



Media Contact:

Allie Wittry
Senior Communications Associate
@womendeliver.org
+1 331 457 7287

New Study: Adolescent Girls and Young Women Want Smarter Digital Sexual and Reproductive Health Resources and Services

New York, NY | Monday, August 10, 2020 — As people and health systems around the world are increasingly relying on digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, [Women Deliver](#) and [Girl Effect](#) today release [new research](#) on how adolescent girls and young women in India, Malawi, and Rwanda use digital platforms to learn about their sexual and reproductive health. The new study finds that adolescent girls and young women are using digital platforms as a one-stop shop to find information about their bodies, their health, and their relationships, but they aren't acting on the information partially due to a lack of trust and fear of social stigma. This research is especially relevant as girls and women face [additional barriers](#) to accessing high-quality sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services and products during the pandemic.

Launching in the lead up to [International Youth Day](#), the study is significant not only for its findings but also because young people were meaningfully engaged throughout the research process. Recognizing that young people are the experts of their own lives, Women Deliver and Girl Effect worked with young people, including Women Deliver Young Leaders and Girl Effect's researchers in India, Malawi, and Rwanda, to shape the research questions, collect the data, discuss the results, and generate recommendations.

Young people, especially girls and women, often turn to digital resources to learn about their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), but these often do not fully address their needs because young people are not meaningfully engaged in design and implementation. Through Girl Effect's Technology Enabled Girl Ambassadors (TEGA) research methodology, young female researchers conducted mobile-based peer-to-peer research to understand girls' perspectives and how digital SRHR resources and services can be better designed.

"I have learnt the importance of facilitating people to express their opinions and thoughts through TEGA," said Shewta, a TEGA from Jaipur, India. "It has made me independent and confident. It is a great way to understand the way young people think as the interviewer and interviewee share common features and the conversation flows freely. It is important to involve young people as they understand their problems like no one else and have ideas for how to solve them. They are curious and confident and capable of doing anything."

"We can't assume what young people's needs are — mobile technology gives us the ability to bring young people into the conversation, listen to their solutions and improve services for them. Our TEGA methodology enables researchers aged 18–24 to capture fast, accurate, and authentic insights into the lives and experiences of their peers," said Isabel Quilter, Senior Evidence Manager at Girl Effect. "During this project, TEGAs co-created the survey questions, collected the data through interviews with girls and

WOMEN DELIVER

young women, hosted workshops with respondents to validate findings and worked with them to shape recommendations.”

One hundred and sixty-nine adolescent girls and young women participated in the study, and, while overall they reported using digital platforms to look for information on SRHR, they had varied experiences in accessing digital SRHR information:

- While digital platforms offer access to varied SRHR information, especially those that remain taboo, participants reported they do not act on information they find, partly due to a lack of trust in its credibility.
- Across the three countries, respondents shared that they verify, discuss, or confirm digital SRHR information with trusted peers and family members.
- Stigma and socio-cultural norms were a large factor in how adolescent girls and young women in the study act on the information they find. Respondents shared that while they were unsure of the accuracy of the SRHR resources they found online, they were fearful of judgement or repercussions if, for example, family members found out they went to a health center.
- Overall, adolescent girls and young women are wary of acting on the SRHR information they find online — due to concerns about accuracy, privacy, and stigma associated with sexual and reproductive health.

The study demonstrated that adolescent girls and young in India, Malawi, and Rwanda are interested in how they can protect and exercise their sexual and reproductive health and rights, but the uncertainty around the accuracy of information, privacy concerns, and social norms and stigma remain barriers to action. **Previous data demonstrate that when adolescent girls and young women can proactively and independently manage and express their SRHR in an informed way, it [increases their ability](#) to live happier, healthier, and more fulfilling lives — and advances gender equality worldwide.**

This research outlines a compelling case for increased meaningful engagement of young people in the development, design, and implementation of digital health services and resources. To harness the power of digital platforms to improve adolescent girls’ and young women’s SRHR, governments, policymakers, civil society, content and application developers, and donors — working meaningfully alongside young people — should commit to:

1. Accurate and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights information online;
2. Strengthening connections between online sexual and reproductive health and rights information and youth-friendly medical and community services;
3. Creating meaningful opportunities for young people to design, test, and implement digital SRHR programs and platforms;
4. Implementing digital literacy education in and out of schools so that adolescent girls and young women feel confident in identifying reputable sources of SRHR information privately, and
5. Increased investments in gender equality, including the support of comprehensive sexuality education, which can foster an environment where all people can learn about their SRHR and access services.



6. Increased investments in gender equality, including the support of comprehensive sexuality education, which can foster an environment where all people can learn about their SRHR and access services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that credible digital health resources and services are key to sustaining critical SRHR care during crises and beyond.

“The COVID-19 pandemic caused a dramatic shift in how all people access and receive healthcare, which is why it's more critical than ever that accurate and reliable digital resources and services take into account the unique needs and expertise of adolescent girls and young women who are too frequently left behind in health systems,” said Divya Mathew, Senior Manager, Research, Policy and Advocacy at Women Deliver. “Digital platforms must be co-created and implemented by young people to equip them with tools and information to protect their health, and we must also foster enabling environments where stigma and harmful norms aren't barriers to good health.”

In 2015, world leaders committed to the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim “to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” by 2030. To deliver on this ambitious goal, governments, civil society, content and app developers, and donors need to center girls and women in all planning and implementation efforts. Girls and women are experts in their own experiences, and they are forging solutions to shared global challenges such as climate change, poverty, conflict, and persistent gender inequality — now is the time to share power, advance progress, and drive change together.

To learn more about the report and delve deeper into the country-specific findings, visit the full report [here](#).

###

This research is supported by funding from the:

- Government of Canada, provided through Global Affairs Canada.
- MSD, through MSD for Mothers, the company's \$500 million initiative to help create a world where no woman dies giving life. MSD for Mothers is an initiative of Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, NJ, U.S.A.

About Women Deliver: Women Deliver is a leading global advocate that champions gender equality and the health and rights of girls and women. Our advocacy drives investment — political and financial — in the lives of girls and women worldwide. We harness evidence and unite diverse voices to spark commitment to gender equality. And we get results. Anchored in sexual and reproductive health, we advocate for the rights of girls and women across every aspect of their lives. We know that investing in girls and women will deliver progress for all.

Girl Effect is an international non-profit working to support adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries through a stage in life that defines their future. Started by the Nike Foundation, Girl Effect supports girls to make choices for themselves so they are healthier, more educated, and financially secure. To do this we create safe spaces for girls to find information and advice, online and in their communities. We answer girls' curiosities,

WOMEN DELIVER

questions, and concerns through our content and products, and connect girls to services that help them take control of their bodies and their lives. Our work is based on 15 years of deep insights and data from girls during the complex stage of adolescents. Girl Effect is now an independent organisation reaching over 20 million people.

Technology Enabled Girl Ambassadors (TEGA) is Girl Effect's girl-operated digital research tool to uncover unique insights into girls' lives by allowing girls to collect close to real-time insights into the lives of their peers. Girls aged 18–24 are empowered and trained using a bespoke mobile app to become Market Research Society (MRS) qualified researchers and TEGAs.