



**Lessons learned from nimble adaptations to organisations' responses to the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of adolescents in the context of the COVID-19 crisis**

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**Country: India**

## **Talking about Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues (TARSHI)**

*Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues (TARSHI) is a registered non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Delhi, India. The organization was founded in 1996 and believes that all people have the right to sexual wellbeing and to a self-affirming and enjoyable sexuality. TARSHI works closely with women's groups, queer groups, NGOs, and educational institutions on gender, sexuality, sexuality education, and wellbeing.*

### **Were you delivering services to young people before the COVID-19 crisis?**

We currently do not consider ourselves as a service-delivery organization. We provide capacity-building support and comprehensive sexuality education to a diverse set of individuals within other organizations and institutions who then work directly with young people.

Since our beginnings in 1996, we have seen that young people do not have access to diverse information on sexuality tailored to their needs. Working with such individuals and organisations helps us contribute to a pool of service providers who begin to think about and discuss sexuality with diverse audiences, including young people, using rights-based approaches.

We have a range of publications for children and young people, features videos and other informational content on sexuality on its social media channels and YouTube, and conducts informative sessions on sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people in colleges.

Building on 'The Orange Book: A Teachers' Workbook on Sexuality' developed more than a decade ago, we also offer online and face-to-face capacity building for teachers and educators to equip them with required skills to engage with young people in schools on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues.

## ***What new approaches did you use to respond to the barriers created by the COVID-19 pandemic to reach young people?***

**Survey:** In May 2020, we conducted a survey on sexual pleasure during the pandemic, in which a little more than a fourth of the respondents were in the age group of 18-24 years. Results of the survey showed that fear of virus transmission had affected the sexual and reproductive lives of 72 percent of the respondents while 14 percent could not access contraceptives.

**Internal culture shift:** At TARSHI, we have always prioritized self-care, but the pandemic really pushed us to walk the talk. We had many more intentional internal conversations about stress management and mental health, including holding a weekly team self-care session for all staff. During the peak of the second wave of the pandemic in India (April-May 2021), we managed our workload to only focus on “must-dos”, and also reduced our usual messaging on social media, in favor of more self-care resources.

**Online capacity building:** In-person capacity-building initiatives took a hit due to the pandemic. For example, we could no longer support in-person trainings we had planned in a school and with an organization working with trans people and sex workers. We have had online courses on SRHR since 2011, but when the pandemic hit, we saw the potential for online learning, be it through online courses or web-based sessions, grow. People’s comfort level in using a laptop or phone for learning and discussions improved. Many more learners signed up for our online courses on SRHR and CSE. We conducted several sessions for parents on talking to their children about sexuality-related issues and on sexual and reproductive health and rights for students in college. We also found value in doing online capacity-building on stress and burnout for SRHR activists. We always cared about this issue; however, COVID-19 has strengthened our focus on it. There could often be a high cognitive dissonance among people working in SRHR and issues related to gender, disability, mental health, and more. We advocate for others to have sexual rights for instance, but may find it difficult to apply these in one’s own life. During the pandemic, we conducted online trainings and developed an online course and a website on stress management and burnout prevention for people in people work.

**Web pages:** Owing to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of people’s lives, including on their sexual and reproductive health, we created a new online resource ‘SRHR in COVID Times’. The webpage is a compilation of resources that explore the interrelationship between COVID-19, SRHR and wellbeing primarily in India and largely in the Global South. Through the first wave of the pandemic, its aftermath, and later during the second wave, the resource has been updated regularly with fresh sources and perspectives on COVID-19 and SRHR.

Through this resource, we aim to create a repository of articles, studies, and perspectives on the impact of COVID-19 on SRHR, and wellbeing, areas that are often ignored in mainstream discussions on the pandemic. We believe that the resource will be useful for researchers, journalists, and anyone looking to analyze COVID-19 through the lens of SRHR, gender, and wellbeing, including among marginalized communities.

The resource has been accessed over 1500 times between May 2020 and October 2021. The information is sorted into the following categories: Sexuality and SRHR; Gender; Self-care and Wellbeing; Marginalized communities; Get help or Contribute' and General, which included information about COVID-19.

## ***Why did you decide to use these approaches?***

As an organization that has been around for a while, we understand the value and power of curation and archiving. Through pulling together resources from the Global South about COVID-19 and SRHR, we have built a repository of materials that may be valuable for research.

We realized that in the initial weeks of the pandemic and lockdown, there was a deluge of information that was soon overwhelming for many people, including young people. We wanted the information available to be scientific, authentic, reliable, comprehensible and accessible in one place for those looking for specific resources related to COVID-19 and SRHR. This led us to curate relevant content and upload them on our website.

Furthermore, we have a rights-based approach to our work and adopt an intersectional lens in targeting our audiences. For instance, we wondered about how trans people's mental health was affected during the pandemic. What about trans people specifically from remote, disadvantaged areas of the country? What are specific concerns of people with disabilities during the pandemic? This guided how we designed and delivered online content in an inclusive manner.

## ***How are you working to find out if these approaches are having the desired impact?***

We do have numbers in terms of page views and reach and such. But as a pro-rights organization, we find that it is important to contextualize these numbers with qualitative input. How has a particular resource on a website been helpful to an individual? Below, we share how three different resources were helpful to users.

### ***•Self-care essentials: Resources for people doing people work***

Since its launch in mid-December 2020 and October 2021, over 2400 users have accessed self-care essentials, and viewed our pages over 7000 times. Our worksheets have been downloaded over 1200 times.

"TARSHI...understands the importance of mental wellbeing and burnout of activists working in the care profession. This website will be a very useful resource hub for all of us both personally and professionally." –Co-founder, Nazariya– Queer Feminist Resource Group

- **A new online course on stress management and burnout prevention**

We were able to collect testimonials from the first batch of learners who have accessed our short online course *"Reflect, Realign, Renew: Manage stress and keep burnout away"*

*"This course was very useful to me in understanding and recognising my stressors, the videos were easy to understand, short and kept to the point. Would definitely recommend this course to others, particularly those struggling with managing their stress and incorporating self-care into their daily routines!"*—Student in Gender Studies

*"I would highly recommend this course for individuals and organizational leaders! Might even be more fun to do as a group :)"* –RESURJ Member

- **Self-care during the pandemic: An article from TARSHI's magazine *In Plainspeak***

This article describes our experiences and offerings on our work on wellbeing, stress management, and burnout prevention during the pandemic. This includes descriptions and images from our social media activities in June and July 2020, which were seen by nearly 10,000 people on Twitter, and were liked over 200 times on Instagram.

The screenshot shows the TARSHI website interface. At the top right, there are links for 'Accessibility Options' and 'Site Map'. A search bar with 'Enter Search Term' and a 'Go' button is present. The main header reads 'Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues'. Below the header is the TARSHI logo and a navigation menu with items: Home, What We Do, Resources, Publications, eMagazine, and Self-care. A secondary navigation bar includes categories: Sexuality and SRHR, Gender, Self-care and Wellbeing, Marginalised communities, Get help or Contribute, and General. The article title 'SRHR in COVID times' is displayed in a large font with a red underline. The article text discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SRHR and provides information about the resources available on the page.

# **Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues (TARSHI)**

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