

Examining the Behavioral, Hygienic and Expectational Changes in Adolescents and Young Women during COVID-19 Quarantine in Colombia

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Abstract : Women and girls have specific health needs, but during health pandemics such as COVID19 they are less likely to have access to quality essential health information, commodities and services, or insurance coverage for routine and catastrophic health expenses, especially in rural and marginalized communities. This is compounded by multiple or intersecting inequalities, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, and sexual orientation, among others. Despite concerted collective action, there is a lack of information on the situation of women, adolescents and youth, including gender inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. Much more needs to be done to amplify the lived realities of women and adolescents in global and national advocacy and policy responses. The COVID 19 pandemic reflects the need for systematic advocacy policies based on the lived experiences of women and adolescents, underpinned by human rights. This research is part of the initiative of Profamilia Association (Solidarity Study), and its objective is twofold: i) to analyze the behavioral changes and immediate expectations of Colombians during the stage of relaxation of the confinement measures decreed by the national government; and ii) to identify the needs, experiences and resilient practices of adolescents and young women during the COVID-19 crisis in Colombia. Descriptive analysis of data collected by Profamilia through the Solidaridad study, an exploratory cross-sectional descriptive study that used subnational level data from a nonprobabilistic sample survey conducted to 1735 adults, between September 01 and 11, 2020. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders about their experiences during COVID19, under three key axes: i) main challenges for adolescents and young women; ii) examples of what has worked well in responding to the challenge; and iii) how/what services are/should be provided during COVID-19 (and beyond) to address the challenge. Interviewees were selected based on prior mapping of social groups of interest. In total, 23 adolescents and young women participated in the interviews. The results show that people adopted behavioral changes such as wearing masks, avoiding people with symptoms, and reducing mobility, but there was also a doubling of concerns for many reasons, from effects on mental health, sexual health, and unattended reproductive health to the burden of care and working at home. The favorable perception that people had at the beginning of the quarantine about the response and actions of the national and local government to control Covid-19 decreased over the course of the quarantine. The challenges and needs of adolescents and young women were highlighted during the most restrictive measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in disruptions to daily activities, education and work, as well as restrictions to mobility and social interaction. Concerns raised by participants included: impact on mental health and wellbeing due to disruption of daily life; limitations in access to formal and informal education; food insecurity; migration; loss of livelihoods; lack of access to health information and services; limitations to sexual and reproductive health and rights; insecurity problems; and problems in communication and treatment among household members.

Keywords : COVID-19, changes in behavior, adolescents, women

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