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Low perceived risk: A challenge to adoption of preventive behaviors for COVID-19?

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Low perceived risk: a challenge to adoption of preventive behaviors for COVID-19?

India, with **13,387** cases reported as of April 17, currently accounts for just **0.6%** of the COVID-19 cases worldwide. The nationwide lockdown may have helped contain the initial COVID-19 outbreak. However, until testing rates improve, the size of the outbreak remains unclear, and the risk of spread remains. It is critical to ensure ongoing adherence to current social distancing and handwashing behaviours to protect the population from a larger outbreak.

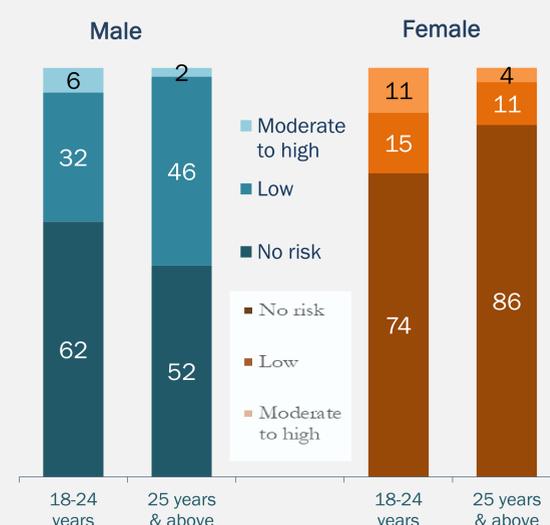
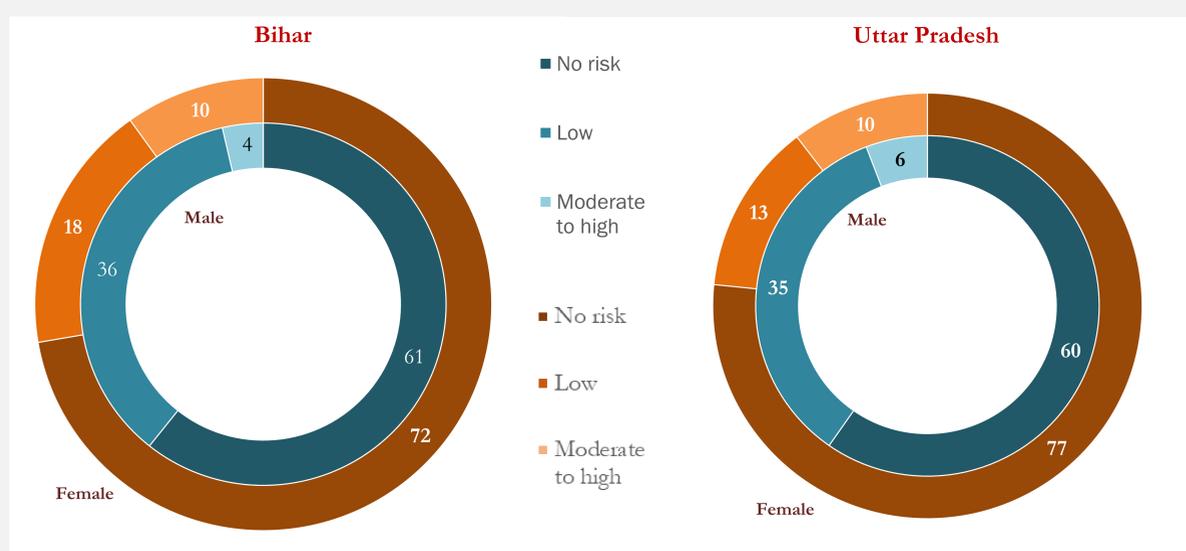
An ongoing COVID-19 knowledge, attitudes and practices study implemented by the Population Council Institute in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh sought to assess the extent to which study participants felt personally at risk of COVID-19 (see Box 1 for a profile of study participants).

Although all participants were aware of COVID-19, their risk perception was very low in both Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In both states, more females than males perceived their risk to be moderate or high.

Profile of study participants (N=1,237)

	Male	Female
Age		
18-24	79%	89%
25 and above	21%	11%
Education		
None	3%	13%
1-7	7%	8%
8-9	12%	15%
10 and above	78%	64%
Place of residence		
Urban	54%	43%
Rural	46%	57%
State		
Uttar Pradesh	313	599
Bihar	112	213

More young men and women (ages 18-24) believed that they were at moderate to high risk, compared with, adult men and women (ages 25 and above)



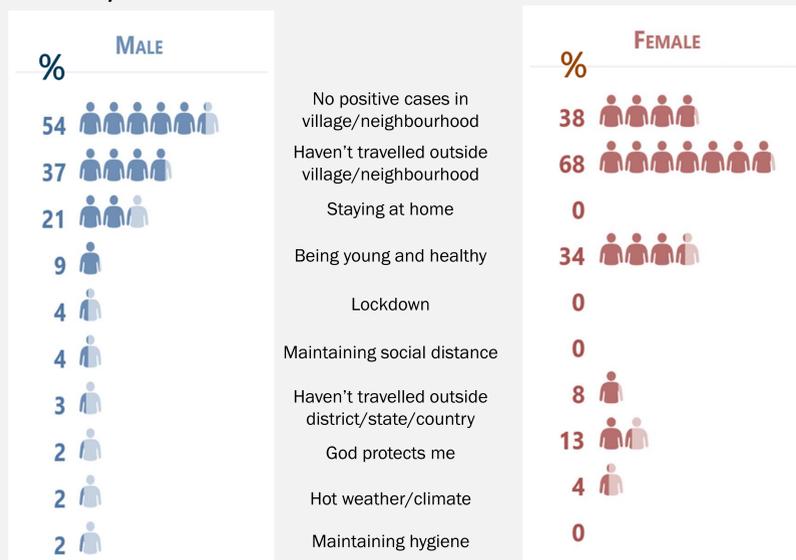
Perceived self-risk did not differ significantly between participants in urban areas and rural areas:

Prominent reasons for very low risk perceptions were **absence of any positive case in their neighbourhood and no history of travelling outside their neighbourhood, district, state or country.**

At the same time, there were misconceptions among those who perceived to be at no/low risk. Female respondents were more likely to attribute their low risk to beliefs that they are young and healthy, god will protect them or the virus will not spread under hot weather; they also had less accurate information about symptoms and preventive behaviours.

Despite our concerns stemming from low perceived risk, so far we see very high adherence – 94-95% staying home, 70-90% washing hands/using hand sanitizer more. These are very good!!

Among those who perceived their risk to be none or low, reasons include



Behavior change campaigns promoting social distancing and handwashing to prevent COVID-19 may need to incorporate information on personal risk, particularly for youth who need to understand that their behavior protects older family members as well. There is also a need to bust the myths and misconceptions about COVID-19.



The Aarogya Setu App, introduced by the Ministry, that contains factual information about transmission and prevention measures and enables individuals to assess their risk and know their proximity to COVID-19 positive cases needs to be popularized!!!