

IMPACT EVALUATION

GIRL ICON PROGRAM

2026



Study Commissioned by



Milaan – Be The Change

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Survey Conducted and Report Prepared by



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INTRODUCTION

Context

India is home to one of the largest adolescent populations in the world, over 253 million individuals between the ages of 10 and 19, nearly half of whom are girls. Adolescence is a critical window for investment in health, education, and life skills. Yet for millions of girls growing up in rural and socially marginalized communities, this window closes far too early.

Structural Barriers to Girls' Development

Despite improvements in school enrolment over the past decade, more than 1 in 8 adolescents drop out before completing secondary school, a rate that is higher among girls from economically disadvantaged and rural households. Early marriage compounds this challenge further. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), nearly 1 in 4 women aged 20–24 in India was married before the age of 18. Early marriage is directly linked to school dropout, restricted economic participation, and heightened health risks.

Beyond education and marriage, girls in marginalized rural communities face a web of compounded disadvantages – limited access to reliable health information, restricted physical mobility, exclusion from household and community decision-making, and inadequate exposure to digital and financial tools. Restrictive gender norms shape and sustain these barriers, limiting girls' ability to exercise agency over their own lives.

The Case for Targeted Intervention

These are not inevitable conditions but they are the product of structures and norms that can be changed. Targeted, evidence-based programming that places girls at the centre of their own empowerment has the potential to interrupt these patterns and set a different trajectory. The Girl Icon Program was designed precisely to address this gap.

THE GIRL ICON PROGRAM: DESIGN AND APPROACH

Program Design

The Girl Icon Program (GIP), implemented by Milaan Foundation, is a community-based leadership initiative targeting adolescent girls aged 12–18 in rural and socially marginalized communities. The program combines structured life-skills training with peer-group engagement, mentorship, and community mobilization to equip girls with the knowledge, confidence, and social support they need to navigate and challenge the barriers they face.

Program Architecture

The program is built around three progressive leadership domains that move girls from personal growth to community action:

- **Leading Self** – Girls develop knowledge and confidence in areas directly affecting their own well-being, including physical health, menstrual health, sexual and reproductive health, and personal aspirations.

Leading Others – Girls build the skills to guide and influence their peers, facilitating group sessions on education, digital and financial literacy, gender norms, and child marriage within their own villages.

Leading Social Change – Girls step beyond their peer groups to engage with families and communities, advocating for girls’ rights and challenging gender-regressive norms in their immediate social environment.

The Girl Icon as a Peer Leader

Each Girl Icon is an adolescent girl from within the target community – selected, trained, and supported to lead a group of her peers. This peer-to-peer model is central to the program’s approach: change is not delivered from the outside but generated from within the community itself.

Community Action: The Social Action Project

A distinctive feature of the program is the Social Action Project, in which Girl Icons and their peer groups identify a locally relevant barrier like related to girls’ education, early marriage, or gender discrimination. Further they design and implement a community-led response to address these identified barriers. This positions girls not merely as beneficiaries of the program, but as active agents of change within their own communities.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND COVERAGE

Evaluation Framework

The impact of the GIP was assessed through a rigorous impact evaluation covering the 2024–25 program cohort over an 18-month intervention cycle. The longitudinal evaluation study involving a baseline and an endline assessment was conducted by an independent third-party research team using a mixed-methods approach and a quasi-experimental research design. It combined large-scale structured surveys with qualitative group discussions and community interviews to capture both the measurable scale and the lived reality of program outcomes.

Study Groups and Analytical Approach

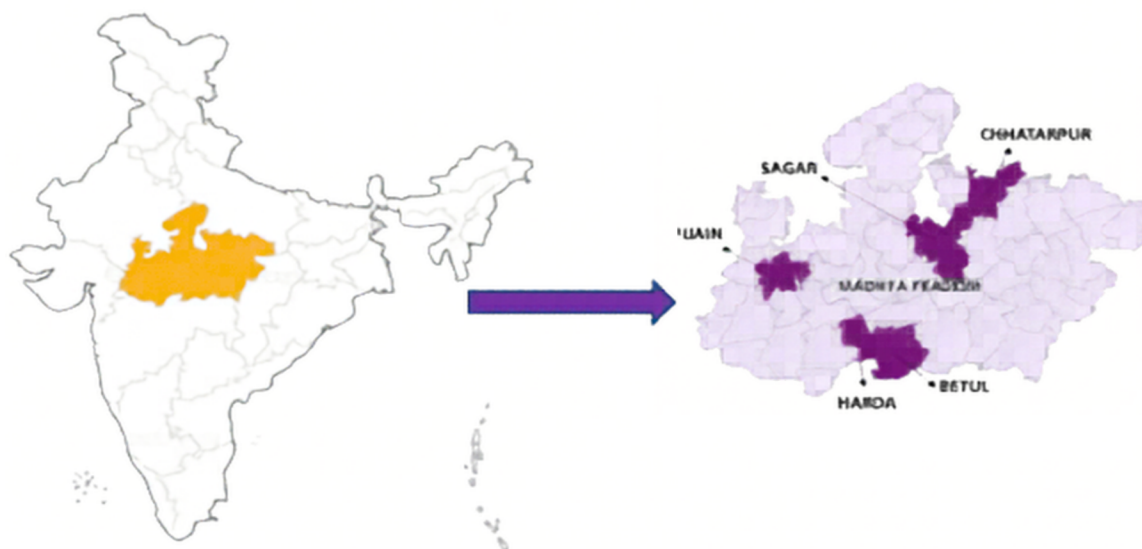
The evaluation tracked three distinct groups of adolescent girls across five districts (Betul, Chhatpur, Sagar, Harda and Ujjain) of Madhya Pradesh:

Girl Icons (108 girls at endline: 108 girls at baseline) – the leaders who received intensive program training and led sessions in their villages

Peer Group (1.044 girls at endline: 1.062 at baseline) – girls from program villages who regularly attended sessions facilitated by Girl Icons

Control Group (1.041 girls at endline; 1.062 at baseline) – girls from comparable nearby villages with no exposure to the program

All three groups were surveyed at the start of the program (baseline) and again at the end of the program (endline). Comparing changes across these three groups rather than simply measuring before and after within the program group alone allows the evaluation to isolate what changed specifically because of the program, as distinct from broader changes occurring in society over the same period.



Program Reach and Equity Focus

The program targeted communities where girls face the greatest disadvantages. The large majority of participants belong to economically vulnerable households and come from communities where girls have historically had limited access to education, health information, and meaningful participation in decisions that affect their lives. This equity focus is not incidental; it is central to the program's design and to the significance of the outcomes reported in this document.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Composite Program Impact: The Headline Result

The GIP has generated a meaningful and statistically significant impact on adolescent girls in rural Madhya Pradesh, **with an effect size of 0.54 across key indicators** including agency, gender attitudes, soft skills, voice and choice, digital literacy, and perceptions on early marriage and gender-based violence. The results indicate that the programme contributed to clear and measurable improvements in several areas of girls' development. For a program working against entrenched gender norms, within some of India's most structurally disadvantaged communities, and within a single 18-month cycle, it is a result of genuine significance. It confirms that the girl icon model which is peer-led, community-embedded, and ownership-driven, works.

Differentiated Pathways of Change across Outcome Domains

The findings across the program's nine outcome domains tell a two-part story that is important to read together rather than in isolation. The first tier includes five indicators where the program's impact is statistically robust, consistent across geographies, and clearly attributable to participation. Both girl icons and girls in intervention villages showed meaningful improvement - not simply in absolute scores, but relative to comparable communities where no program was present. This is where the program has demonstrably and rigorously moved the needle.

The second tier, encompassing physical health, menstrual health management, sexual and reproductive health, financial literacy, and education and career aspirations, tells a more nuanced

story. Positive directional movement is visible, particularly among girl icons, and in several cases the gains are substantial at the individual level. However, given the influence of deep-rooted cultural norms, generational conditioning, and the relatively short duration of the intervention, changes in more entrenched behaviours and structural outcomes may take longer to manifest in practice. These are areas that demand longer engagement cycles, stronger family and community integration, and sustained investment beyond a single cohort.

Contextualising the Effect Size: Impact Achieved Against Active Regression

The program's composite effect size of 0.54 must be understood in its full context and that context is not one of stagnation. Across several key domains, girls in control communities did not just fail to improve during the same period but their scores declined. In sexual and reproductive health, attitude towards gender equality, and perceptions on early marriage and gender-based violence, the absence of program intervention was associated with a measurable movement in the negative direction. Gender-repressive norms, where unchallenged, do not hold still. The program's impact was therefore achieved not against a neutral backdrop but against one of active regression, a fact that makes the 0.54 effect size not merely a measure of progress, but a measure of reversal.

The Case for Prioritising Agency-Based Indicators

The five indicators driving the program's composite effect size are not ends in themselves. They are upstream determinants of the two outcomes that matter most in the lives of adolescent girls in these communities: the prevention of child marriage and the completion of secondary education. The evidence base on this relationship is well-established and directly relevant.

ICRW's landmark study, *More Power to Her: How Empowering Girls Can Help End Child Marriage* (ICRW, 2014), demonstrates across multiple country contexts including India that strengthening girls' agency, their voice, their confidence, and their sense of self-efficacy, is among the most sustained and reliable pathways to reducing the incidence of early marriage. The world bank's evidence from adolescent girls' empowerment programming in India establishes that shifts in agency and foundational life skills are the preconditions on which both educational and economic gains are subsequently built (World Bank, 2019). A rigorous evaluation of life skills programming in Rajasthan, India further confirms that improvements in adolescent girls' agency and socio-emotional skills are associated with a 25% reduction in school dropout and stronger grade progression (Edmonds, Feigenberg, and Leigh, 2020). Young lives' longitudinal research in India reinforces this finding directly, identifying foundational empowerment including girls' occupational aspirations and self-efficacy developed in early adolescence as among the strongest predictors of secondary and higher education completion among girls from marginalised communities, and noting that girls with stronger agency at age 12 were significantly more likely to complete higher education by age 26 (Singh, Mukherjee, and Kumar, 2023).

The program has moved the upstream levers. The downstream outcomes, fewer girls married before 18, more girls completing school, are where this movement is designed to ultimately arrive.

The sections that follow present the findings for each of the domains assessed in this evaluation, including the overall program impact on girls' agency as well as the nine individual domains. Each section reports changes across girl icons, the peer group, and the control group, examines program impact using a difference-in-differences framework, and contextualises the statistical results with insights from qualitative fieldwork. Taken together, these findings constitute the full evidentiary basis for the conclusions and recommendations that close this report.

FINDINGS

Overall Impact of the Program on Girls' Agency

Evidence of Change and Program Attribution

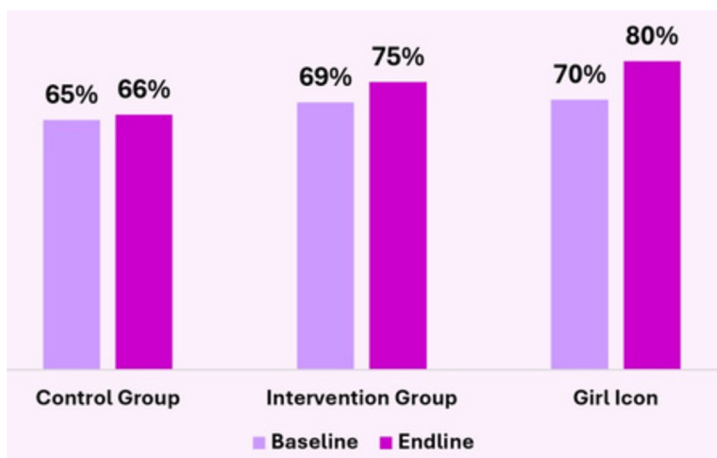
Girls' overall agency increased significantly through the program.

 **+10 pts**
Girl Icons

 **+6 pts**
Intervention

 **+1 pt**
Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON



+1 POINT

65% – 66%

Minimal shift in agency

+6 POINTS

69% – 75%

Significant gains across five domains

+10 POINTS

70% – 80%

Strongest gains as core leaders

EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM ATTRIBUTION

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference-in-Differences (Did) approach to isolate program impact by comparing with non-program areas.

KEY RESULT

+5 percentage points

Net improvement attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

High significant ($p < 0.001$)
Effect size: 0.54 (Strong)

WHAT THIS MEANS

The improvement is sustainable and transformative, consistent across all agency domains.

Transformational impact confirmed

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

The combined gains across agency-building indicators demonstrate the girls to move beyond awareness towards meaningful action. Improvements in general attitudes, voice and choice, soft skills, and digital literacy are strengthening girls' ability to make informed decisions and navigate social constraints.

Overall, the findings show that the program is not only improving individual indicators, but empowering girls with the agency to take control of their futures and shape their life trajectories.

GIRL ICONS EXPERIENCED 10 TIMES THE GAINS

IN OVERALL AGENCY SCORES OF GIRLS WITH NO PROGRAM EXPOSURE.

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Evidence of Change and Program Attribution

Girls' physical health knowledge improved significantly through the program.



+14 pts

Girl Icons



+9 pts

Intervention

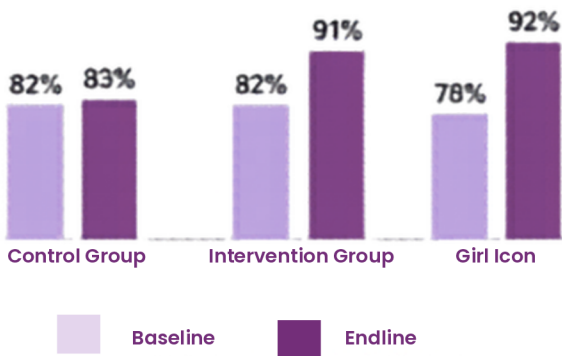


+1 pt

Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON

Physical Health Knowledge Scores



GIRL ICONS

78% → 92%

+14 POINTS

2 out of 3
gained
knowledge

INTERVENTION

82% → 91%

+9 POINTS

Strong
Improvement

CONTROL

82% → 83%

+1 POINT

No Meaningful
Change

EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM ATTRIBUTION

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference-in Differences (Did) approach to isolate program impact by comparing with non-program areas.

KEY RESULT

+8 percentage points

Net impact attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

Highly significant ($p < 0.001$)
Effect size: **0.66** (Moderate to Strong)

WHAT THIS MEANS

A real and meaningful improvement – consistent across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Equitable impact confirmed!

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

Physical health knowledge is a **foundational step** toward girls' empowerment.

Girls who understand their bodies are better equipped to make **informed decisions**.

Peer-led, structured health education – like the Girl Icon model – works powerfully in rural settings.

Girl icons improved **14 times** more than non-participants.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

Evidence of Change and Program Attribution

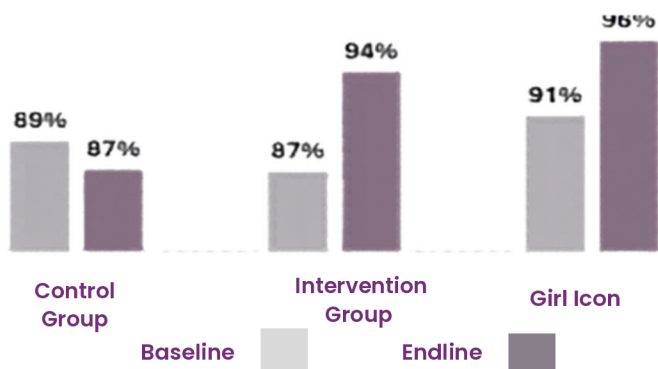
Girls' attitudes towards gender equality improved significantly through the program.

 **+5 pts**
Girl Icons

 **+7pts**
Intervention

 **-2pts**
Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON



GIRL ICONS
+5 POINTS

Strong improvement

INTERVENTION GROUP
+7 POINTS

Strong improvement

CONTROL GROUP
-2 POINTS

Gender norms decline

EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM ATTRIBUTION

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference-in Differences (DID) approach to isolate program impact by comparing with non-program areas.

KEY RESULT

+8.5 percentage points

Net impact attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

Highly significant ($p < 0.001$)

Effect size: 0.61 (Moderate to Strong)

WHAT THIS MEANS

A real and meaningful improvement – consistent across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Equitable impact confirmed

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

Shifting deeply held gender norms is one of the most difficult outcomes to achieve. Peer-led initiatives—like the **Girl Icon program**, where adolescent girls themselves challenge inequality—are highly effective mechanisms for enacting change within rural communities.

GIRL ICONS ARE 9 PERCENTAGE POINTS

MORE GENDER-EQUITABLE THAN NON-PARTICIPANTS

This program is developing more empowered, informed, and equitable girls.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Girls' sexual and reproductive health knowledge improved significantly through the program.

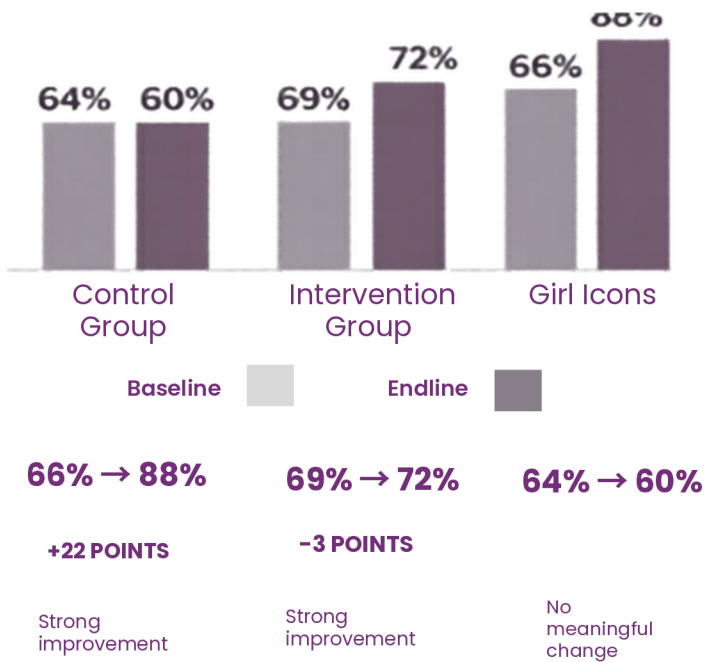
+22 pts
Girl Icons

+3 pts
Intervention

-4 pts
Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON

SRH Knowledge Scores



EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM ATTRIBUTION

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference-in Differences (DiD) approach to isolate program impact by comparing with non-program areas.

KEY RESULT

+7 percentage points

Net impact attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

Highly significant ($p < 0.001$)
Effect size: 0.41 (Moderate)

WHAT THIS MEANS

A real and meaningful improvement—consistent across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Equitable impact confirmed.

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

SRH remains one of the **most underserved** areas of adolescent **health** — stigmatized and **often avoided**, leaving many girls without the knowledge they need to make informed decisions.

Peer-led, structured SRH education —like the Girl Icon model —works effectively in rural settings.

Girl Icons outperform non-participants by 27 percentage points

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Bridging the Soft Skills Gap for Adolescent Girls

Girls' soft skills improved significantly through the program.

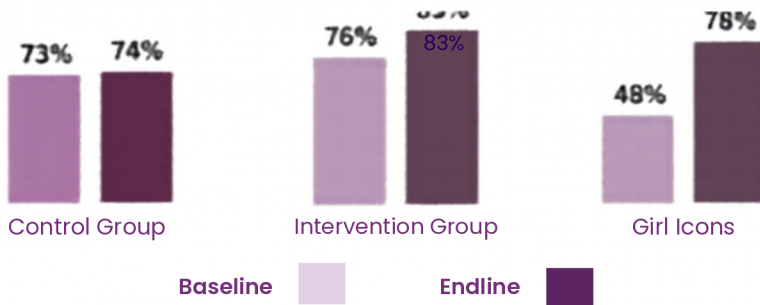
+30 pts
Girl Icons

+7 pts
Intervention Group

+1 pt
Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON

Soft Skills Scores



EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM ATTRIBUTION

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference in Differences (DiD) approach used to isolate program impact.

KEY RESULT

+6 percentage points

Net impact attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

Highly significant ($p < 0.001$)
Effect size: 0.38 (Moderate)

WHAT THIS MEANS

- Real improvements in communication, confidence, and problem-solving
- Impact consistent across socioeconomic groups

Equitable gains confirmed

GROUP-WISE CHANGE

GIRL ICONS

48% → 78%

+30 POINTS

INTERVENTION

76% → 83%

+7 POINTS

CONTROL

73% → 74%

+1 POINT

- Largest transformation
- More than half the skills gap bridged

- Steady improvement
- Strong gains in life skills

- Minimal change
- No meaningful improvement.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

- Girls report greater confidence speaking in public.
- Improved participation at home and in community discussions.
- Reduced hesitation and stronger peer interaction.

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

- Soft skills are critical for real-world readiness and agency.
- Confidence-building peer interaction are key drivers of change.
- Peer-led models like Girl Icons are highly effective.

Girl Icons bridged **more than half** of the soft skills gap.

Program delivers equitable, meaningful gains in life skills.

VOICE AND CHOICE

Evidence of Change and Program Attribution

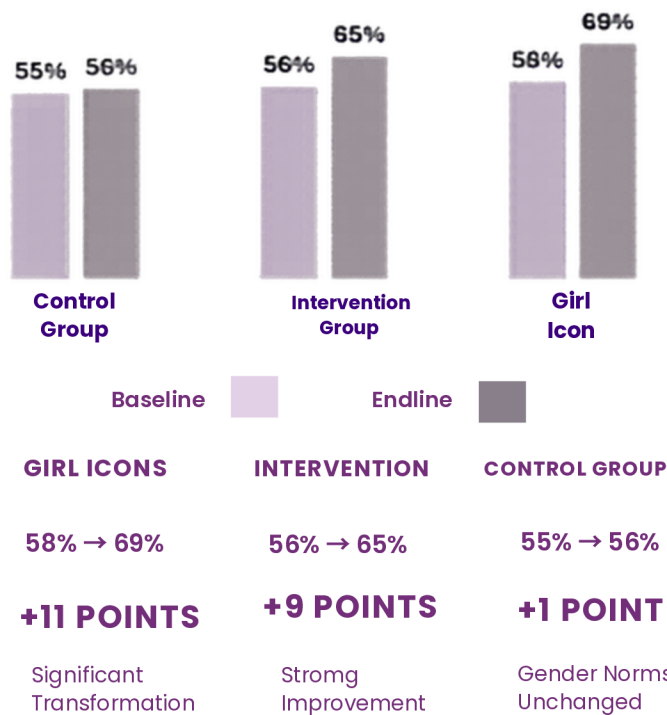
Girls' attitudes to assert their voice and make choices improved significantly through the program.

 **+11 pts**
Girl Icons

 **+9 pts**
Intervention

 **+1 pt**
Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON



EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM ATTRIBUTION

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference-in Differences (DiD) approach to isolate program impact by comparing with non-program areas.

KEY RESULT

+8 percentage points

Net impact attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

Highly significant ($p < 0.001$)
Effect size: 0.36 (Moderate)

WHAT THIS MEANS

A real and meaningful improvement – consistent across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Equitable impact confirmed!

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

Voice and choice – the ability to speak, decide, and be heard – is one of the most foundational yet most constrained capabilities for adolescent girls in rural communities.

The Girl Icon model positions girls as active participants in their own development, and this evidence confirms that such positioning translates into real gains in confidence and decision-making capacity.

GIRL ICONS IMPROVED 11 TIMES

MORE THAN NON-PARTICIPANTS

This program is cultivating more confident, informed, and empowered girls.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Evidence of Change and Program Attribution

Girls' digital literacy improved significantly through the program.



+39 pts

Girl Icons



+5 pts

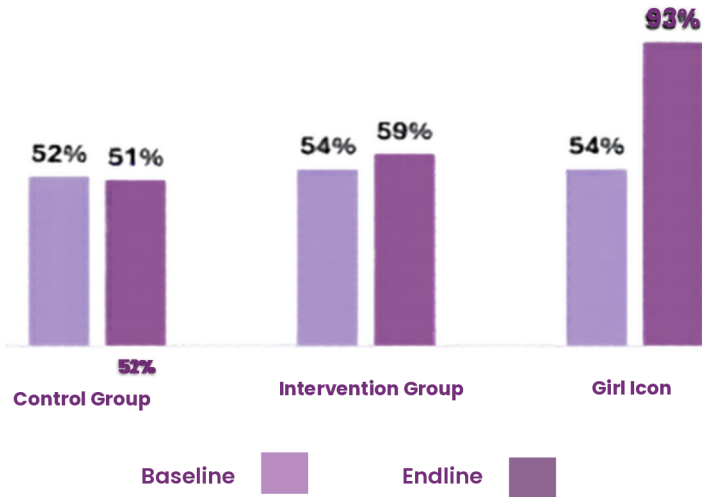
Intervention



-1 pt

Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON



GIRL ICONS
+39 POINTS
54% → 93%
Nearly quadrupling impact

INTERVENTION
+5 POINTS
54% → 59%
Moderate improvement

CONTROL GROUP
-1 POINT
52% → 51%
Decline in digital safety

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference in Differences (DiX) approach to isolate program impact by comparing with non-program areas.

KEY RESULT

+6 percentage points

Net impact attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

Highly significant ($p < 0.001$)
Effect size: 0.34 (Moderate)

WHAT THIS MEANS

A real and meaningful improvement – consistent across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Equitable impact confirmed.

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

Digital literacy is both a safety imperative and an enabling skill – a girl who understands how to navigate digital platforms safely is better protected from harm and better positioned to access information, opportunities, and services.

The Girl Icon model has proven to be a highly effective mechanism for bridging this gap.

GIRL ICONS IMPROVED NEARLY 40 TIMES MORE THAN NON-PARTICIPANTS

This program is preparing more digitally literate, connected, and protected girls.

PERCEPTIONS ON EARLY MARRIAGE & GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Evidence of Change and Program Attribution

Girls' awareness of early marriage and gender-based violence improved significantly through the program.

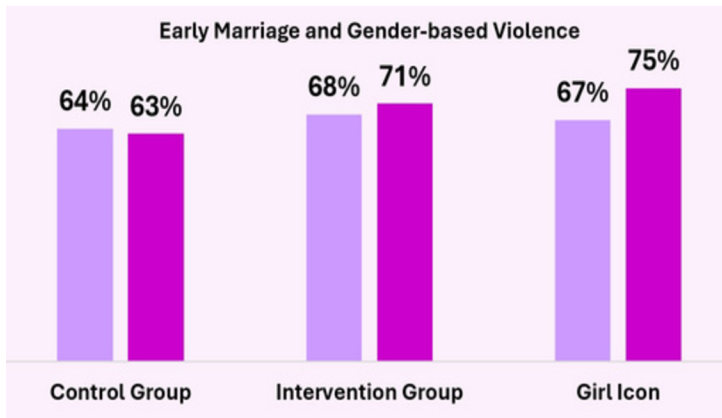
+8 pts
 Girl Icons

+3 pts
 Intervention Group

-1 pt
 Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON

Early Marriage and Gender-based Violence



Baseline ■ Endline ■

+8 POINTS

67% ~ 75%

Significant transformation

+3 POINTS

68% ~ 71%

Modest improvement

-1 POINT

64% ~ 63%

Decline in awareness

EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM ATTRIBUTION

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference in Differences (DID) approach to isolate program impact by comparing with non-program areas.

KEY RESULT

+4 percentage points

Net impact attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

Highly significant ($p < 0.001$)
 Effect size: 0.32 (Moderate)

WHAT THIS MEANS

A real and meaningful improvement — consistent across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Equitable impact confirmed!

GIRL ICONS OUTPERFORM NON-PARTICIPANTS BY 12 PERCENTAGE POINTS



MENSTRUAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT (MHM)

Evidence of Change and Program Attribution

Girls' knowledge and practices in menstrual health management improved significantly through the program!

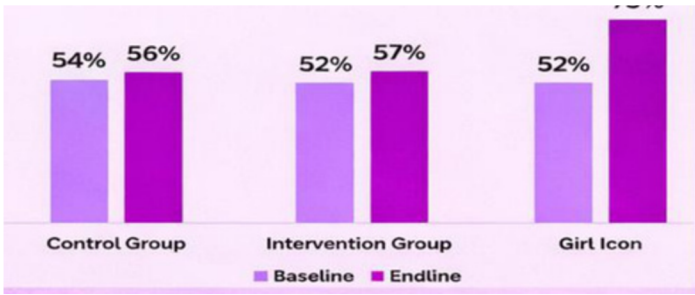
 **+21 pts**
Girl Icons

 **+5pts**
Intervention Group

 **+2 pts**
Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON

Baseline - Endline Comparison in MHM



51% – 73%

A 1 in 4 Girls transformed

52% – 57%

Meaningful improvement

54% – 56%

Modest progress

EVIDENCE OF PROGRAM ATTRIBUTION

WHAT WAS DONE?

Difference-in-Differences (DiD) approach to isolate program impact by comparing with non-program areas.

KEY RESULT

+4 percentage points

Net improvement attributable to the program

STATISTICAL STRENGTH

Highly significant ($p < 0.001$)
Effect size: 0.31 (Moderate)

WHAT THIS MEANS

A real and meaningful improvement confidence in menstrual management across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Equitable impact confirmed!

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

Menstrual health management is essential for adolescent well-being, enabling girls to stay healthy, attend school, and participate confidently. The Girl Icon program dismantles taboos and equips girls to manage their periods, helping break menstrual stigma in rural communities.

GIRL ICONS OUTPERFORM NON-PARTICIPANTS BY 21 PERCENTAGE POINTS

This program has markedly improved menstrual health knowledge and practices.

EDUCATION AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Evidence of Change through the Programme

Girls' educational aspirations strengthened through programme participation.

+8 pts

Girl Icons



+2 pts

Participants

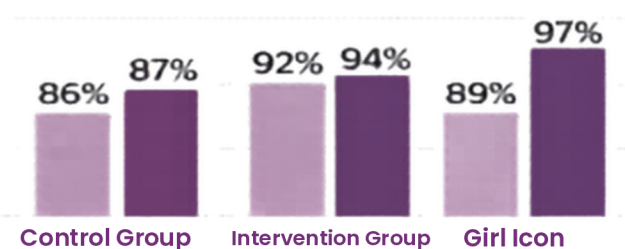


+1 pt

Control Group

BASELINE VS ENDLINE COMPARISON

Education and Career Aspiration Scores



GIRL ICONS

89% → 97%

+ 8 POINTS

Strong rise in educational ambition.

INTERVENTION

92% → 94%

+ 2 POINTS

Programme exposure reinforced educational goals.

WHAT GIRLS SAID

Education builds agency

"Earlier I thought I would stop studying after school. **Now I want to go to college and become a teacher.**

"The **programme sessions helped us think** about our future and what we want to become.

"Now our **parents also encourage us to continue studying.**

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

Education builds agency

Girls who believe in their **educational future** are more likely to stay in school, delay early marriage, and pursue economic independence.

Sustained engagement is essential

To deepen programme impact, longer engagement cycles, stronger school linkages, and active involvement of families and communities.

GIRL ICONS SHOWED THE **STRONGEST IMPROVEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS**

The programme is helping girls imagine broader futures and pursue higher education and careers.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

KEY TRENDS EMERGING FROM THE FINDINGS

The findings of the impact evaluation, taken together, point to a set of clear and consistent patterns that cut across individual indicators and geographies. These cross-cutting trends offer important insights into what is working, where the program's impact is most pronounced, and where it operates against broader structural headwinds.

1. The Peer Leader Model Produces the Deepest Change

Across every outcome domain assessed in this evaluation, Girl Icons, adolescent girls entrusted with the role of leader rather than simply program participant, demonstrated the largest and most consistent gains. This pattern holds regardless of the subject matter, whether health awareness, digital literacy, soft skills, or attitudes toward gender equality. The evidence strongly suggests that ownership-based, responsibility-driven engagement produces fundamentally deeper change than participation alone. When a girl is positioned as a leader and held accountable for the learning of others, she internalises the content in ways that passive participation does not enable.

2. The Program Is Preventing Regress, Not Merely Creating Progress

One of the most significant and often underappreciated findings of this evaluation is the direction of change in the control group. In multiple domains including Sexual and Reproductive Health, Attitude Towards Gender Equality, and Perceptions on Early Marriage and Gender-Based Violence, girls without program exposure did not simply stagnate; their scores declined over the same period. This tells a critical story that in the communities where this program operates, gender-repressive forces are actively at work. The program's value, in these domains, lies not only in advancing knowledge and attitudes but in reversing what would otherwise be a measurable slide backwards.

3. Health and Empowerment Outcomes Are the Program's Strongest

The indicators of Menstrual Health Management, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Voice and Choice, Attitude Towards Gender Equality, and Soft Skills all show meaningful, statistically significant, program-attributable impact. These are precisely the domains at the core of the Girl Icon Program's design, areas where structured peer-led engagement, delivered consistently over time, has the greatest opportunity to produce visible change within an 18-month cycle.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

From Hesitation to Confidence in SRH Awareness

“ Earlier, I was not aware of sexual and reproductive health and felt shy talking about these topics under anyone. After joining the program, I realized these are common issues. It has reduced my hesitation, and now I can even explain these things to others and doctors.

– Girl Icon, FGD, Betul

“ Earlier, I was not aware of proper hygiene practices during menstruation. After attending the sessions under this program, I learned the importance of maintaining hygiene, such as changing pads regularly and washing properly during periods.

– Girl Icon

“ GIP taught us we should not share our account ID details with anyone. And always keep privacy feature on.

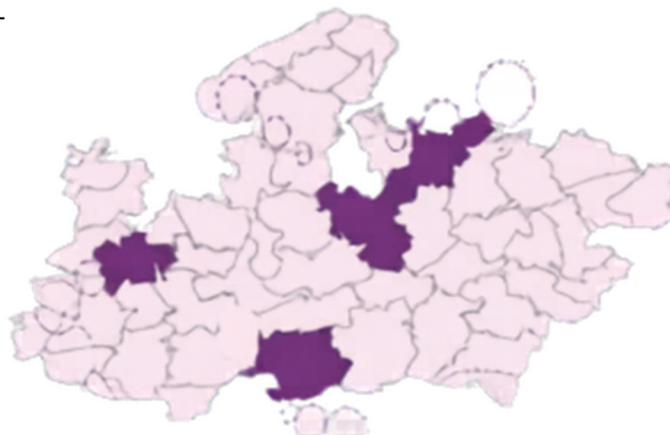
Peer Member, Ujjain

“ Didi (Girl Icon) told us that whenever we get money, we should not spend it unnecessarily and instead save it in our bank account. She also taught us how to use digital payment apps.

– Peer Group Member: FGD with Peers, Sagar

“All of us learned to speak openly and communicate” – Sagar

“Compared to before, the hesitation has opened up now... talking has become easier and we can now openly share our thoughts with someone” – Chhatpur



“Before, I was afraid and couldn't speak to anyone. Now, whoever speaks to me, I look them in the eye and talk back” – Ujjain

“Before, we used to hesitate - even when we knew something at school, we couldn't speak up. Now we can speak well” – Betul

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this evaluation point clearly to a set of actions that would strengthen the program's reach, deepen its impact, and address the structural barriers that restrain adolescent girls' empowerment in these communities.

1. Engaging Parents and Families as Active Program Partners

The barriers adolescent girls face such as menstrual taboos, restricted mobility, and early marriage are rooted in household norms, not individual choices. They are rooted in household norms and family decision-making. Awareness alone is insufficient; the program should systematically incorporate parents, particularly mothers, into structured engagement activities. Leveraging existing community platforms such as Self-Help Groups and ASHA workers can extend the program's reach into the household and create a more enabling home environment for the change it seeks to produce.

2. Bringing Men and Boys into the Conversation

Household and community decision-making continues to be predominantly shaped by male members. Sustainable change in gender norms, practices around early marriage, and responses to gender-based violence will require the active engagement of adolescent boys and male community members not as bystanders but as participants in structured dialogue. The program should develop and pilot dedicated sessions targeting this group, creating spaces for conversations that shift the demand side of gender inequality alongside the supply side.

3. Strengthening Linkages to Community Institutions and Government

Girl Icons currently operate largely within peer group structures. For their awareness and agency to translate into sustained community-level action particularly on issues of gender-based violence prevention and early marriage they need formal connections to panchayats, school leadership, and government health services. Building these linkages will give Girl Icons the institutional backing they need to act not just as peer educators but as genuine agents of change within their communities.

4. Building a Sustainable Girl Icon Network Across Cohorts

The program's most extensively developed resource trained, experienced Girl Icons exits the system at the end of each program cycle. Establishing an alumni network through which senior Girl Icons mentor incoming cohorts would create intergenerational continuity of the program's influence. This would accelerate the learning curve for new Girl Icons, sustain community-level impact between cycles, and build a growing base of young women who have been deeply shaped by the program.

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