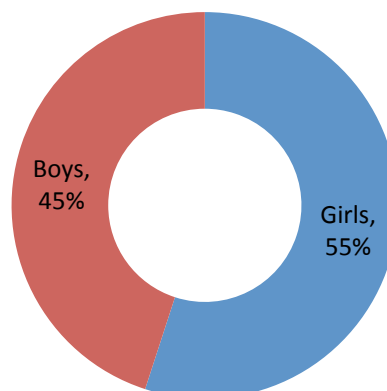
Besides that, the study also tried to understand if there is any other health, nutritional, mobility or care impact on children with disabilities. Further, the STCI team have been in touch with and facilitating relief support to members of these communities in Mumbai, which has in turn, contributed in understanding the unique situation of the community members.

Overall, 56 children between the ages of 7 and 15 were interviewed randomly via telephone. Sample details are below:

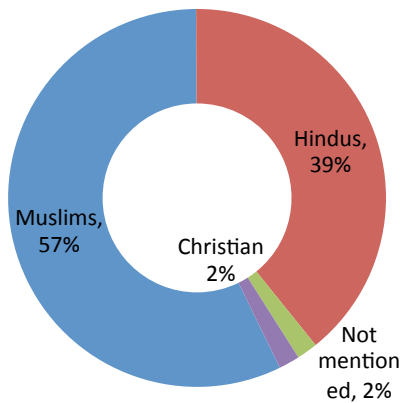
**Chart 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents with Intellectual Disability (n=36)**



**Chart 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents with Auditory Disability (n=20)**



**Chart 3: Religious Distribution of study Respondents (n=56)**



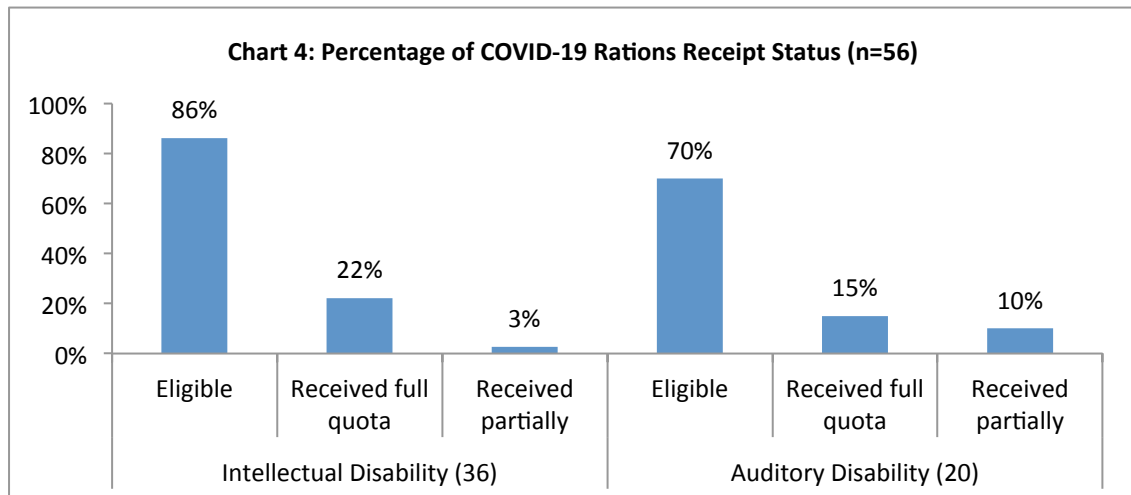
The caregivers for these respondents include parents, siblings, grandmother and uncle. The family income for respondents is from members involved in daily wage work – largely as vegetable vendors and auto drivers .

This is **not** a representative sample, nor a structured study.

## 2. FINDINGS

### 2.1 Access to Food

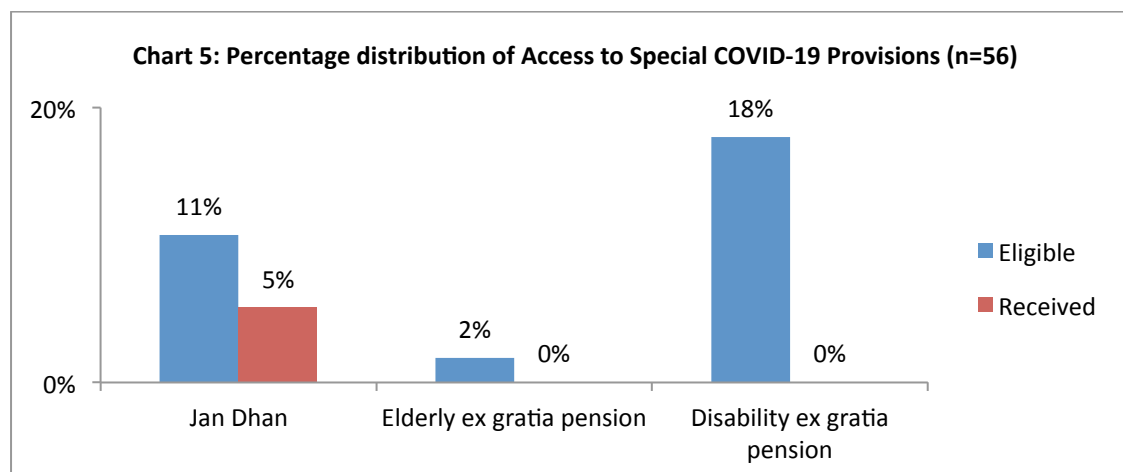
The data collection team spoke to families of 31 children with intellectual disability and 20 with auditory disability. Chart 4 below shows the distribution of eligibility and access to rations. While many families received the 5 kgs rice and 1 kg pulse, three among those with auditory disability and one among those with intellectual disability, reported that they received only rice (but not pulses) in the month April. These are anyway part of the existing PDS scheme of the state Government. The special allotment as promised by the Central Government under Public Distribution System (PDS) will be available only in later April. Though none of them have gone hungry yet, **three children overall reported to have merely two meals a day. One of them mentioned surviving on tea and biscuits.**



It is noteworthy that only **one in four or five** families has received any ration for the last one month (since 17 March) when the lockdown was announced. With families dependant on daily wages for survival, this has implications in immediate and long term health and nutritional needs of the families and especially the children.

## 2.2 Government Relief Entitlements due to Outbreak of COVID -19

Five schemes were explored with the 56 respondents – including Jan Dhan payment of Rs 500, Elderly ex gratia pension, Disability ex gratia pension, Ujjwala and Kisan Saman Nidhi Yojana. Of these, none of the families were registered for the Ujjwala or Kisan Saman Nidhi Yojana. A summary of findings related to the three others are detailed in chart 5 below:



In this specific context, even though **10 children with intellectual disability are entitled for disability allowance; none of them have received money** from the Maharashtra government.

## 2.3 Indebtedness

Out of the 56 families interviewed 9 have already taken loan from various sources during the lockdown period. While asked about the reasons of such burdens, they expressed the uncertainty of family income, which compelled them to take loans to buy grains and groceries - largely to manage the household expenses. 5 of the 9 families have taken loans from relatives while 3 from friends and 1 of them has taken from their neighbour. Close to 20% families are indebted in less than a month since the lockdown, with loans taken in the informal loan space, where there is limited or no control on the pressures and interest rates that are being levied. This points to a likelihood of families being made more vulnerable and pushed into situations of bonded labour.

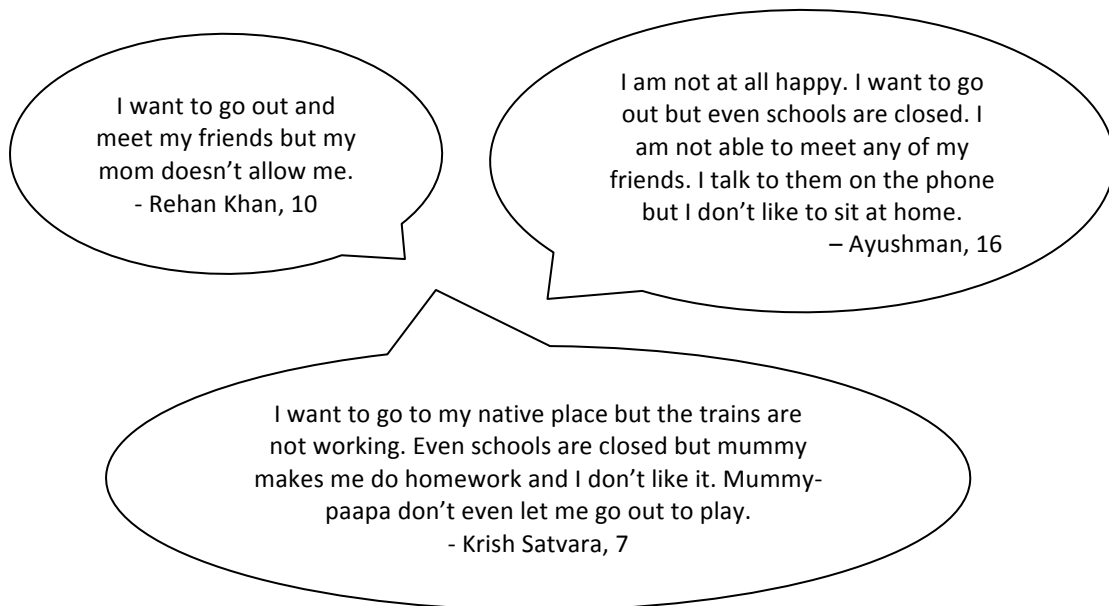
## 2.4 Issues Specific to Children with Disabilities

Impact on several aspects of the daily life of children with disability was explored with them. These have been summarised below:

### **Problems faced by children with auditory disabilities**

**Four** children with auditory disabilities are facing problems because their parents are unable to repair their hearing aids while **two** children are unable to use their equipment due to unavailability of battery during the country-wide lockdown.

- **Impact on nutrition:** The ongoing situation of COVID-19 outbreak hasn't impacted the nutritional behaviour of children with intellectual disabilities except one. In the case of children with auditory disability, seven children out of 20 reported some impact on food and nutrition
- **Mobility:** Two children with auditory disability out of 20 want to go out while two are keen to attend school. In the case of children with intellectual disabilities only one out of 36 reported that the lockdown has impacted their mobility.
- **Care:** As far as 'care at home' is concerned, seven children with auditory disability reported to have shown immense self-care while one specifically mentioned to be wearing mask and washing hands at regular intervals. The remaining mentioned getting more or less the usual care. One child with intellectual disability has been reported to have some impact on care.
- **Physical and mental Behaviour:** Four families of children with auditory disability reported subtle change in children's behaviour. Two of them sometimes **get irritated staying at home**, one has become mischievous and one constantly checks out the mobile phone. Only one child with intellectual disability has had some impact on her behaviour as shared by her mother.



On a more positive note, all the 56 respondents were asked about **engaging with family and spaces of freedom**. All the children with intellectual disability who were interviewed shared that they are spending quality time with their caregivers. One of them plays with siblings while one even helps her mother. For them, it's a freedom from their daily routines. 18 among the 20 interviewed children with auditory disability are spending more time with parents while one is also trying to communicate in two words. Only one child has been reported to have no positive impact due to prevailing familial conflicts.

### 3. Reflections and Recommendations

Children with disabilities have been severely impacted by the lockdown. The lack of physical activity has tended to make the more aggressive with families and often the boredom has led to irritability which parents find difficult to manage. Social interaction among children without disabilities are much higher than the children with disabilities in the communities the families live in. Hence this has led to a sense of secondary isolation. The closing down of schools has led to a loss of learning which will last longer as anticipated. Instead of parents being able to spend more time with children, frustration and familial glitches have increased as the parents are more in touch with the reality of children's life. Financial issues, fear of loss of livelihood and children's health are some of the other concerns emerged from the lockdown situation. Set against this backdrop, here below are some recommendations:

1. With regard to the schemes and Government provisions Rs 500 is not sufficient for the Jan Dhan Yojana and a minimum Rs 2500 should be provided for the next six months. For those who do not have Jan Dhan accounts, these accounts should be opened on an urgent basis.
2. The need for a cash allowance for the families of children with disability needs to be recognised. The families would have to address the special needs of the children, for the children would not be able to go to school. The additional nutrition need and educational needs, including access to equipment repairs and parts, are often not voiced. The government should ensure a minimum entitlement of Rs 2000 per month per child with disability.
3. In terms of the small businesses that will begin operation in a phased manner, those who support with repair of devices used by persons with disability, should be prioritised
4. A framework of cross-learning needs to be built with the Non Governmental Organisations working with specially abled children across the country. Four major components of the framework can be learning, complementing, assessing and providing inputs to each other. While this health emergency has brought the world together, there is a need to exchange assets and expertise across spaces. As warriors in this ongoing crisis, complimentary cooperation with phases of cooperative learning and cross border sharing is a potential way-out.
5. An open platform or helpline needs to be put in place where families with specially abled children from across the country can get support and advice.
6. The specially abled children who are still outside the reach of NGOs working in this field need to be integrated so that they can access the benefits of government schemes.

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