

CorStone's cutting-edge 'Girls First' resilience program significantly improves emotional and physical wellbeing of adolescent girls in Bihar

- **Program maximizes wellbeing, learning and self-esteem, minimizes conflicts**
- **Program demonstrates resilience is integral for India's youth to thrive emotionally and physically**

20th January 2016, New Delhi: CorStone India Foundation today presented the outcomes of a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) of its flagship 'Girls First' resilience program, which aimed to cultivate resilience among marginalized adolescent girls in India. Conducted in 2013-14, the 'Girls First' RCT involved 3500 girls and 74 facilitators across 76 schools in rural Bihar, demonstrating significant positive impact on mental and physical health, education, social skills and relationships. The program has resulted in improvements in girls' emotional and physical wellbeing, safe water practices, and self-advocacy for gender and educational rights.

Elaborating on the results of the Girls First RCT, Steve Leventhal, Executive Director, CorStone, said, *"The Girls First resilience program has had tremendous impact on adolescent girls and their communities. Our analyses reveal that girls are stopping early marriage, advocating for their education, and standing up to harassment using a combination of many skills learned in Girls First, including assertive communication, managing negative emotions, drawing on strengths, sharing feelings and problems*

with group members, collaborative problem-solving, and so on. We believe this study is one of the first to show that tackling issues of identity, strengths, and mindset through a rigorous resilience-building program can indeed amplify impact across many life domains for girls in developing countries, improving their psychosocial health, physical health, and education."

Key Outcomes of the Program

- Emotional resilience increased **33%**
- Health knowledge increased **99%**
- Attitudes about gender equality improved **18%**
- Clean water behaviours improved **96%**

With funding support by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 'Girls First' was a first-of-its-kind resilience-based program introduced in India, which integrated evidence-based practices from the fields of positive psychology, social-emotional learning, emotional intelligence and restorative justice. Under the program, adolescent girls attended facilitated peer support groups (led by trained school teachers or community

women) during the school day for one hour each week. A typical lesson combined 20-30 minutes of skill building followed by 30 minutes of group discussion and problem solving.

CorStone recognized that prioritizing education and wellbeing is particularly important in Bihar where girls are at a high risk for arranged marriages starting at around age 14, at which point they are often forced to stop attending school. As a result, 95% of women in Bihar have less than 12 years of education, and nearly 70% are pregnant by age 18, which sharply increases health risks.

Mr. Rajiv Ranjan Prasad, State Program Officer, Elementary and Formal Education, Bihar Education Project Council, Patna, Bihar said, *"We are fortunate to receive the support of CorStone for improvement of the resilience, health, and education status of adolescent girls in Bihar. It is encouraging to see the positive changes that the Girls First program has brought to these young girls, which is also appreciated by the school authorities and teachers. The program has complemented the BEPC's activities and helped to improve our own indicators as well during the project period. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with CorStone on the roll-out of the resilience program in Government schools across rural as well as urban Bihar."*

Key outcomes of the RCT

- **33% increase in emotional resilience** in girls who received training in a combined resilience and adolescent health program, compared to just 4% increase in girls receiving only an adolescent health program. Girls receiving resilience training also improved their coping skills, self-confidence, courage, persistence, and ability to handle negative emotions relative to a control group.
- **99% increase in health knowledge** in girls who received training in the combined program as compared to 78% increase in knowledge among girls receiving only the adolescent health program (both groups received the same amount of direct instruction about health issues). Health knowledge measured included facts about HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, menstruation, anemia, malaria, clean water, substance use, and health consequences of early marriage.
- **18% improvement in attitudes about gender equality** in girls who received training in the combined program as compared to 8% improvement in girls only receiving the adolescent health program even though both groups received the same amount of direct instruction about gender differences and women's rights. The improvement was seen in their belief in gender equality, including their beliefs that it is equally important for boys and girls to attend school, and that women never deserve to be beaten.

- **96% improvement in clean water behaviors** in girls who received the combined program as compared to only 37% improvement in girls receiving the adolescent health program. The improvement was seen in the strategies used to keep water clean, including filtering, boiling, or chlorinating.

Based on the successes of Girls First, scale-up programs involving over 30,000 boy and girl students in standards 6th-8th in over 250 schools in Bihar are underway in partnership with the Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC). The next phase is being called 'Youth First' as it aims to impact the health and education - and positive life trajectory - of both boys and girls. *"It is vital to cultivate resilience among marginalized youth in India—girls as well as boys—for them to thrive emotionally, physically, and economically; to make conscious, positive choices; and to deal with adversity of any kind in a resilient and peaceful manner,"* **added Steve Leventhal.**

One such resilient youth from Bihar, Ritu has become a true advocate for women's rights in her community. She managed to stop her sister's early marriage and convince her father to let her sister study further. As she expresses, *"I truly dislike that boys and girls are so often treated differently in my area. I do not like [when anyone] speaks ill of girls, does not love girls, loves boys more than girls and does not want to give birth to girls."*

About CorStone (www.corstone.org)

CorStone develops and provides personal resilience program to improve well-being for youth worldwide, focusing on adolescent girls as critical change-agents in their communities. CorStone believes that cultivating personal resilience is a foundational step in helping youth to thrive — one which is often missing in development program worldwide. CorStone's evidence-based program impact three interdependent factors in wellbeing: emotional health, physical health, and education.

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