

# Uniting Isolated Voices: Girls and Gender-Expansive Youth During COVID-19





**UNITING ISOLATED VOICES:  
GIRLS AND GENDER-  
EXPANSIVE YOUTH DURING  
COVID-19**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alliance for Girls (AFG) is an Oakland-based nonprofit mobilizing girls' champions to address barriers facing girls\* and gender-expansive youth (\*cis girls, trans girls, non-binary youth, gender non-conforming youth, genderqueer youth and any girl-identified youth); create conditions for girls' success; and advance systemic change to achieve equity. AFG catalyzes agencies and systems to shift gender-specific realities, working to ensure that the next generation of women and girls can realize their full potential. It is the largest alliance of girl-serving organizations and leaders in the country, whose membership includes 100+ organizations serving more than 300,000 girls across nine Bay Area counties.

This report would have not been possible without members of AFG's Young Women's Leadership Board (YWLB): Ralitsa Caneva, Uchenna Esomonu, Makayla Harden, Darcy Hatcher, Brianna Jackson, Salaam Adeleke Lateef, Sofia Orduña, Geovanna Veloz, and Sammie Wu. The YWLB worked tirelessly and contributed their unique and critical insights into the analyses and recommendations of this report's findings through iterative meaning making with AFG staff, Evaluation Studio, and the community.



**Report authored by:**



AFG commissioned Evaluation Studio to author the *Uniting Isolated Voices: Girls and Gender-Expansive Youth during COVID-19* report in order to ensure that COVID-19 recovery programming, policy, and funding are informed by the lived experiences of girls and are appropriately centering girls' complexity and needs. Through this report, AFG proactively uplifts gender-responsive, culturally affirming, trauma-informed, strength-based, and developmentally appropriate solutions to the things girls say they need during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report's primary authors are Linda Lu, Founder and Principal, Evaluation Studio; Jocelyn Michelsen, Principal Research Consultant; and Peter Cooper, Principal Research Consultant.

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# A LETTER FROM ALLIANCE FOR GIRLS

Dear Friends,

The COVID-19 pandemic did not create new inequities, it dramatically worsened existing ones. It shone a spotlight on the issues that we, as a society, have neglected to address. For girls, especially Black and Brown girls and gender-expansive youth, multiple factors including isolation, economic insecurity, increased caretaking responsibilities, and the prevalence of stress and anxiety during COVID-19 have destabilized their sense of safety and ability to thrive.

Moreover, this report demonstrated the need for coordinated, systemic response to girls' needs throughout the pandemic. The report was conducted from March, 2020 - March, 2021, and yet there were no significant improvements in any of the key indicators for girls during the course of the pandemic. We do not want to see this trend continue during the recovery phase.

Powerful coordinated response is dependent on good data. Using data to amplify the experiences of girls is at the core of AFG's mission. Since 2013, AFG has been producing youth participatory action research to understand the unique needs of girls and mobilize its membership to address the issues impacting them the most. So when we learned there wasn't enough data to understand the short and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on girls and gender-expansive youth we jumped into action with data collection. We brought our data snapshots to policymakers and government agencies, many of whom were seeing this data for the first time.

The dearth of data about girls makes it difficult to create coherent and coordinated strategies that meet their unique needs - especially for our most underserved girls. More investment is needed to build a girl-centered data infrastructure to understand the impacts gender inequity has on these youth's lives, especially at the intersection of race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Now is the time to commit, in this period of resetting, or we risk leaving girls - 50% of the nation's population - behind.

So what did we learn from the 1214 girls we surveyed? Almost half (44%) of the girls who responded to our survey said they had more caregiving responsibilities than before the pandemic, and 31% noted that these caregiving responsibilities negatively impacted their schooling/education. This is especially insightful given rising childcare costs are at the center of national discussions.

Even before the pandemic, many lower socioeconomic families relied on family members for childcare because of these rising costs. When childcare centers and schools closed, but essential workers - many who are people of color - had to keep working, young girls filled those caregiving needs at the expense of their education and mental health. As we allocate more resources to solving this existing dilemma exacerbated by the pandemic, girls must be centered in this conversation, given how they are directly impacted, and can help shape the best solutions to support families and reduce the caregiving burden on women and girls.

The survey revealed mental health impacts of the pandemic on the girls were significant, although not new. We know that underserved girls have long-standing patterns of added stress, anxiety, and trauma versus their affluent peers. And, further, young women are almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with a mood disorder, such as depression, than their male counterparts. Our data signaled that COVID-19 changes and restrictions amplified girls' stress and anxiety levels, especially when their sense of safety and their connections were upended. The long-held systemic barriers impacting girls and gender-expansive youth have been dramatically worsened, while the ecosystem of support for girls was shattered. Now, it is essential that we, as a community, prioritize girls' recovery, including uplifting and funding the programs that are best positioned to meet girls' needs and supporting coordination efforts to ensure every girl has a pathway to success.

As the nation starts to transition from COVID-19 relief to long-term recovery, AFC's Uniting Isolated Voices: Girls and Gender-Expansive Youth During COVID-19 report provides a roadmap on the investments and strategies needed to achieve greater gender equity, especially for girls and gender-expansive youth of color. We invite you to join us and our 120+ member organizations to lift up the voices and experiences of girls at decision-making tables and spaces and prioritize their solutions. This is how we turn research into action in the wake of the pandemic so we can start healing and rebuilding communities where every girl thrives.

In solidarity,  
Emma

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## The Negative Impacts of COVID-19 on Girls

To effectively rebuild an infrastructure of support that honors girls' needs, it is essential to truly listen and center how girls' experienced COVID-19. Nearly all the 1,214 girls who took Alliance For Girls' COVID-19 survey say they have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 in varying and distinct ways. Girls' safety and sense of wellbeing have been compromised, and it is the most underserved girls who say they are bearing the brunt of the pandemic's outcomes. The data illustration below describes the most reported negative effects of COVID-19 by girls.

Increased isolation described as loneliness, lack of connection, missing friends, and feeling trapped



Deterioration of boundaries characterized as lack of privacy and private spaces and blurring lines between home and school

Difficulty with emotional coping described as increased stress, anxiety, depression, worry and overwhelm

Increased caretaking responsibilities of siblings, other family members, and own children

Increased concerns about college, career, and future planning, AP and college prep tests

Decreased physical health and wellness contributing to growing concerns around body image

Loss of structure, routine, and schedule



Loss of enrichment, sports, after school activities, volunteering, and clubs

Increased pressures around school

Increased barriers to basic needs such as food, housing, financial stability, employment, and technology access.

Increased domestic violence and toxic family dynamics

Loss of motivation also characterized as feelings of boredom, lack of support, and encouragement

Loss of access to specialized services including mental health, healthcare, and special needs





# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## COVID-19 Exposes the Role of Multiplying Factors Impacting Girls

Girls need positive tethers to responsive systems, supportive relationships, and safe spaces to thrive<sup>1</sup>, especially during a global crisis. Girls' responses collected from Alliance For Girls' COVID-19 survey points to how COVID-19's disruption of the systems girls rely on for protection and connection has compromised protective factors<sup>2</sup> –the conditions that mitigate the likelihood of young people experiencing violence by increasing their abilities to confidently respond to violence (CDC, 2020). Further, these protective factors have been challenged and replaced by what this report is calling multiplying factors – the individual and systemic traits that make girls more susceptible to experiencing the negative effects of COVID-19 with more severity and intensity. Each stair in the data illustration below describes an individual multiplying factor and the mounting challenges ahead for an equitable recovery.

<sup>1</sup>Radical Visions of Safety, page 6, Alliance for Girls (2020)

<sup>2</sup>"Protective Factors," Centers for Disease Control, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/index.htm>, retrieved 12 May 2010.



Older girls, especially adolescent and transition-age (18-24)

Girls with Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement

Involvement with school disciplinary systems

Low socio-economic status

Users of community, social, or nonprofit services

Living in a household where a family member is incarcerated

Race and identifying as non-cis gender

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## Girls Define the Mental Health and Emotional Supports They Seek

Girls' responses collected from Alliance For Girls' COVID-19 survey show mental health arose as an important factor in girls' lives during the pandemic. Because getting to the heart of mental health can be a vulnerable topic of discussion and difficult to explain, this report looks at how girls characterize their mental health and the supports they need by what they say they have been missing during the pandemic, and what has helped them feel better. By starting with how girls' talk and experience the dimensions of their wellness, effective policies, direct services, and convenience of access can be better crafted to honor girls' needs.

For girls, Mental Health is creating conditions that support the exploration and integration of:

**Emotional Health** in the form of:

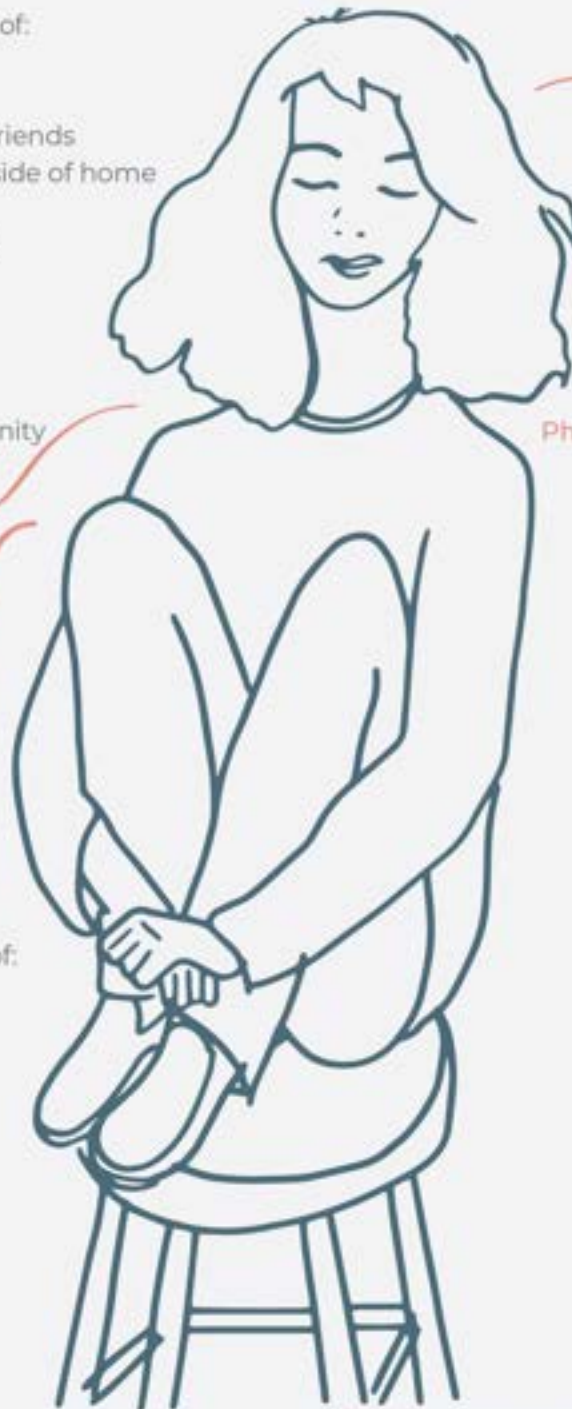
- Connection
- Interaction
- Spending time with friends
- Exploring spaces outside of home
- Privacy
- Enrichment activities
- Clubs
- Afterschool
- Volunteering
- Self-sufficiency
- Belonging to community

**Physical Health** in the form of:

- Sports
- Dance
- Exercise
- Positive body image
- Yoga

**Spiritual Health** in the form of:

- Self-care
- Journaling
- Meditation
- Art
- Music
- Self-love
- Self-growth



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# OVERVIEW

## What is the purpose of *Uniting Isolated Voices*?

A post-COVID future is beginning to take shape. This is an inflection point for girls<sup>1</sup>, their allies, and leaders across sectors as they begin to design and resource a vision for a better future – one that does not repeat the mistakes of the past nor re-create the same systemic and institutional barriers and burdens for girls.

Between 2016 and 2019, Alliance for Girls (AFG) released its Lived Experiences of Girls report series, which helped create a deeper understanding of the needs of girls in California’s San Francisco Bay Area. As a follow-up to those reports, in early 2021, AFG released its groundbreaking report *Radical Visions of Safety*, in which girls themselves redefined and reimagined notions of safety and healthy relationships, with an eye toward partnering with allies, practitioners, and funders to change programming and make policy and grantmaking more girl-centric. In this report, girls and girl champions reported the biggest roadblocks to achieving safety and healthy relationships were lack of support and systemic, institutional, and operational barriers.

*Uniting Isolated Voices: Girls and Gender-Expansive Youth during COVID-19* bridges those reports by grounding their findings in one of the most severe global disruptions in the past one hundred years, the COVID-19 pandemic. This report centers girls’ experiences and further highlights how the reported pre-pandemic barriers to safety and healthy relationships were further dismantled, amplifying the severity of effects of COVID-19 for girls. It also provides a girl-centered and -led **call-to-action guide** in which three categories of allies – educators and service providers, policy and advocacy organizations, and funders – can take action. With this girl-driven road map in hand, allies can fundamentally redress issues wrought by COVID-19 and the underlying second-class citizenship of girls that predates the pandemic. Using this as an opportunity to move away from a “new normal,” we can all instead move towards the dream of a better future.

## How was *Uniting Isolated Voices* developed?

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Alliance for Girls and its youth participatory action research (YPAR) team of youth researchers (Young Women’s Leadership Board) developed a survey to collect data from girls and gender-expansive youth up to age 24 in California.

1. In 2019, Alliance for Girls moved toward more inclusive language to define girls as gender-expansive youth (cis-girls, trans-girls, non-binary youth, gender non-conforming youth, genderqueer youth, and any girl-identified youth) up to age 24. Throughout this report, the use of the term girls encompasses this definition.

The survey asked about their lived experiences during COVID-19 and was administered from March 2020-January 2021. AFG received 2,083 surveys, with 1,214 fitting its inclusion criteria<sup>2</sup>. This report was created through rigorous analysis of girls' survey data and iterative meaning making sessions using the data and analytical insights of AFG's Young Women's Leadership Board (YWLB), AFG staff, and Evaluation Studio, a third-party research team, to paint the landscape of girls' complex needs during COVID-19. Those major insights are focused into three distinct calls to action, which identify the clear issues created or exacerbated by COVID-19, and the necessary strategies and mindset shifts to address those issues. It pays particular attention to the ways that multiplying factors like gender identity, race/ethnicity, systems involvement, and socio-environmental factors have intensified the experiences of already-underserved girls.

### What *Radical Visions of Safety* Report Taught Us About *Uniting Isolated Voices*

Uniting Isolated Voices details the negative impacts of COVID-19 and the supports that were compromised for girls. In the key takeaways and main findings of what girls share in this report, what becomes apparent is that the severity of COVID-19 can be attributed to how it challenged and upended the benchmark of safety and healthy relationships depicted in the *Radical Visions of Safety* Report. The table on the next page details the fundamental conditions defined by girls as necessary to achieve a baseline of safety and healthy relationships for themselves.

Table 1. For Girls By Girls: How Girls Define Safety and Healthy Relationships <sup>3</sup>

Trust	Confidentiality and protection of vulnerability built between peers and adults
Non-Judgment	Open-mindedness and freedom to express authentic self with unconditional acceptance and without feeling judged.
Comfort	Being at ease, carefree, and without stress.
Boundaries	Awareness and regard of what one is willing to give, what one is willing to accept, and what one is needing.
Respect	Emotionally and physically meeting one where they are by valuing their opinions and not making demands to change.
Fun	Experiences marked by laughter, happiness, and humor.
Self-love	Cultivating a relationship with oneself through self-awareness, self-expression, self-confidence, and self-esteem.
Representation	Leaders, role models, and trusted adults who reflect participants' histories, ethnicities, social identities, and culture.
Sovereignty	Sense of control and determination around one's body and environment, allowing freedom from self-consciousness and stigma.

2. Detailed in the research methodologies section of the appendix

3. Alliance for Girls (2021). *Radical Visions of Safety*, <https://www.alliance4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/AFG-Radical-Visions-of-Safety-Report.pdf>.

Knowing fundamentally what girls need for safety and healthy relationships and seeing the effects of COVID-19 tangibly erode that, gives us a context and framework for seeing the true consequences of the pandemic and a real opportunity to act. Girls are telling us what they need, what works, and what they want to feel safe. In transforming our institutions and systems post-pandemic, we should look to those voices for guidance on how to best invest in and rebuild our ecosystems.

Together with its girl participants, member organizations, and supporters, Alliance for Girls is leading a proactive, not reactive, charge to ensure girls set the agenda. COVID-19 represents a once-in-a-generation chance for girl allies to be accountable in co-creating and resourcing girls' visions for more just post-pandemic systems. This call-to-action guide links girls' COVID-19 experiences to practical step-by-step strategies that can create foundational practices of safety and healthy relationships for girls.

# 3 CALLS TO ACTION

## Call to Action 1: Redefine Schools as Ecosystems for Girls' Wellness

**What?** Schools should invest in building out and advancing physical and virtual services and infrastructure that support girls' safety, social and emotional wellbeing, coordinated specialized services, and enrichment opportunities.

**Why?** Girls say schools provide them with myriad benefits that they have missed and needed during COVID-19: private, distinct spaces outside of their home to study and to create and explore identity; peer and caring adult interactions and connections; enrichment, sports, and afterschool activities; and access to counseling and other specialized services. If we want girls to be co-creators of their futures and of their school communities then we must start with girls' experiences and voices in what happens next with school-day spaces.

**Objectives** The strategies in this call to action can position schools to provide uninterrupted support regardless of severe environmental and personal disruptions (i.e., pandemic, fires, toxic home environments, caregiving and early parenthood). Additionally, these strategies can provide continuous systemic reinforcements for the most underserved groups of girls, thereby girding protective factors, minimizing multiplying factors, and driving radical visions of safety and healthy relationships.

### Strategies

- Build coalitions between schools and girls' service providers to create a true continuum of services<sup>4</sup>, something that was already missing pre-pandemic.
- Extend representation to uplift girls' experiences about what mental health means for them to leverage recovery funds for targeted mental health and emotional supports.
- Integrate a broader continuum of caregiving support to young parents and families.
- Create inclusive spaces for girls, young parents, and other affinity groups to foster conditions for safety. Create and develop tools and mechanisms for safety through quality virtual enrichment opportunities as continual options and alternatives for connection.

4. Alliance for Girls (2021). Radical Visions of Safety, <https://www.alliance4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/AFG-Radical-Visions-of-Safety-Report.pdf>.

- Establish, integrate, and expand mental health and trauma-informed counseling, practices, and infrastructure into school-day learning and out-of-school time.
- Provide wellness workshops that integrate spiritual, emotional, and physical health.
- Offer professional development for teachers around SEL engagement, virtual learning quality, trauma-informed practices, and flexible curriculum and classroom structures.
- Increase internet access and connectivity at outdoor school spaces.
- Expand accessible, hybrid tutoring services.
- Expand accessible, hybrid college and career counseling, support, and resources.
- Require digital literacy workshop for girls provided through schools.



## Call to Action 2: Leverage Policy and Advocacy Organizations as True Allies

**What?** Policy and advocacy organizations should align on critical issues, led by girls' voices around what they perceived as their hardest-hit areas as a result of COVID-19.

**Why?** When girls describe their pandemic experience, they commonly share how one or more of the negative effects of COVID-19 identified in the data affect them; many are also experiencing one or more multiplying factors which render their COVID-19 experience even more intense. In aggregate, girls' voices are illustrating the profound institutional and systemic deficits that continue to pervade and work disproportionately against the most underserved girls; these deficits are calling out for swift policy and advocacy action.

**Objectives** The strategies and steps in this call to action can provide continuous systemic reinforcements for the most underserved groups of girls, thereby girding protective factors, minimizing multiplying factors, and supporting conditions to create safety and healthy relationships.

### Strategies

- Relieve unequal caregiving burdens by advocating for national paid sick leave, paid family leave, and subsidized daycare and preschool. Girls experience disproportionate caregiving responsibilities as young mothers and in sibling and family support.
- Including girls into the caregiver policy conversation as they are often expected to serve as the key caregivers in their families and communities.
- Advocate and increase awareness around the need for wraparound services for girls, which address and connect the mental, physical, and spiritual needs of girls. Create more viable public spaces for connections by expanding internet access and connection outdoors in public parks and libraries.
- Create and adequately resource more dedicated, physical spaces where girls can feel safe, be themselves, and not worry about judgment or expectations.
- Advocate for an expanded understanding of mental health so that it can be more inclusive of all girls' experiences and build an infrastructure of support based on what they voice as their needs and wants.
- Increasing government and systemic efforts to consistently collect more girl-centered data to better support and understand the experiences, challenges, and needs of girls.

## Call to Action 3: Provide Dedicated Funding to Uplifting Girls

**What?** Funders now have clear and targeted ways they can provide funding and resources based on exactly what girls say they need and how it will support them.

**Why?** Girls say that COVID-19 demonstrated the degree to which they rely on strong systems, like public services, schools, and community supports, to get their needs met; COVID-19's systemic disruptions have impacted underserved girls and their families the most.

**Objectives** Funders can help redress existing infrastructural and institutional gaps to provide stable and comprehensive assistance for girls and girl-serving organizations.

### Strategies

- Prioritize funding for organizations specifically addressing the direct negative impacts of COVID-19 on girls and that eliminate the barriers for safety and healthy relationships.
- Fund intergenerational (i.e. parents, guardian, caregivers, adults) learning and service delivery to recognize the family and community context in which girls are served, and to redistribute the burden of growth, change, and healing for girls.
- Prioritize a culture of funder accountability so partners wanting to make real change in girl-serving ecosystems are responsible and transparent in meeting these goals.
- Provide more flexible funding and operational funding for organizations serving girls.
- Involve girls and girl-serving organizations in decisions about funding priorities, strategy, outcomes, and gaps.
- Invest in capacity-building of girls themselves through training and workshops in skill-building or financial literacy, intergenerational services and training, inviting girls from grantee organizations to sit on a youth grantmaking board.
- Fund and subsidize internship and employment opportunities that are equitably compensated for the most underserved girls and invest in their future growth.

# GET TO KNOW:

## YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP BOARD

### *Understanding **Uniting Isolated Voices** girl-led approach*

In March 2020, Alliance for Girls (AFG) conducted wellness checks with 23 girls of color across the San Francisco Bay Area to assess how girls were doing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Girls reported being bored, concerned about their peers, and needing financial relief. In response to these interviews, AFG decided to implement a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project to better understand the short and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on girls, provide girls with immediate, pressing resources, and advocate to ensure that girls' needs are centered in the COVID-19 response, recovery plans in California.

AFG's YPAR is rooted in girl-led and centered practices. YPAR is "an innovative approach to positive youth and community development in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them" (YPAR Hub, 2015). In order to effectively amplify and center girls' experiences to change and improve the systems that impact their lives, AFG believes that girls themselves should be centered throughout the process, from research design through implementation.

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"[My favorite part of the YWLB program is] the social issues taught and covered in our meetings. It helps me make more sense of the world around me."  
-YWLB Member

AFG put out a call for applications for girls to join a new cohort of our Young Women's Leadership Board (YWLB). Nine girls, all of which were girls of color and half identifying as Black, were selected and hired by AFG as researchers and the new YWLB cohort. This project provided girl researchers with one year and three hours per week of paid research training to build their skills in research design, data collection and analysis, public speaking, and advocacy. The girls were trained by AFG staff, along with guest lecturers and AFG's YPAR and YWLB alumni.

Training focused on three main themes:

1. *Deconstructing and leveraging research*: where YWLB members learned about the research process and design and deconstructing the role of racism, power, oppression, and sexism in research;
2. *Meaning Making*: where they learned about qualitative and quantitative data analysis;
3. *Action Forward*: where YWLB members were trained on how to create a final report and leverage research for organizing and advocacy.

The researchers who participated in this cohort of YWLB completed an evaluation at the end of the first quarter of the program, where 100% reported an increase in knowledge on the research process, survey design, the role of racism, power, oppression, and sexism in research, analyzing survey data, and leveraging research for organizing and advocacy.

### YWLB Research Design and Data Collection

As part of this training, the YWLB members designed and developed a digital, six-minute survey assessing the needs and experiences of girls during COVID-19 in California. Because girls themselves designed the main research tools, questions were asked in a way that were understandable and accessible to youth, making it easy for them to participate in the study and resulting in rich data. The YWLB also played a crucial role in the outreach and dissemination of the survey with peers across California, along with AFG's member organizations and key dissemination partners already mentioned, which resulted in AFG collecting a total of 2,084 responses (1,214 met the criteria for inclusion).

### YWLB Analysis and Meaning Making

The YWLB led the analysis of the qualitative data captured through this survey and assisted with some of the quantitative data analysis as well. Using their unique lived experiences as girls, the YWLB identified key themes from the qualitative data that serves as the basis of this report and the key takeaways and recommendations shared here.

Once the girls completed the analysis of the qualitative data, they presented their findings and recommendations in a two-hour event called "When Girls Thrive: COVID-19 Final Analysis and Community Input Session" on June 17th, 2021 gathering key representatives from schools, government agencies, funders/donors, AFG's member organizations, other community-based organizations, and youth interested in learning more about the impacts of COVID-19 on girls in California.

During this event, the participating audience members provided generative input around the recommendations created by the YWLB.

With girls at the center of the research process from beginning to end, the following report highlights the needs and experiences of girls and the solutions they want to see to improve their lives and wellbeing as defined by girls for girls.

### Who are they?

From March 2020 to June 2021, a group of girls led the design and execution of this research. Get to know them and a reflection of their experiences.

#### **RALITSA CANEVA**

**Age: 17**

**How has serving on YWLB shaped your future plans and prepared you for advocacy and research in the future?**

YWLB has shaped and prepared my future plans for advocacy and research because I have more knowledge and experience on what it is like to do action research, sampling analysis and advocate for topics I am passionate about. In the future I hope to continue doing similar work because it amplifies important voices and makes a positive impact in our community.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

In ten years, I hope to have a career I am passionate about, which positively impacts others. I also see myself giving back to the community!

**What advice do you have for the next group of girls on the YWLB?**

Always ask for help if you need it and don't forget to have fun! It's an amazing experience. <3

#### **UCHENNA ESOMONU**

**Age: 20**

**How has serving on YWLB shaped your future plans and prepared you for advocacy and research in the future?**

I now have a cache of experience in advocacy research (an impressive addition to my resume) and data analysis. I am also now very curious of the next stage of the research which is the implementation of our recommendation. I would like to get involved with one of the organizations that attended our event to work on this process.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

Big Question. I'll be 30 in ten years. I hope I have my own place somewhere in the Bay Area. I hope I am writing for a publication I am proud of. I hope I am involved with a women's advocacy organization that does important and inspiring work. I hope I'm ready to become a mother lol. I hope I'm healthy.

**What advice do you have for the next group of girls on the YWLB?**

Always touch base with the team.

**MAKAYLA HARDEN**

**Age: 19**

**How has serving on YWLB shaped your future plans and prepared you for advocacy and research in the future?**

Being part on the Young Women Leadership Board has shown me what advocacy looks and feels like. It showed me just how much power I have and the countless things that I can achieve as a young Black girl. I also got the chance to learn how to analyze data, which is not something I'd ever thought I learn.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

In ten years I see myself making money by doing the things I love. I see myself owning a beautiful house that can hold all of my family and friends. I see myself living a happy life knowing that all the work I am currently putting in now will pay off.

**What advice do you have for the next group of girls on the YWLB?**

My advice for the next group of girls is to embrace this opportunity with open arms. There will be moments when you may not want to do the action work or attend the meetings, but stick with it because the feeling of showcasing all the work you did is unforgettable.

**BRIANNA JACKSON**

**Age: 16**

**How has serving on YWLB shaped your future plans and prepared you for advocacy and research in the future?**

Over the past year as a part of the YWLB I learned the value of teamwork and everyone's role plays apart in a bigger picture.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

In ten years, I will be a travel nurse, traveling all around the country.

**What advice do you have for the next group of girls on the YWLB?**

Your opinion matters. As teenagers we can easily become intimidated by adults, but the staff at AFG is wonderful in providing a safe environment to allow us to speak up.

**SALAAM ADELEKE LATEEF**

**Age: 17**

**How has serving on YWLB shaped your future plans and prepared you for advocacy and research in the future?**

Serving for the YWLB has given more inside knowledge into how girls feel and what our communities aren't providing. This is saddening and I want to do my part to give all girls access to therapy, hygiene products, a job, childcare, and a place they can feel safe which should be available to everyone. I hope to continue my advocacy work and make actual changes like I've been able to with the YWLB.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

In ten years, I see myself living abroad with a successful company and the ability to employ black women and men and also be a pillar in my community and be there for people in need of support.

**What advice do you have for the next group of girls on the YWLB?**

For the next group of girls on the YWLB, I want you to cherish these moments because you are a part of something important and you are the change. The work you're doing will change many lives including yours and it a beautiful and amazing opportunity.

**SOFIA ORDUÑA**

**Age: 18**

**How has serving on YWLB shaped your future plans and prepared you for advocacy and research in the future?**

I hadn't heard of youth participatory action research before I started this program, and it has reframed how I think about advocacy in research. I experienced how being a peer to people whose lives you are trying to understand better, and approaching a situation with respect and compassion, and deliberately challenging traditional notions of research power dynamics, is hugely important. I noticed that participants in focus groups seemed more comfortable upon seeing that the people talking to them about their experiences were youth who looked and acted like them, who listened to and validated their experiences, who paid them for their work, and who included them in updates about how their research was being used. I have a better understanding of what real research should look like, and how to conduct it in the future, so that people who understand what their communities need have the chance to share those concerns directly. In the future, I would like to go into international relations or do something with screenwriting. As both areas involve communicating with many different groups of people to better understand their needs and experiences, I'm hugely grateful to be a part of this program that's taught me so much and restructured how I think about research.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

I'd like to be working to change people's lives for the better. I want to create something that means something to people, whether that's in speeches and treaties given as a politician, or in movies and novels I write. I'd like to explore more and stay in touch with the friends I've made on these YWLB boards. I see myself staying involved in activism, politics, and if I go into international relations, being like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and both advocating for my community, as well as being transparent about what my job entails and how to get involved on social media to encourage young folks to get involved in an area that for the U.S. is very historically white and wealthy.

**What advice do you have for the next group of girls on the YWLB?**

Reach out and connect with your peers on the board. Sessions seem like they go by so quickly, but when it's time to be in those important conversations with government leaders, funders, and policymakers, it's vital to have that network. Your peers are here to support you, and you have a network of organization leaders who would love to help, so be sure to reach out. You are more than capable and qualified, and the people on your team have your back!

# MEETING GIRLS WHERE THEY ARE

In order for allies, practitioners, teachers, service providers, advocates, and funders to use this moment to co-create meaningful change with girls, they must hear from girls directly about what they want and need. Girls' COVID-19 landscape is rich and complex, and as a result, their needs are complex as well. Meeting girls where they are within that landscape must be the starting point for taking swift action – so it is critical to unpack in detail how girls describe that landscape.

## The Landscape of Survey Participants

The 1,214 girls whose survey responses fit the inclusion criteria for the Alliance for Girls' COVID-19 survey (March 2020 to January 2021) powerfully shared about what their lives have been like since the pandemic hit. Though girls are by no means a monolith – their lives and experiences are diverse and complex – the trends that emerge from this invaluable data are key to meeting girls where they are and taking meaningful action based on what girls say they need.

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"[COVID-19 HAS] BEEN DIFFICULT, IT'S MADE ME NOT WANT TO LEAVE MY ROOM. I'VE BEEN TAKING LESS AND LESS CARE OF MYSELF. I WOULD LIKE TO SEE SOME HOPE OF CHANGE."

-22-YEAR-OLD GIRL,  
HISPANIC/LATINX, PARENT, MURRIETA



This report signals those key trends using the term *upshot*: The data below will present those key trends, and then unpack them so that practitioners, service providers, advocates, and funders understand how girls' complexity shapes their experiences and must factor into creating meaningful change post-COVID.

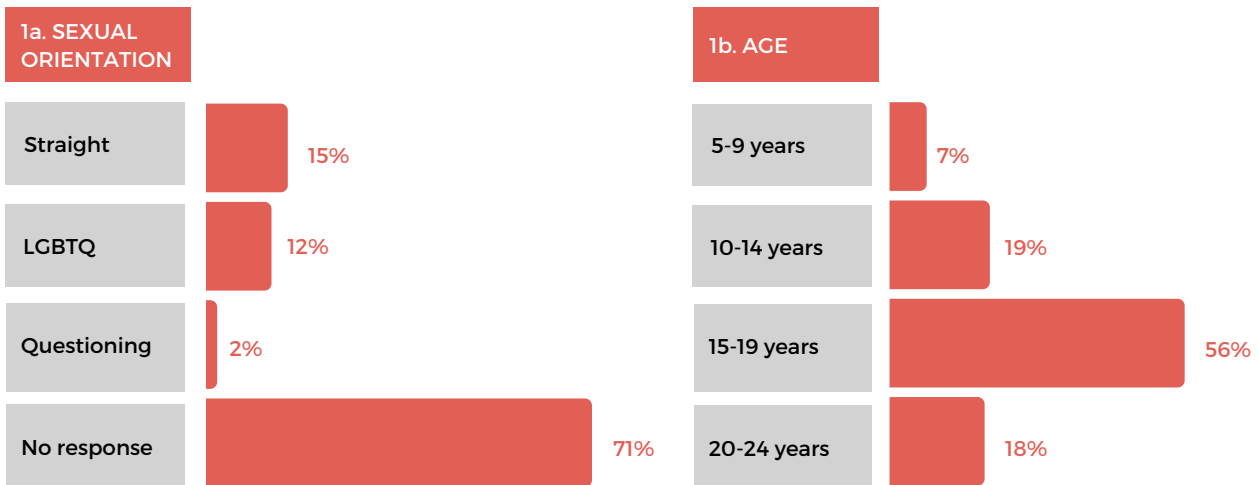
Additionally, more research is needed to understand the impact and nuances of the negative effects of COVID-19, multiplying factors, and the upshots on particular demographic, affinity, and dispossessed groups.



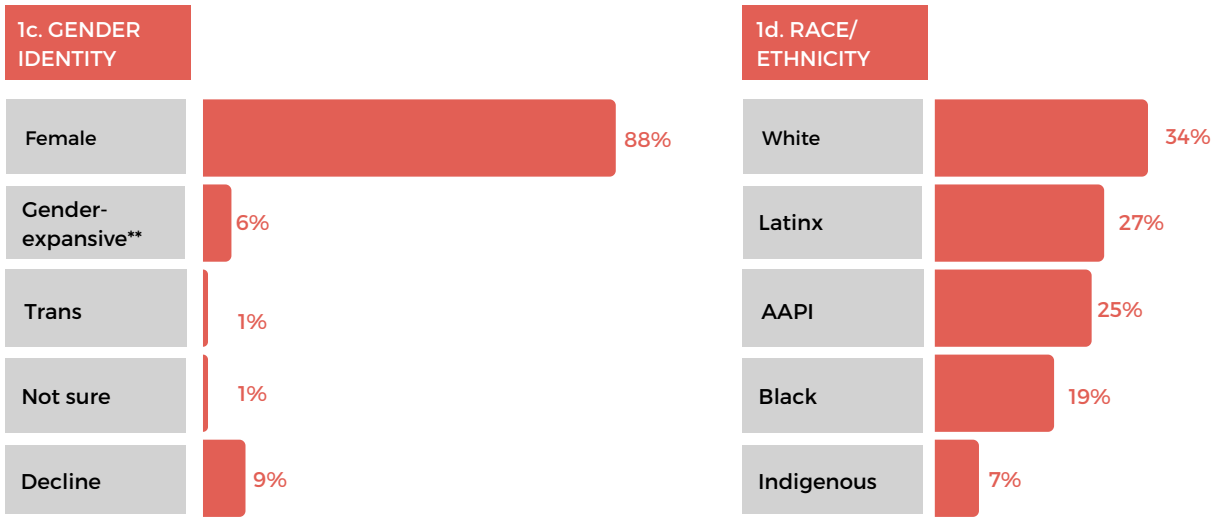
*Upshot: Girls who took the survey are diverse and complex*

Girls taking the survey self-reported on their race/ethnicity, age, zip code, primary language, and other key details about themselves (Figure 1a-e). This is important in understanding to what degree the data is representative of girls in California; because Alliance for Girls places a high value on the lived experience of girls who are traditionally excluded from and underserved by social systems, the girls who responded to this survey are more diverse than California overall in terms of many important demographic markers:

Figure 1a-f. Girls who took the survey represent a cross-section of backgrounds

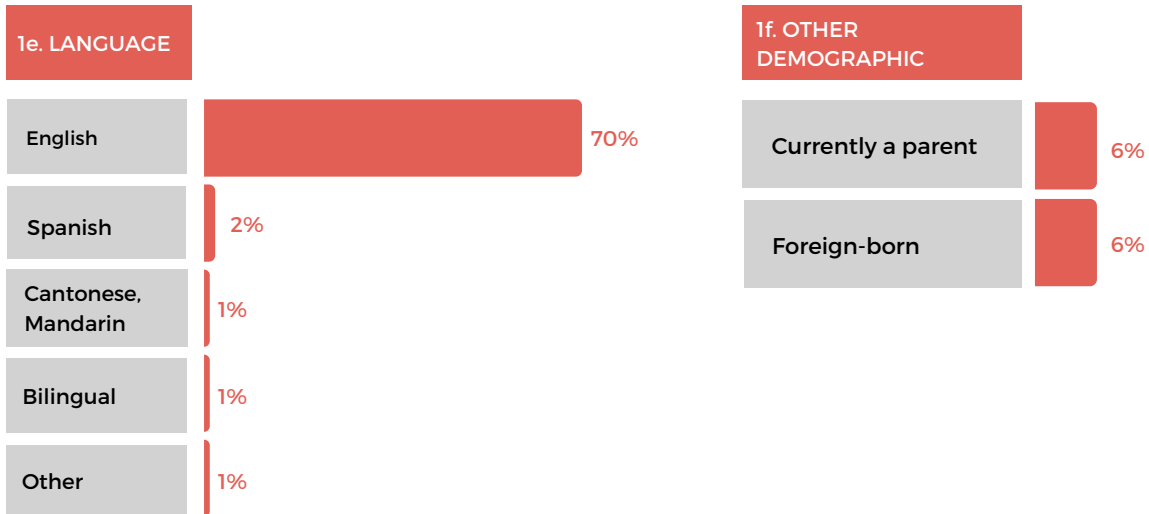


Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021. Multiple selections possible; \*\* Includes gender-expansive, -queer, -non confirming, -non binary.

In addition, 6% of girls reported currently being a parent, and 6% of girls stated they were born outside of the United States. These figures also confirm that the survey sample represents a more diverse group than the overall California population of the same age range.



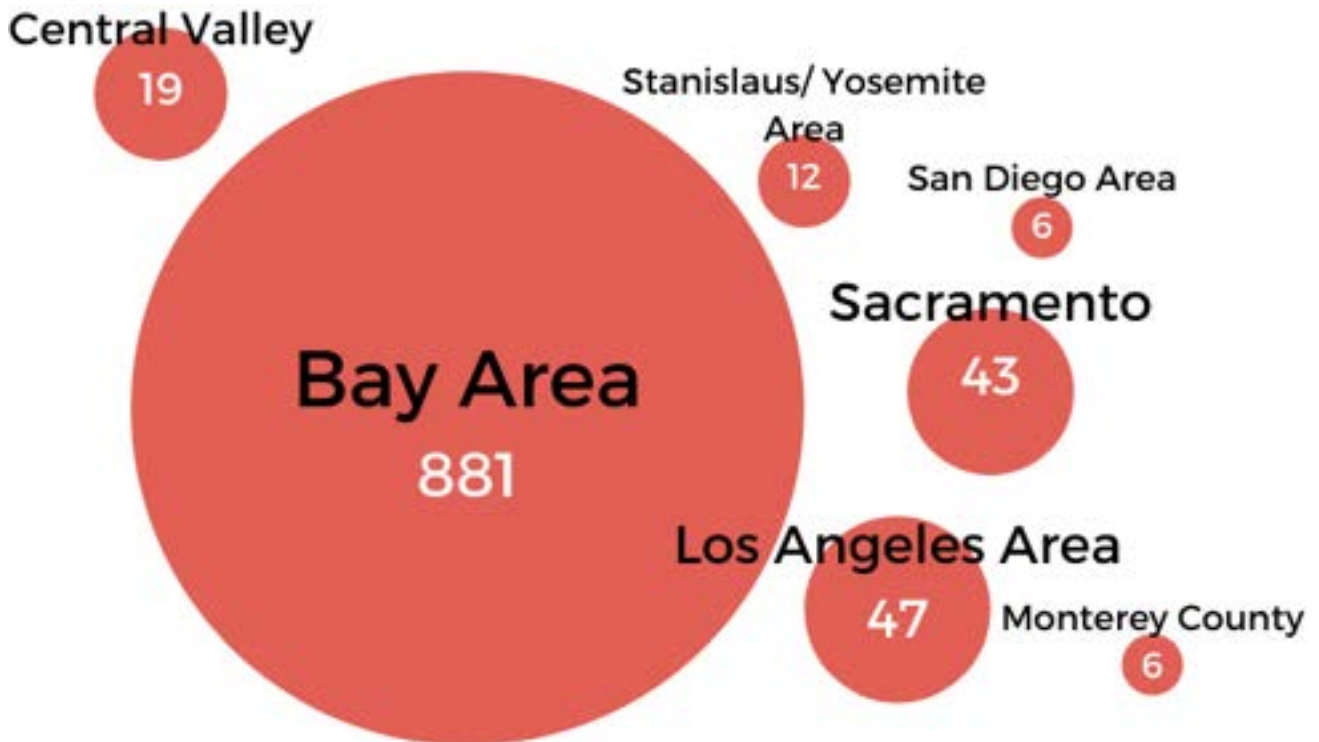
Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021. Multiple selections possible



*Upshot: Girls who took the survey represent large, urban systems*

Four in 10 girls taking the COVID-19 survey live in Oakland and/or attend Oakland Unified School District (OUSD); most of the other respondents were concentrated in the Bay Area, with just 29% coming from other parts of California (Figure 2). Though concentrated in a single school district, the survey findings that follow are a measure not only of what girls in OUSD and Oakland need and want, but also what girls in large, urban systems are experiencing. Though each city's and county's school, nonprofit, social services, criminal justice, and health systems undoubtedly have unique strengths and deficits, the systems of large cities share enough key traits for the survey data that follow to be applicable to girls across California living in similar areas and attending similar representative school districts.

Figure 2. Most girls who took the survey live in the Bay Area



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, compilation of girls' self-reported Zip code data, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.

## WHAT GIRLS SAY ABOUT: COVID-19'S SOCIAL + EMOTIONAL IMPACT



*"I am more stressed in general because I cannot handle 6 AP classes and 8 classes while taking care of my 3 younger siblings. I use school as a place to unwind (ironically) from my stress at home and to connect with my friends, and that isn't really possible now despite online classes requiring us to 'get to know each other.'"*

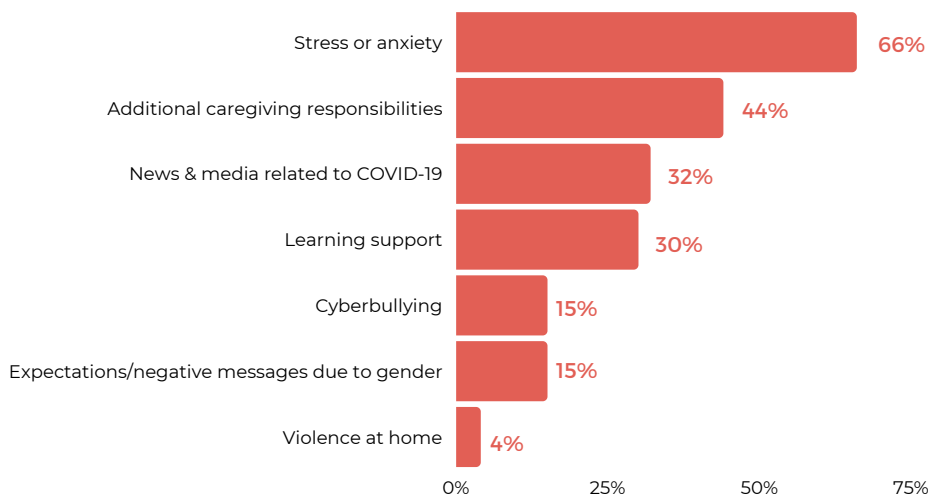
*- 17-year-old, AAPI, San Bernardino County*



*Upshot: COVID-19 has increased girls' stress levels, caregiving duties, and trouble getting learning support*

Girls say that COVID-19 has had multiple negative effects for them, effects which spanned their school, home, and social lives (Figure 3). A majority of girls (66%) feel greater stress or anxiety since the shelter-in-place restrictions began. Almost half (44%) say that they now have more caregiving duties than before. About one in three (32%) girls report being negatively impacted by news and media coverage about COVID-19, and nearly the same amount (30%) say they are unable to get the learning support they need right now.

Figure 3. Girls overall have been impacted by a wide range of COVID-related factors



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.

Based on the data collected and the experiences girls shared in this study, there is little doubt that girls have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 changes and restrictions. These impacts take on even greater urgency for girls who belong to already-marginalized groups at the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, low socioeconomic status, and systems involvement; already-marginalized girls experience these negative effects or multiplying factors even more intensely, as deeper data analysis reveals:

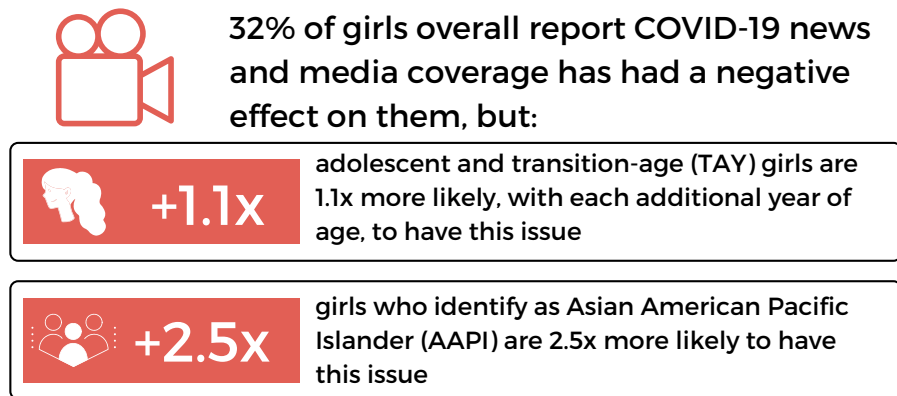
### News/Media Impact

*"It becomes really depressing to see Asian people who look like you being stabbed every single day. Grandmas being set on fire. Asian parents being assaulted on public transportation. It sends the feeling of "oh we're just fungible like that" and to have that violence normalized is disturbing"*

- 17-year-old girl, AAPI, Oakland

Overall, nearly one in three girls report being negatively affected by news and media related to COVID-19; this number increases exponentially with age and for girls who identify as Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) (Figure 4):

Figure 4. Effects of COVID-19 news and media coverage



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Older girls and AAPI girls in this sample are more negatively affected than other girls by the media's approach to covering the pandemic; this can multiply even further these girls' sense of stress, lack of physical and mental safety, and ability to access support networks during this already-challenging pandemic.

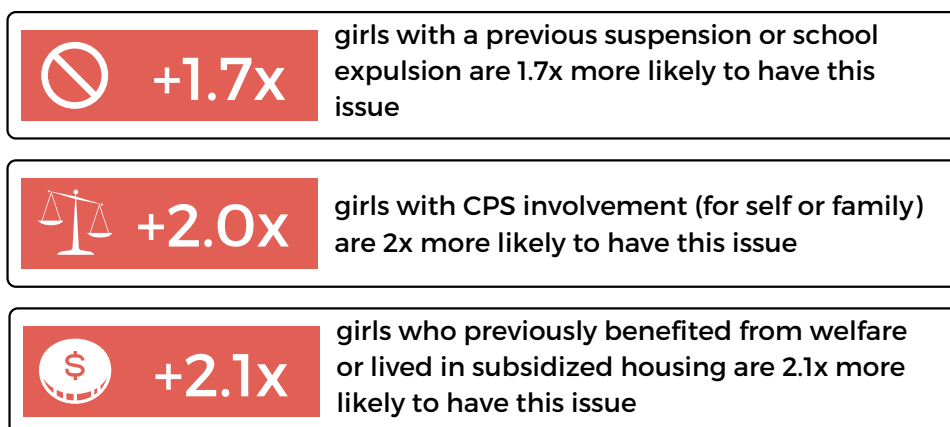
## Learning Support

Girls with disciplinary or child protection systems involvement and those with low socio-economic status are the most disadvantaged by remote and hybrid school. These girls are much more likely than their peers to say that they have not been receiving adequate learning support during the pandemic (Figure 5):

Figure 5. Effects of COVID-19 on receiving remote and hybrid learning supports



**30% of girls overall report not receiving learning supports, but:**



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Fully remote and hybrid learning models are not working as intended for all girls, as the data above demonstrates. Low socio-economic status, involvement with CPS, and school disciplinary involvement make girls more likely to need and not receive adequate learning supports during COVID-19 -- multiplying factors that further compound their pandemic-related difficulties.


## Cyber-Bullying


Though overall only a handful of girls say that cyber-bullying has been an issue during the pandemic, for non-cisgender girls and those involved in school disciplinary actions, cyber-bullying has been much more prevalent:

Figure 6. Effects of COVID-19 on experiencing cyber-bullying



**4% of girls overall report experiencing cyber-bullying, but:**

 **+0.3x** girls who do not identify as cisgender are 0.27x more likely to have this issue

 **+5.0x** girls with a previous suspension or school expulsion are 5x more likely to have this issue

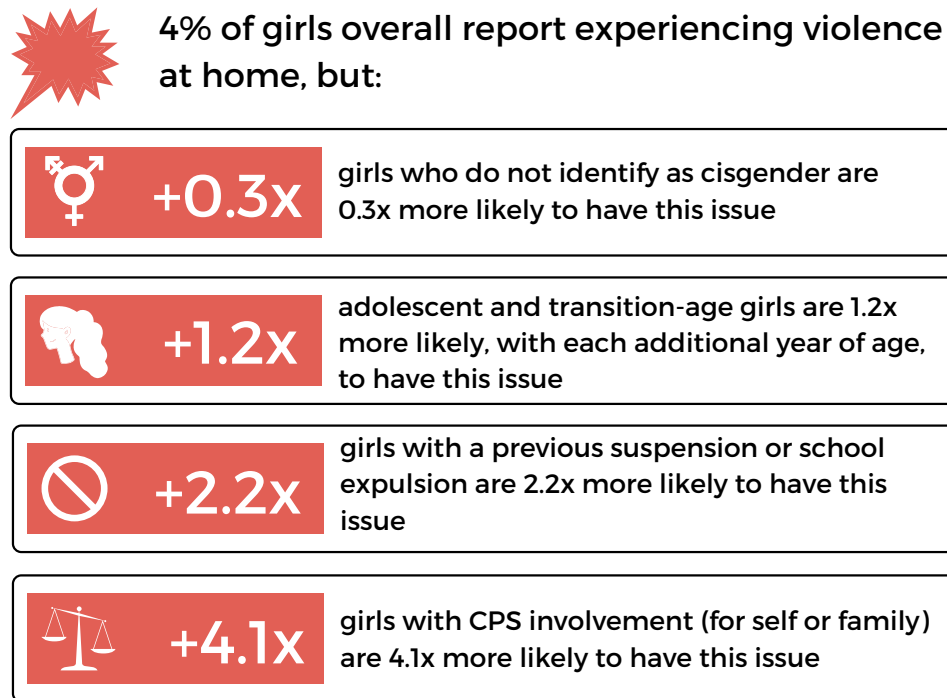
Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Girls' support networks, education, resources, social lives, and almost everything else moved online due to the pandemic; for non-cisgender girls and those with school disciplinary involvement, these multiplying factors make life online less safe and productive, which further negatively impacts myriad other aspects of their lives during COVID.

### *Violence at Home*

A small number of girls overall say that violence at home has been an issue since the start of the pandemic; however, for certain girls this compounding factor is much more likely to be an issue:

Figure 7. Effects of COVID-19 on experiencing violence at home



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Girls are spending more hours at home due to the pandemic. For some girls, more time at home means less mental and physical safety and more exposure to violence, stress, and uncertainty. Those girls acutely impacted by violence at home should be prioritized for urgent COVID-19 supports and outreach.

### Summary of COVID-19's Social and Emotional Impact on Girls

From AFG's COVID-19 survey, girls share that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels, caregiving duties, and trouble getting learning support; in addition, deeper analyses reveal that not all girls are experiencing these issues equally – key multiplying factors can render the pandemic's impact even more acute for certain already-marginalized girls. As service providers, schools, community-based organizations, and girl allies begin to think about how best to support the social and emotional wellbeing of girls moving forward, the data highlights that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.



## WHAT GIRLS SAY ABOUT: COVID-19 AND SYSTEMIC DEFICITS



*"I live in a small apartment in San Francisco with a family of seven. It is very difficult to find a place where it is quiet, and I can actually study. I wish teachers were more understanding. Also, the WiFi is very slow because my siblings also have to use it.*

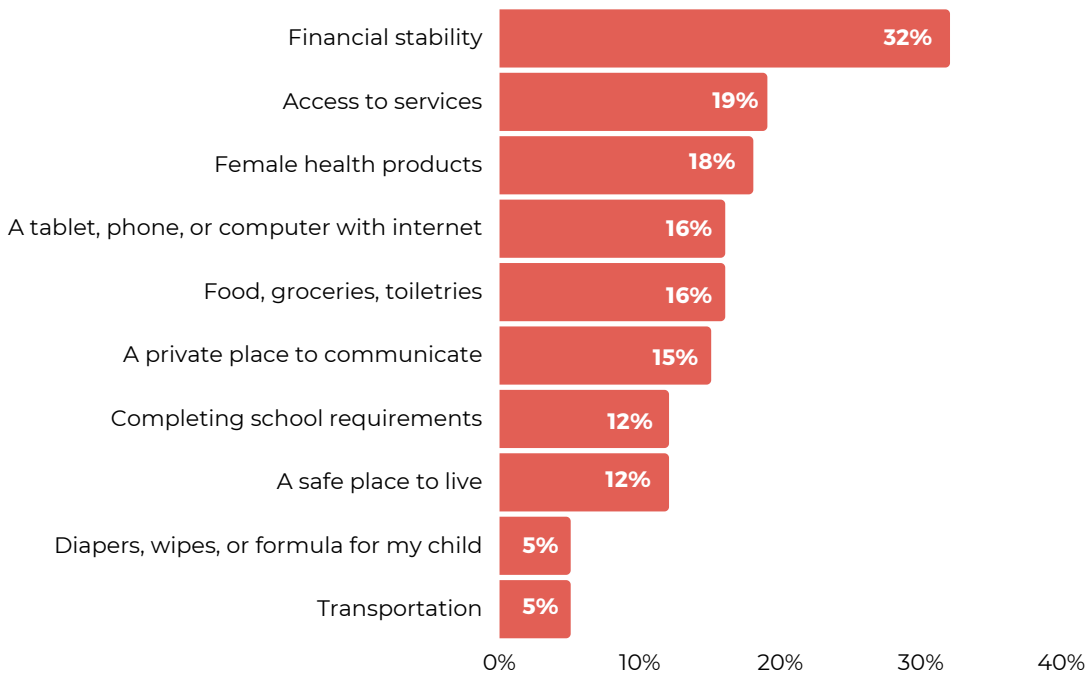
*-15-year-old girl, Hispanic/Latinx, Oakland*



*Upshot: COVID-19 short-circuited the systems that girls rely on to meet their needs*

The pandemic's closure/restriction of schools, libraries, nonprofit services, public spaces, and physical and mental health resources severely disrupted the systems that girls rely on to get their needs met. Girls overall report increased or unmet needs in multiple categories, with the lack of access to financial stability the most prevalent (32% of girls; Figure 8):

Figure 8. Effects of COVID-19 on girls reported areas of need and lack of access

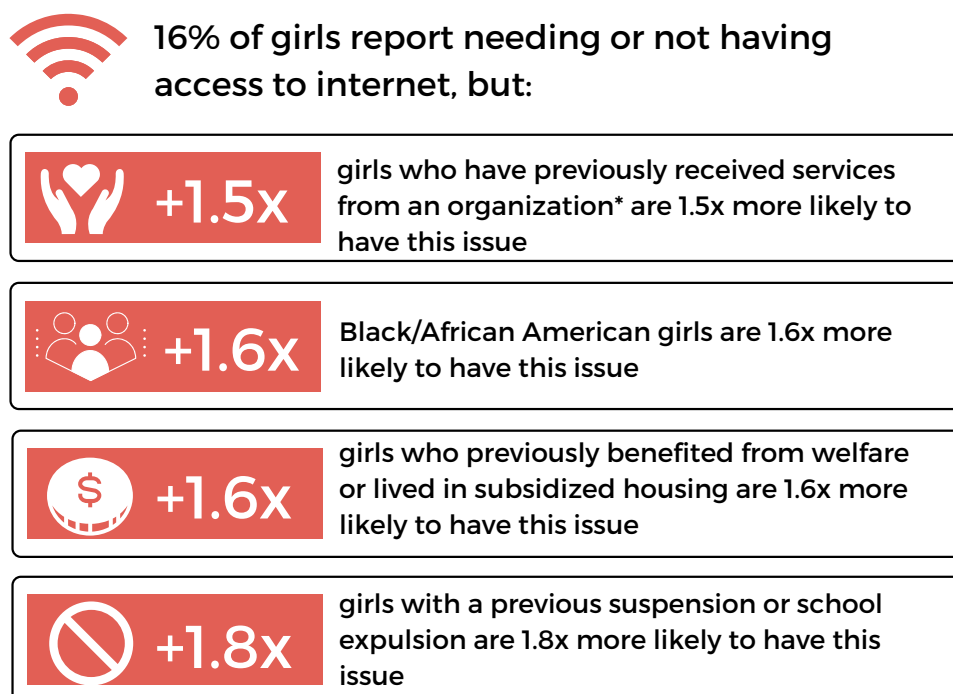


Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.

## Internet Connectivity

Though the pandemic has shifted nearly every aspect of life online – from socializing to school – not all girls are able to participate fully in online systems (Figure 9):

Figure 9. Girls reported access to a tablet, computer, or phone with internet



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*Girls who are users of community, social, or nonprofit services, including for mental health or grief counseling; findings statistically significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Girls who lack reliable internet connectivity are encountering a systemic barrier to fully engaging with their education, healthcare, support networks, and other key aspects of their lives during COVID-19. Though this can be remedied by technical fixes, the inequitable nature of this barrier means that systems change work will also be needed post-pandemic.

## Safe Place To Live

Sheltering in place necessitates a shelter – a safe place to live while reducing contact with the outside world to a minimum. Though a relatively small percentage of girls overall (12%) say this is an issue, the lack of a safe place to live disproportionately impacts older girls, girls who have accessed services from an organization, and girls with school discipline involvement (Figure 10):

Figure 10. Girls reported access to a safe place to live during COVID-19



**12% of girls overall report needing or not having access to a safe place to live, but:**



**+1.1x**

adolescent and transition-age girls are 1.1x more likely, with each additional year of age, to have this issue



**+2.1x**

girls who previously received services from an organization\* are 2.1x more likely to have this issue



**+3.2x**

girls with a previous suspension or school expulsion are 3.2x more likely to have this issue

Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*Girls who are users of community, social, or nonprofit services, including for mental health or grief counseling; findings statistically significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Girls who lack a safe place to live during COVID-19 are experiencing the extra challenge of housing insecurity during a global health crisis, something which puts them at greater risk of getting sick or infecting others. Post-pandemic planning must factor in housing justice and remedies for COVID-related and long-term housing insecurity for girls.

### *A Private Place To Communicate*

*"[School closures have impacted me because of the] lack of quiet and private space for me to work and talk to my therapist and other people's open support."*

*- 22-year-old transgender girl, Black, Berkeley*

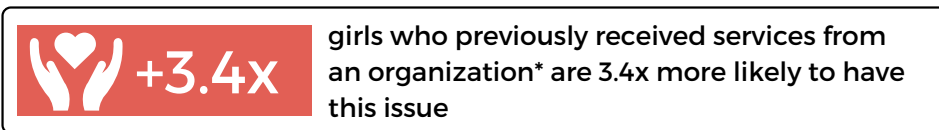
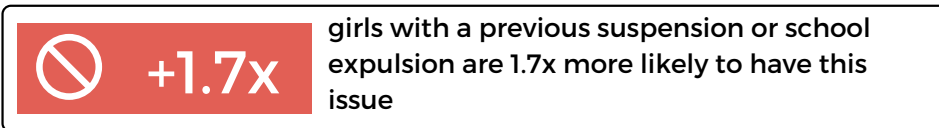
Girls' own definition of safety and wellbeing includes having a private, dedicated, girl-centric space in which they can communicate freely and be themselves<sup>5</sup>. For many girls, the constraints of COVID-19 have stripped away their private spaces (Figure 11):

5. Alliance for Girls (2020). Radical Visions of Safety, <https://www.alliance4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/AFG-Radical-Visions-of-Safety-Report.pdf>.

Figure 11. Girls reported access to privacy during COVID-19



**15% of girls overall report needing or not having access to a private place to communicate, but:**



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*Girls who are users of community, social, or nonprofit services, including for mental health or grief counseling; findings statistically significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Girls need private, safe spaces to connect with friends, explore their identities, and successfully participate in online/hybrid learning. They also need these spaces to access healthcare and make private decisions about their health (such as for receiving birth control or virtual counseling and therapy). Schools and community providers must place a premium on (re-)creating these spaces for girls post-pandemic.

### *Food, Groceries, and Toiletries; Access to Female Health Products*

*"At home we don't have enough alcohol and sanitizer. We can't access them either. And our rent went up and we lost our food stamps. Everything is off balance because of stupid COVID."*

*- 12-year-old girl, Black, Oakland*

Though fewer than one in five girls say they have unmet food, grocery, or toiletry needs due to the pandemic, girls in households in which someone had gone to prison were three times more likely to identify this as a need area. Furthermore, about one in five girls (18%) say they have trouble accessing female health products during COVID-19, though that increases by 1.1 times for each additional year of age, and by 1.9 times for girls with a previous suspension or school expulsion. Any effective post-COVID relief will need to address decreasing girls' food and supply insecurity and fully resourcing their health needs.

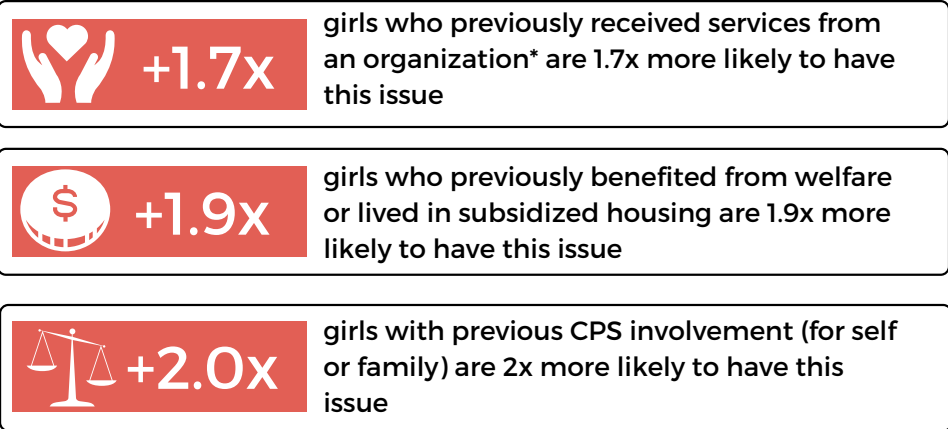
## Further Access to Services

About one in five girls overall (19%) say they need further access to services, including mental health or grief counseling. This increases significantly for three categories of girls (Figure 12):

Figure 12. Girls reported access to services



**19% of girls overall report needing or not having access to services, but:**



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*Girls who are users of community, social, or nonprofit services, including for mental health or grief counseling; findings statistically significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## Summary of COVID-19's Social and Emotional Impact on Girls

Re-opening and effectively resourcing all the services that girls use to meet their needs will be an essential feature of post-pandemic planning; girls' needs and wants must be centered in this planning to ensure that services are meeting girls where they are.

## WHAT GIRLS SAY ABOUT: RECEIVING ENCOURAGEMENT + SUPPORT DURING COVID-19



*"It is a little difficult to get the aid I need as teachers and counselors are overwhelmed with students' needs. Something I'd like to see change or put into place is peer-support or tutoring."*

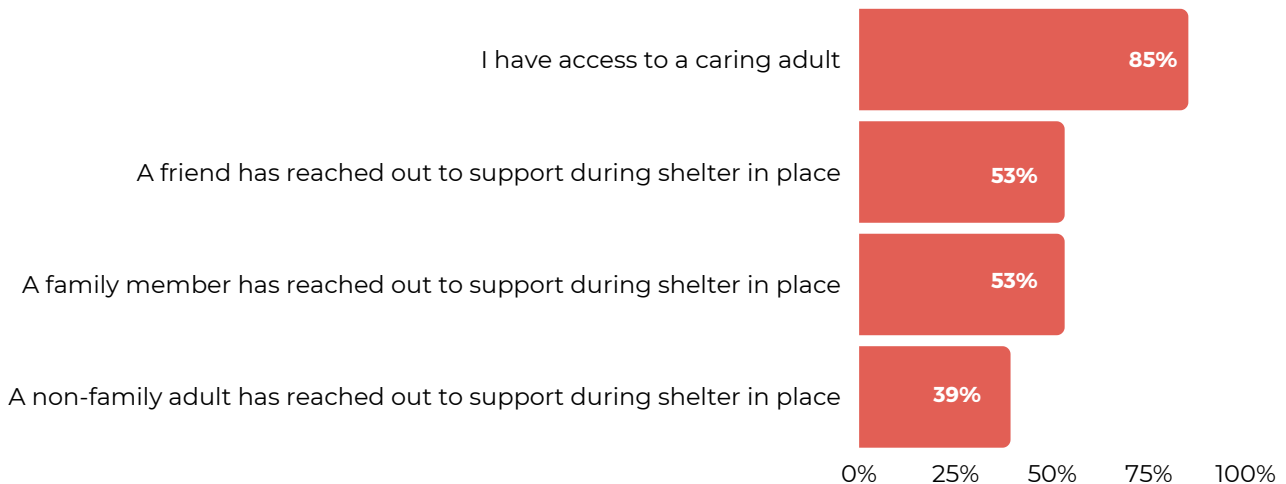
*-17-year-old girl, Hispanic/Latinx, Watsonville*



*Upshot: Girls have uneven experiences receiving family and community support*

In their qualitative feedback, girls report that connecting to family, peer, and community support has been a crucial lifeline for them during the pandemic. An overwhelming majority of girls overall (85%) share that they have access to a caring adult, and most say that a friend (53%) or a family member (53%) has reached out in support (Figure 13):

Figure 13. Girls reported support from friends, family, or other adults during COVID-19



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.

However, not all girls have been able to access the support they need and want.

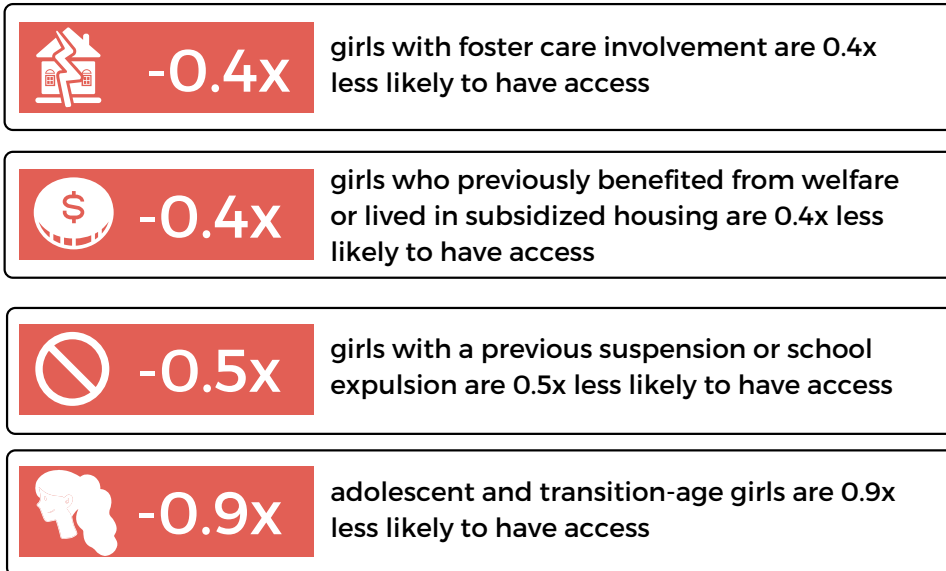
## Access To a Caring Adult

Although more than eight in 10 (85%) say they do have access to a caring adult during COVID-19, some girls are not as likely to have this key support (Figure 14):

Figure 14: Girls reported access to a caring adult during COVID-19



**15% of girls overall report not having access to a caring adult, but:**



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Similarly, while over half of girls overall (53%) report a family member has checked in on them during COVID-19; for Black girls they are .4 times less likely to report having a family member check in on them.

## Virtual Engagement

*"In one of my history classes, the professor arranged a virtual exchange with students from her old university in Kuwait. I was surprised by how similar we all were and how much we had to relate to. While some of my instructors were unprepared for online learning, she really rose to the occasion, finding new and interesting ways to keep students engaged."*

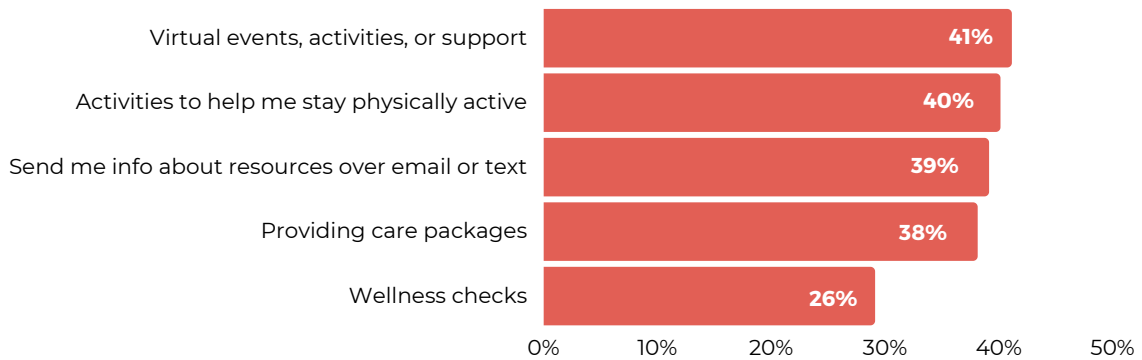
*- 19-year-old girl, White, Mountain View*



*Upshot: Girls want ongoing engagement – and that takes many different forms*

Girls desire to stay connected and have ongoing engagement in the future. No strong trend about how all girls prefer to be engaged emerged; rather, the overall data show a range of engagement preferences (Figure 15):

**Figure 15: Girls reported methods in which they want to be engaged during COVID-19**



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.

However, within each of the modes of engagement above, different categories of girls have very different preferences. Service providers, practitioners, and girl allies should take these into account to successfully engage with girls and meet them where they are.

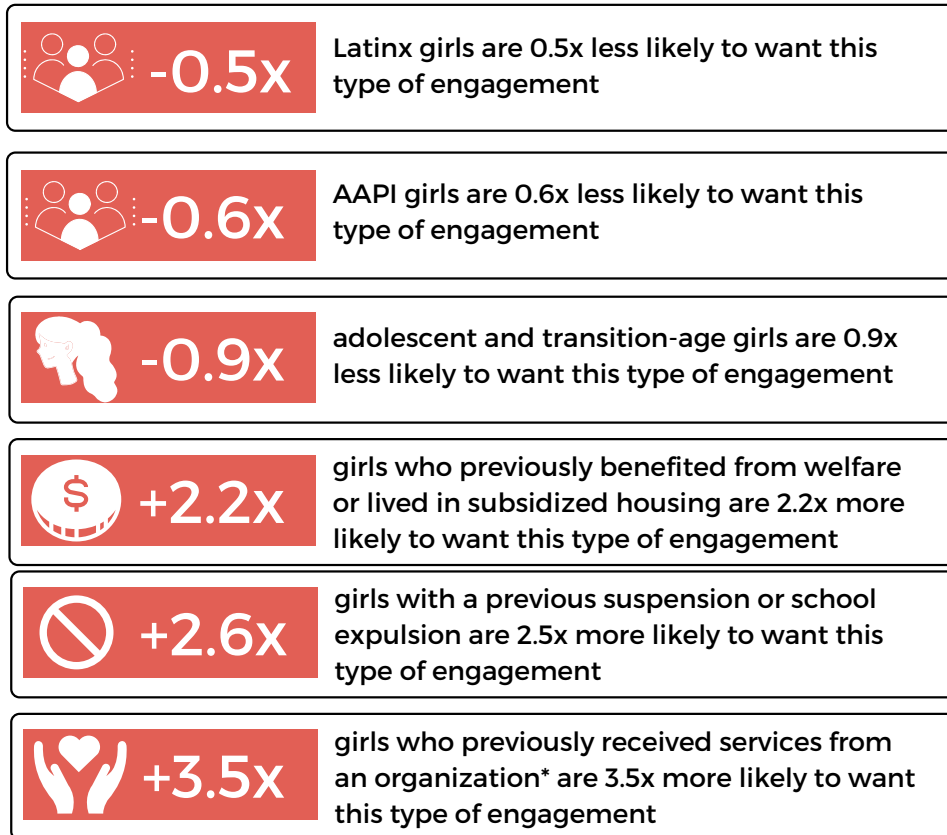
The idea of virtual engagement (e.g. virtual affinity circles, video calls, virtual check-ins, virtual clubs) has varied appeal depending on different identity groups, notably (Figure 16):



Figure 16: Girls reported desire for virtual engagement during COVID-19



**41% of girls overall report wanting virtual engagement, but:**



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*Girls who are users of community, social, or nonprofit services, including for mental health or grief counseling; findings statistically significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ).

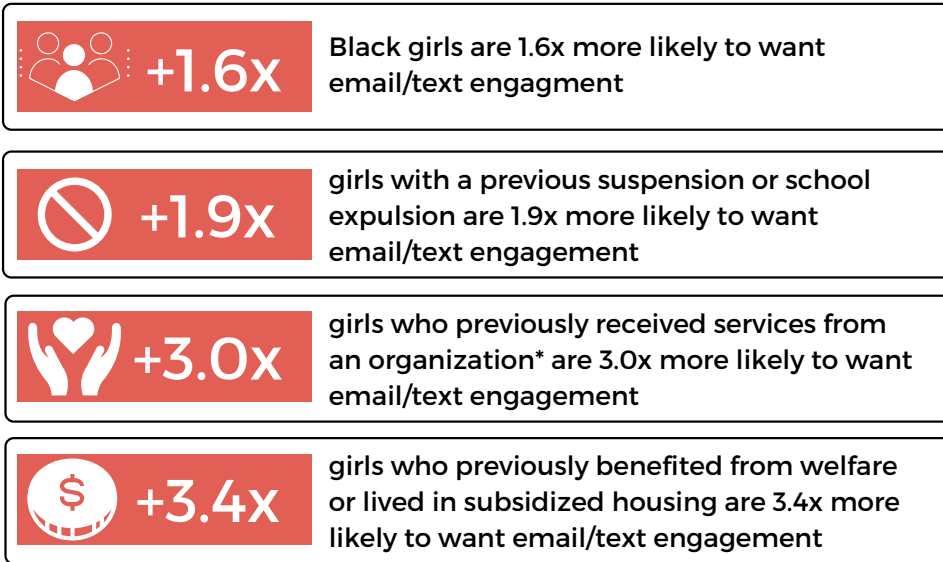
### *Email/Text Engagement*

The idea of email or text message engagement works especially well for some girls, notably (Figure 17):

Figure 17: Girls reported desire for email and/or text engagement during COVID-19



39% of girls overall report wanting email/text engagement, especially:



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*Girls who are users of community, social, or nonprofit services, including for mental health or grief counseling; findings statistically significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### Engagement To Stay Physically Active

*"I have not been able to play sports, which has made it difficult to get much physical activity."*

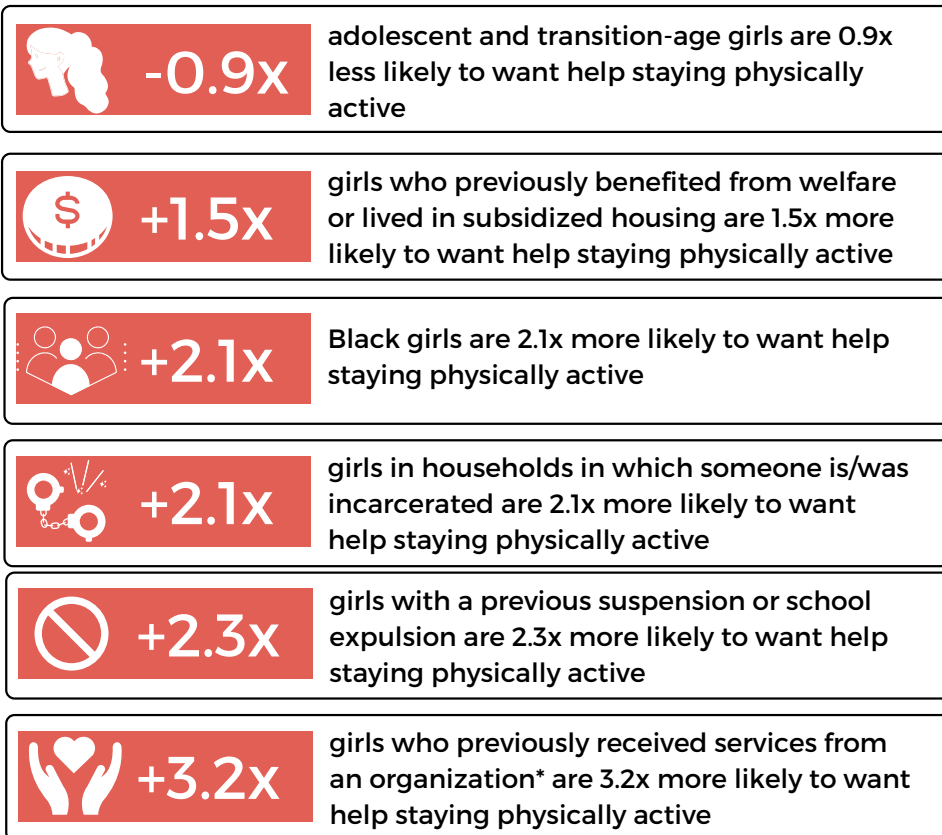
*- 16-year-old girl, Hispanic/Latinx, Oakland*

Overall, four in 10 girls want engagement around physical activity; that is especially true for many categories of girls, but less true for older girls (Figure 18):

Figure 18: Girls reported desire for activities to help them stay physically active during COVID-19



**40% of girls overall report wanting support around activities that keep them physically active, and:**



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*Girls who are users of community, social, or nonprofit services, including for mental health or grief counseling; findings statistically significant at  $(p < 0.05)$ .

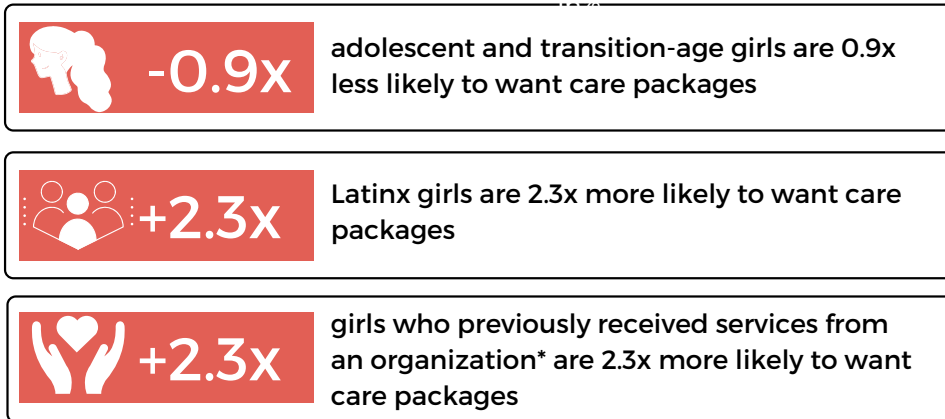
### Care Packages

Receiving care packages is a popular form of engagement with girls; 38% of girls say that would like to be provided with care packages with varying degrees of popularity with certain subsets of girls (Figure 19):

Figure 19: Girls reported desire for care packages during COVID-19



**38% of girls overall report favoring care packages, and:**



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey, (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

\*Girls who are users of community, social, or nonprofit services, including for mental health or grief counseling; findings statistically significant at ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## Summary of girls' needs for encouragement and support during COVID-19

Radical Visions of Safety points to the need for girls to have friends, peers, family, and adults with which they can build trust, feel supported, and model after to feel safe, thrive and sustain healthy relationships. A post-COVID-19 recovery must factor in providing relevant and continuous support for girls by meeting girls where they're at. Girls report the different ways in which they would like to or prefer not to be engaged. For direct service providers, policy makers, and systemic changemakers, listening to girls reported preferences of engagement can help to craft a more specialized and accessible ways to engage those most underserved.

## WHAT GIRLS SAY ABOUT: SCHOOL CLOSURES AND DISTANCE LEARNING DURING COVID-19



*“The closure of certain programs has taken away a huge part of the support system I have. It had also taken away much of the structure in my life and made it a lot more stressful as I was expected to take care of my younger siblings thus not having time for schoolwork or the sort. I would like more structure within the system.”*

*-15-year-old girl, AAPI, Hayward*

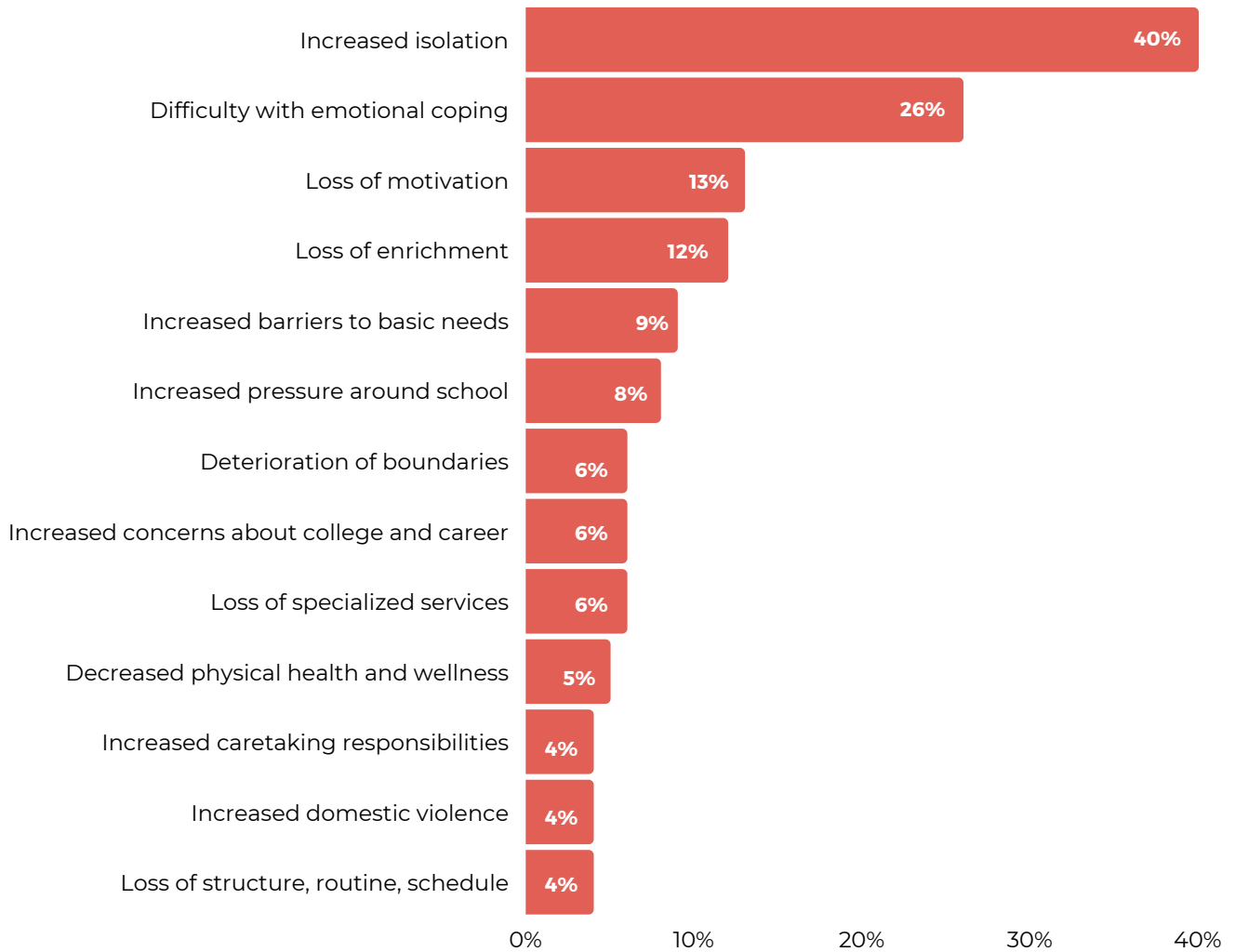


*Upshot: Girls value the connection and support system that schools provide over academic learning*

COVID-19 has shown schools to be more than places of learning. For girls, schools serve as unique and centralized spaces for connection, access to services, basic needs, and enrichment, and a constant for ensuring stability and structure.

In their qualitative feedback, when asked how the school and service closures have impacted them, girls typically report missing friends and connections (40%) over academic performance (30%). Further, girls report missing a stable routine (4%), services (6%), and access to enrichment (12%) more than their decline in learning quality (3%) (Figure 21 and 22).

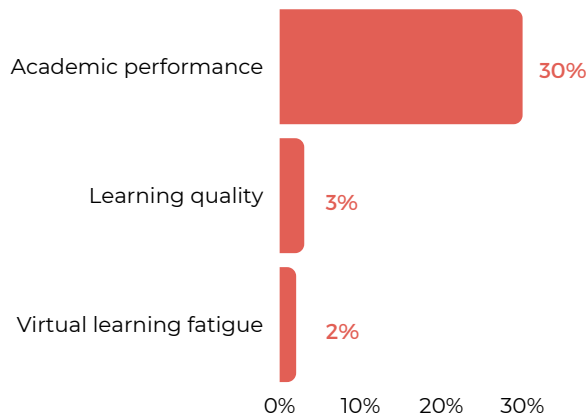
Figure 20. Girls overall reported negative effects of COVID-19



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.

While a small percentage of girls liked and even preferred distance learning, girls overall were frustrated and concerned by distance learning. Thirty percent were worried about how the pandemic and online learning would affect their academic performance whether that be a decline in their grades, the effects of school closures on future planning, or learning new concepts. Three percent described negative effects of the pandemic on learning quality – inconsistency in lessons and learning, wanting to return in-person because online learning was insufficient, hard, and/or inadequate.

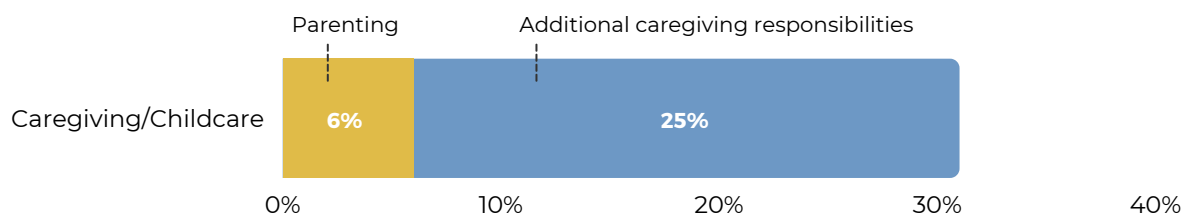
Figure 21. Girls overall reported negative effects of COVID-19 tagged by learning loss



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.

Important to note is the effect that school closures had on girls' self-reported caregiving responsibilities. Overall, 31% of girls reported increased caregiving responsibilities as an effect of the pandemic on their education and schooling. The girls reported taking on caregiving roles for siblings and other family members including increased household responsibilities, childcare, and helping with sibling's own distance learning (25%). Young parents also reported additional caregiving responsibilities in having to juggle distance learning, lack of childcare, and financial stability (6%).

Figure 22: Girls overall reported negative effects of caregiving responsibilities affected their education and schooling as a result of COVID-19



Source: Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021.

## Summary of the effects of school closures and distance learning during COVID-19

If schools want to effectively and meaningfully address learning recovery and improve academic success for girls post-COVID, it must acknowledge the comprehensive role they have in girls' lives as centralized spaces for support and well-being. That means building out school infrastructure to support holistic wellness with improved trauma-informed care, teacher training around social and emotional supports and hybrid modalities, reliable and continuous access to services, and supporting young parents and families with caregiving so the burden care doesn't default to girls and impede their own learning.

# OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

THIS SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE PROVIDES A GLIMPSE OF OUSD GIRLS' EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19.

92% of OUSD survey respondents completed the survey between June 1 and August 10, 2020.

Total OUSD survey participants: 487

- 18% of girls rated their mental health 'bad' or 'very bad' during shelter-in-place\*
- 52% of girls reported no (non-family) adult from school or program reached out to support during COVID-19\*\*\*
- 6% of girls reported losing a loved one due to COVID-19\*\*\*
- 12% of girls reported not having access to a caring adult during COVID-19\*\*\*

Negative effects	OUSD respondents	
	Count	Percentage
Stress or anxiety	302	62%
Additional caregiving/parenting responsibilities	201	41%
Learning support (e.g., tutor, support for style of learning)	156	32%
News and media related to COVID-19	123	25%
Cyberbullying	50	10%
Negative messages due to gender	41	8%
Violence at home	5	1%

Ways in which respondents want to be engaged	OUSD respondents	
	Count	Percentage
Activities to help me stay physically active***	275	56%
Providing care packages***	270	55%
Virtual activities, events, or support***	262	54%
Send me information about resources over email or text***	246	51%
Wellness Checks**	149	31%

Source: Source: All data in OUSD profile is from Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at \*p ≤ 0.05, \*\*p ≤ 0.01, or \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001



Need or do not have access to...	OUSD respondents	
	Count	Percentage
Financial stability	134	28%
A tablet, computer, or phone with internet	92	19%
Access to services	82	17%
Female health products	76	16%
Food, groceries, toiletries	75	15%
A private place to communicate	63	13%
Completing school requirements	56	11%
A safe place to live	42	9%
Transportation	13	3%
Diapers, wipes, or formula for my child	13	3%

Source: Source: All data in OUSD profile is from Alliance for Girls COVID-19 Survey (n=1,214), administered March 2020 to January 2021; differences are statistically significant at \*p ≤ 0.05, \*\*p ≤ 0.01, or \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

## Young Women's Leadership Board's Recommendations for OUSD

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- Continue to provide a food pantry at school clinics and other spaces for students struggling with food insecurity even after COVID-19.
  - Establish sports programs during the summer or when school is shut down to provide students with a physical and enrichment-based outlet.
  - Provide consistent teacher training and resources for online learning so that in case of future online learning, classes and schedules are organized, accessible, and understandable for students.
  - Expand office hours and have recorded lessons so respondents can learn at their own pace. Also, provide hands-on interactive activities so students are able to comprehend concepts more easily.
  - Provide a mandatory one-week Black history seminar for all students to learn more about Black history outside of slavery.
  - Develop mentorship programs especially for youth living in toxic home environments.
  - Protect students against attacks and microaggressions through policy
-

# CONCLUSION

Resiliency is a trait our societies and systems encourage and promote – the ability to bounce back and adapt to difficult circumstances and return stronger. However, the onus of being resilient is often put on the affected and most underserved, including girls and gender-expansive youth. *How can we transform our systems and institutions to shoulder the burden of resiliency and healing so the weight of recovery relies on a better ecosystem of support rather than on the mindsets and habits of our girls?*

It starts with listening and leading with girls' experiences and voices. Prior to the pandemic, girls described how they were doing, what was not working, what they needed to feel safe and supported (trust, respect, sovereignty), proven practices to achieve those needs, and the barriers and challenges preventing those needs from being met (institutional, systemic, operational, and community deficits).

With the onset of COVID-19, an already fragile ecosystem of support for girls was flattened. Girls were severely affected by the pandemic – experiencing profound isolation and disconnection, increased stress and anxiety, and taking on unequal caregiving responsibilities, just to name a few. And for girls for whom systems were already stacked against them the pandemic negatively multiplied the effect and the weight of their experiences.

As we begin to rebuild an ecosystem and infrastructure of support for girls, there is a real opportunity for institutions, systems, funders, communities, and service providers to share the burden of resiliency by cultivating conditions for safety, healthy relationships and wellness for girls. This is truly an inflection point uniting isolated girls' voices and experiences into explicit and tangible solutions for how to honor their needs in this moment and beyond.

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"EXPLAIN TO US KIDS  
WHAT IS GOING ON  
DON'T IGNORE US. WE  
ARE SMALL BUT WORRY  
ABOUT EVERYTHING  
AROUND US."

-8-YEAR-OLD GIRL,  
HISPANIC/LATINX, OAKLAND

# APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND AIMS

Immediately after the March 16, 2021 shelter-in-place ordinance impacted California, on March 19, 2021 Alliance for Girls (AFG) and Oakland Unified School District partners recognized the importance of knowing how the closing of schools and services due to COVID-19 was impacting girls and their families. To do so, AFG and its partners reached out via calls, texts, and emails to girl leaders who had previously led or were connected to AFG's Meeting Girls Needs Initiative (MGNI) in San Francisco Unified School District and Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). MGNI is a system change model spearheaded by AFG in partnership with its members, girls, families, and system and community stakeholders. MGNI starts with a research and design process led by women and girls of color. Research produced through the Lived Experiences of Girls series is intended to provide AFG, its members and partners, and the Bay Area community with the data needed to increase coordination and collaboration between organizations and advance policies, practices, and programs that are informed and led by girls.

Together AFG and its partners conducted one-on-one wellness checks with the girls. We learned that, given school and program closures, they needed a job, wanted something to do, and were also interested in how their peers were doing. To support their needs, AFG invited girl leaders to join the Young Women's Leadership Board, and to design the relief efforts and lead a virtual youth participatory action research (YPAR) project. The YPAR project aimed to understand and respond to the needs of girls and gender-expansive youth up to age 24 living in California under a COVID-19 context, as well as to provide girls with access to resources through survey incentives. By the end of the month, the YWLB had developed, piloted, finalized, and disseminated a needs assessment survey to better understand what girls and gender-expansive youth were experiencing as a result of Covid-19. All survey respondents were eligible to win one of ten \$50 gift cards each week that the study was running. And partnerships with AFG members serving girls that are hard to reach, including youth connected to systems and young moms. These partners included MISSEY and Teen Success, Inc. Participants recruited to complete the survey through these organizations were guaranteed a \$50 stipend after completing the survey.

# CONTINUED: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## SURVEY DESIGN

YWLB leaders designed the needs assessment survey to capture what they identified as important based on past AFG research, personal experiences, and what they knew were the experiences of their peers. The needs assessment survey asked about access to safety; basic needs, including food, access to birth control, diapers, baby wipes, baby formula, menstruation products, internet, and technology; and support systems, which encompassed private, confidential access to a caring adult and friend. YWLB leaders also thought it would be important to assess experiences previous AFG reports identified as impacting girls: caregiving responsibilities, cyberbullying, negative messages placed on them because of their gender identity, and race. YWLB leaders also wanted to know how girls' mental health was fairing and how their schooling and education was impacted by the closing of schools and in-person learning. To assess if there were any differences based on an individual's identity, the survey also included important self-reported demographic information: location, race/ethnicity, gender identity and expression, age, place of birth, and parenting status.

## SURVEY DISSEMINATION

YWLB and AFG engaged in multiple survey dissemination strategies. YWLB shared information about the survey, its aims, and the inclusion criteria via Instagram; participants also sent text messages to friends and peers. AFG engaged in multiple data partnerships with its members and school partners to disseminate the survey: Girls at the Margin; MISSEY (Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting & Serving Sexually Exploited Youth); CARAS; Planned Parenthood Mar Monte; Oakland Unified School District; San Francisco Unified School District; the Santa Clara County Office of Education; Black Girl Brilliance; Public Council; Brown Issues – Bay Area Chapter; YWCA of San Francisco, Marin, and Silicon Valley; and Oasis for Girls. Partners shared the survey with participants through programing, email communication, and individual outreach by staff. Through these survey dissemination strategies, AFG collected 2,084 survey responses; of these, 1,214 unduplicated surveys met the criteria for inclusion in the study.

# CONTINUED: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## DATA CLEANING

Data were cleaned through the following process:

- Step 1: Identify obvious duplicate open responses for Q7, Q8, Q10, Q13, and Q14. "Obvious" duplicates were responses that were identical and extremely unlikely to be common across participants. Responses were frequently cross-checked to see if they came from the same IP address; 423 cases were excluded because of duplicate open responses.
- Step 2: Identify responses with duplicates of unusual ZIP codes. "Unusual" ZIP codes were non-California ZIP codes or ZIP codes that were incomplete (i.e., fewer than five digits). If the unusual ZIP code had a duplicate and it came from the same IP address, the duplicate entry was deleted; 203 cases were excluded because of duplicate/unusual ZIP codes.
- Step 3: Identify respondents who indicated that they were 25 years of age or older; 224 cases were excluded for being outside the survey's age range.
- Step 4: Identify cases without any responses to the substantive survey questions; seven cases were excluded due to no responses to substantive questions.

In total, 857 cases were excluded as part of the data cleaning process, which resulted in a usable total of 1,214 observations.

## QUANTITATIVE SURVEY ANALYSIS

The first phase of quantitative data analysis examined the background characteristics of girls included in the dataset. Using self-reported demographic data collected through the survey, the evaluation team sought to understand who the respondents were in terms of age, ethnicity, language most comfortable speaking, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, access to services, and other life circumstances.

The second phase of quantitative data analysis examined the frequency of responses to the closed-ended survey questions relating to the effects of shelter-in-place. Responses to these questions were examined for the population of respondents overall as well as separately for the respondents who indicated that they heard about the survey through the Oakland Unified School District.

# CONTINUED: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The third phase of quantitative data analysis focused on the likelihood of certain responses to the closed-ended questions about shelter-in-place according to the different sub-populations of respondents. For each closed-ended question, Pearson bivariate correlations were calculated between the response options and each sub-population (e.g., ethnicity, language, gender, etc.). Next, a logistic regression model was run for each response option. The model included the response option as the dependent variable and all background characteristics that had a statistically significant correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ) with the response option as independent variables. Background variables that had a statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) association with the response option were identified and expressed in the form of an odds ratio whereby respondents with the background characteristic were x-times more/less likely to provide the response than respondents without the background characteristic.

## QUALITATIVE SURVEY ANALYSIS

The qualitative data analysis included inductive and deductive grounded analyses of the responses to the open-ended survey questions, as well as three meaning-making sessions: 1) internal with Evaluation Studio team, 2) cross-organizational with AFG and ES, and 3) review and discussion with AFG's Young Women's Leadership Board to see what themes emerged.

For the first phase of the grounded analysis, two inductive read-throughs were administered by the Evaluation Studio primary researcher. The first read-through was a general read-through to become familiar with the data, and the second noted emerging themes, ideas, and common language. One deductive read-through was also administered, noting themes by survey questions and two intentional questions: 1) What is specifically being noted about power, institutions, and systems? 2) What are girls noting they miss?

In the second phase of analysis, the Evaluation Studio team, consisting of three other researchers, read through the broad responses and noted emerging themes and filled out a worksheet asking, 1) What stood out? 2) What are common themes? 3) How does it compare to the quantitative data? In this meaning-making session, the findings were juxtaposed to the initial grounded analysis to consolidate similar themes.

In the third phase of analysis, a cross-organizational meaning-making session was conducted, comparing themes across organizations and with the findings from AFG's Young Women's Leadership Board.

# CONTINUED: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following these phases, Evaluation Studio's primary researcher created three primary codes and 23 sub-codes. The three primary codes were Compounding Outcomes, Academic Challenges, and Solutions. The 23 sub-codes included isolation, emotional condition, encouragement, enrichment, basic needs, pressure of school, specialized services, boundaries, pathways, physical health, structure, caretaking, toxic family, learning loss quality, return to school, learning loss grades, virtual learning fatigue, tutor, solutions-connections, solutions-hobbies, solutions-self-love, solutions-ease, and solutions-counseling.

## LIMITATIONS

The survey was administered at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, between March 2020 to January 2021 at irregular intervals, based on sampling convenience of Alliance For Girls and member organizations' virtual convenings, workshops, trainings, town halls, and listening sessions. Therefore, some limitations of the survey data include:

- Nearly half of the respondents submitted their responses during summer 2020 (defined here as June 1-August 10, 2020), making generalizability based on the survey "waves" during different phases of the pandemic unclear."
- Some disaggregated correlations require further research.
- More participant diversity is needed to generalize around underserved demographic, affinity, and dispossessed groups.
- There is limited COVID-19 comparison data across majority groups so there is a lack of comparative data.
- Survey participants predominantly were from the Bay Area, so there is limited statewide data generalizability.



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