



# COVID-19 and Social Values: Interpretations of young students in Nepal

## Introduction

COVID-19 affected all the sectors in Nepal, however, education is at the top. To prevent students from catching the virus, the government of Nepal decided to close all the schools in March 2020. The closure of schools continued for eight months until November 2020. The second wave of COVID-19 severely hit the country, resulting in a three-month closure of schools beginning in April 2021. Again, the third wave of COVID-19 forced schools to remain shut down for one and a half months in early 2022. In this way, during the past couple of years, schools in Nepal have remained closed almost for a year, one full academic session. Despite the efforts of the government in virtual teaching, rural students did not benefit and missed out education.



Young students watching films (Photo credit: Bhag Narayan Chaudhari)

While young students were not at school, most of their time passed in fear and frustration. They have come through the most difficult time of their life. The restrictions on movements, shortage of food, loss of family, and friends have had a psychological effect on many young students. The students' interpretations about society and social values have been changed due to COVID-19. Similarly, COVID-19 related terms such as isolation, quarantine, social distancing and so on have been introduced and become more prominent in their lives. Surviving through such a difficult time, students have come back to school with rejoice and excitement. Hence, they have a lot of feelings to express about their society, social values, and COVID-19. To interpret the feelings of young students on the influences of COVID-19 on social values, I carried out a brief study in three schools of Nepal. This article brings the interpretation of young students on the influences of COVID-19 on social values in Nepal.

## Methodology and tools

I selected three schools, one school each from the northern, central, and southern part of *Dhanusha* district of *Madhes* province. In each school, 24 young students from grades 8 to 12 were selected. I used the two films produced through a Changing the Story phase II research project, which examined the interpretations of civic national values made by young students in post conflict settings of Kenya and Nepal (Kenya and Nepal project), in which I contributed to as a co-Investigator. The films worked as an igniter to enable young students to formulate their interpretations. I followed the steps provided in part four of our [Scope of Works](#) to collect the information from young students. After the films, young students worked in pairs to interview each other. Initially they were shy, but later they enjoyed the process of interviewing each other.



Students conducting a pair interview (Photo credit: Rajib Kumar Jha)

Our films helped young students to ignite ideas in their mind. Students watched other students talking about social values in post conflict settings, which helped them to formulate interpretations in the post COVID-19 scenario. Though the films were from different contexts and countries, young students watched them thoughtfully. They asked questions around the making of films and expressed their interest to participate in an arts based teaching and learning process. After watching the films, some students realized the suffering of animals and nature during the lockdown. They realized that nature and animals are also part of our society and must be valued. After watching the films, a girl student requested to re-play the Kenyan film. She linked the impacts of COVID 19 to other creatures, like domestic animals, street dogs, and others. She stated,

*'During the lockdown period, we were only thinking for ourselves, our families, and friends. We completely forgot that there were other creatures in nature and they needed our care'.*

## Young Students' Interpretations

The effect of COVID- 19 is apparent on young students' expression of social values. Before COVID- 19, mutual respect, harmony, social bond, peace, tolerance and cooperation were the motto of their society. *'When needed, people were helpful to each other. During COVID, I saw that sick people were avoided. Poor people suffered from hunger, but many of them did not get support'*, a young student from grade 11 stated. Though life was difficult for poor people even before COVID, it was habitual for them. According to the young students, *'Even the poorest people had some source of income to live their daily life'*. However, COVID- 19 pushed poor people to the poorest category, and middle class people to the poor category. The fear of COVID- 19 forced people to unnecessarily store food stuff in their home. Those who could afford, stored more food stuff and stayed safely at home. Poor people were forced to go out in search of work and thus, put themselves at risk of COVID- 19 infection.

In Nepali community, guests are regarded as a god. However, during COVID- 19 guests were avoided. Young students expressed, *'Friends' doors were closed for each other. Our relatives and neighbors also did the same. Schools were used as a quarantine space and guests were not welcomed'*. Students are feeling sorry for all the misunderstanding of social values that happened during COVID- 19 and want to re-establish everything. They further stated, *'Now we should invite each other to strengthen our communal, friendship, and relationship bond'*. They have realized the importance of strengthening communal bonds and wish to create a better society. They reinforced that the COVID- 19 related terms, such as isolation, quarantine, social distance should be re-interpreted and contextualized.

Young students are worried about their educational achievements. They are unhappy that their academic course may not be completed. *'We would like to request schools and governments to recruit more teachers and give us extra tuition classes'* was the voice of all students. Students are also worried for their friends who are still facing hardships to attend school regularly. They are also willing to transfer what they have learned in school to their friends. They said, *'Some of our friends are still facing hardships to come to school regularly. So we can help them by sharing what we have learnt in school.'* Until the COVID- 19 situation completely resolves, helping each other and transferring what students have read at school to the poor students is a brilliant innovative idea. However, the students have no idea how they can do it.

## My reflections and takeaways

Most of the young students who engaged in the mobility fund activities , belonged to the poor and marginalized community. During the COVID-19, they lived through fear, frustration, and scarcity. The information highlights the COVID- 19 induced social challenges they faced and are still facing. Students with family members' that lived in isolation at some point during COVID- 19 tried to convey that it was a wrong practice. Isolating someone to prevent the spread of virus could be the option but the way it created hatred among other people was wrong. The infected people could have received better care if she or he had received love and affection from others. Now, young students have a better understanding about the importance of social values and want to re-establish a better society. Along with friends, family, and neighbors, young students have also understood the importance of animals and nature as important aspects of society. There are more poor people in the community which bothers them. Young students want to share knowledge to other students who are unable to continue school.

Active participation and thoughtful responses of young students enabled me to interpret the influences of COVID- 19 on social values. They mentioned peer to peer education and are worried about the education of their friends. It demands further research that can generate practical solutions to solve the problems young students have identified. Young students liked the arts based performance shown in the films. They are interested in arts based learning methods and are filmed in a similar way. The infection of COVID- 19 is significantly low in Nepal now. The lockdown has been fully relaxed and the situation is almost normal. Schools are in full operation. Therefore, this is the right time to carry out further research studies on the ideas mentioned by young students.

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Students reflecting over their ideas (Photo Credit: Nub Raj Bhandari)