

FEELING the HEAT

Children's Voices on
heat, well-being and
learning in India.

JUNE 2026

A Volunteer-led Rapid Assessment
by CRY – Child Rights and You





Acknowledgements

This rapid assessment is first and foremost indebted to the children across different parts of India who shared their experiences, discomforts, observations, worries, and hopes with openness and honesty. Their voices form the heart of this report.

We are deeply grateful to the volunteers and interns associated with CRY who participated in this initiative with sincerity, sensitivity, and responsibility. Through thoughtful interactions and careful documentation, they helped surface realities that are often unseen, normalised, or insufficiently acknowledged.

The volunteer group represented a diverse cross-section of engaged citizens — students, interns, young professionals, educators, and long-term volunteers — who collectively

demonstrated the potential of participatory citizen engagement in social listening and documentation around issues affecting children.

We also acknowledge the support of VE regional teams and colleagues across the Research and Media teams in shaping the framework and approach of this assessment.

Finally, we recognise that while this report captures only a snapshot of children's experiences during a particular phase of severe heat, it represents a sincere collective effort to listen more carefully to children — and to carry their voices forward with empathy, credibility, and responsibility.

Team CRY

Executive Summary

India's summer of 2026 again brought into sharp focus the growing intensity and spread of extreme heat across the country. During April and May 2026, several regions recorded temperatures exceeding 44–47°C, leading to severe heatwave alerts, revised school timings, restricted outdoor activities, and temporary school closures across multiple states.

While heatwaves are often discussed through environmental or infrastructural lenses, children experience these realities in deeply personal and immediate ways — through exhaustion, disrupted sleep, difficulty concentrating, overheated classrooms, water shortages, power cuts, altered routines, and stress within families. Yet children's own voices remain relatively absent from mainstream discourse around heat preparedness and response.

It is within this context that CRY undertook a volunteer-led rapid assessment titled "Heat Distress: Children's Well-being and Learning" during May–June 2026, to better understand

how children across urban and peri-urban India are experiencing severe heat in their everyday lives.

The assessment gathered 3,096 responses from school-going children aged 10–17 — through volunteer-assisted interactions with children from under-served communities, and direct self-administered online participation by children with internet access — across 27 states and union territories, supported by 686 volunteers and interns associated with CRY across regions.

Unlike formal data collection led solely by researchers or field enumerators, this assessment consciously encouraged volunteers to immerse themselves in children's realities, interact thoughtfully, and document experiences with sensitivity and authenticity. In doing so, the exercise not only generated valuable insights, but also deepened volunteers' awareness of the unequal ways in which children experience environmental stress and vulnerability.

KEY FINDINGS

- **88% of children** felt the heat this year was "much higher" or "a little higher" than previous years.
- The **afternoon (46.5%)** and **school hours (45.3%)** emerged as the most difficult parts of the day.



KEY FINDINGS

- Children most commonly reported **dehydration (63%)**, **headaches (51%)**, **extreme tiredness (44%)**, and **dizziness (39%)**.
- **76% of children** reported that heat negatively affected their ability to focus or study, and 68% had missed school or activities due to heat.
- At home, children reported **power cuts (53%)**, **difficulty sleeping (41%)**, **overheated rooms (41%)**, and **water shortages (29%)**.
- Many observed heat-related stress among parents — **work becoming harder (59%)** and **changes in mood or behaviour (58%)**.
- The clearest **inequality**: children of daily-wage and manual-worker parents reported family stress far more than others (“work becomes harder” at **71% vs 46%**).



Importantly, children repeatedly expressed a desire for adults to better recognise how exhausting school becomes in extreme heat, how poor sleep and overheating affect learning, the stress families face around livelihoods, water and electricity, and the need for more supportive, child-sensitive responses from schools, communities, and institutions.

While not intended to be nationally representative research, this assessment offers a meaningful and credible glimpse into children’s lived experiences during India’s severe 2026 summer — while placing their voices more centrally within conversations on climate, childhoods, learning, and well-being. It also speaks to the power and beauty of a volunteer-led assessment, and how concerned citizenship can surface realities that often remain undocumented.

Introduction

Why this assessment matters?

India is witnessing increasingly severe and prolonged heat, with several regions experiencing repeated heatwave alerts during the summer of 2026. During April and May 2026, temperatures crossed 45°C in multiple states, leading to revised school schedules, restricted outdoor activities, and temporary closures of educational institutions in some regions.

For children, these conditions are not experienced merely as weather. Heat enters childhood through exhaustion during school hours, difficulty concentrating in classrooms, sleepless nights, water shortages, overheated homes, emotional stress within families, and concern for parents working in difficult heat.

Emerging evidence, globally and in India, increasingly points to the impact of extreme heat on children's physical well-being, cognitive functioning, learning conditions, school participation, and emotional environments. Yet, despite growing public discussion around climate and heatwaves,

children's own lived experiences remain relatively absent from mainstream discourse and policy conversations.

This rapid assessment was therefore undertaken to document children's experiences and perceptions around heat; understand how heat may be affecting learning and well-being; surface patterns and inequalities across contexts; and contribute child-centred insights to wider conversations on climate realities and childhoods in India.

Importantly, it also sought to explore the role of participatory and volunteer-led engagement in surfacing lived realities. Rather than relying solely on conventional field-research models, the assessment encouraged volunteers and interns to engage directly with children through structured listening and documentation — not only to gather responses, but to deepen civic engagement and empathy, build social understanding of unequal childhood realities, and encourage active citizen participation around issues affecting children.

India's heat is trending up

2024 remains India's **warmest** year on record since 1901, and the decade **2016–2025** was the **warmest** ever — **10 of the 15 warmest years** since 1901 fell in the last 15.¹

About the Assessment

Objectives

The rapid assessment aimed to:

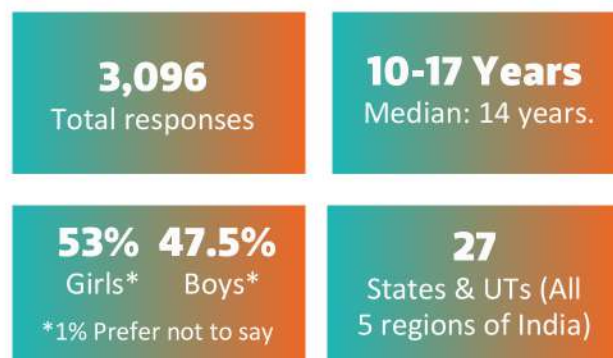
- understand how children are experiencing severe heat in their everyday lives;
- explore possible links between heat, well-being, and learning;
- document children's observations around family stress and routine disruption;
- surface children's own suggestions and expectations from adults and institutions;
- and build wider public understanding around child-centred climate realities.

Approach and methodology

The assessment was conducted during May–June 2026 across urban and peri-urban locations in India. Responses were gathered through two complementary pathways.

1. Volunteer-assisted interactions.
Volunteers and interns interacted directly with children — especially those from under-served communities — and documented responses through guided, conversational interactions.
2. Self-administered online participation.
Children with digital access independently completed an online version of the assessment form.

Respondents



Volunteer participation

The assessment was supported by 686 volunteers and interns across CRY regions, including college students, interns, educators, young professionals, community volunteers, and long-term CRY associates. Their involvement was especially significant in enabling participation from children with limited digital access, encouraging trust-based conversations, capturing nuanced anecdotal experience, and building wider civic engagement around issues affecting children.

Ethical considerations & limitations

This assessment was designed as a rapid, volunteer-led social-listening exercise, and not as formal academic or nationally representative research. Participation was anonymous and voluntary, with no personal identifiers collected, and volunteers were guided to avoid intrusive questioning, document responses authentically, and maintain dignity and respect throughout.

Limitations

- Non-random sampling and uneven geographic spread (some states and regions are far more represented than others).
- Dependence on voluntary participation.
- Digitally connected respondents may represent relatively more privileged groups — partly offset by the volunteer-assisted route, which reached under-served children who might otherwise be excluded from online consultations.
- The correlations in this report are descriptive patterns on a large sample, not significance-tested causal claims.

Key findings

4.1 Children feel the heat is getting worse

One of the clearest findings was children's strong perception that heat is becoming more severe. 55.1% felt this year's heat was "much higher" and 32.9% "a little higher"; only 8.4% felt it was the same. Children themselves are increasingly conscious of intensifying heat.

How heat compares to last year

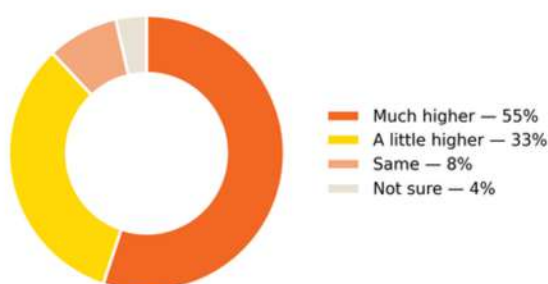


Figure 1

4.2 The most difficult parts of the day

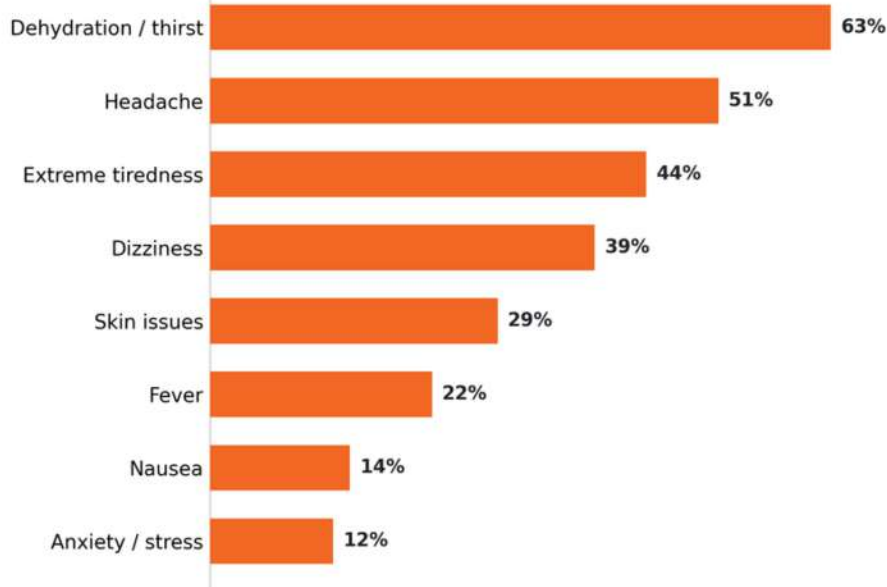
Children most commonly identified afternoons (46.5%) and school hours (45.3%) as the hardest periods — followed by nighttime (3.7%) and mornings (4.4%). This highlights the overlap between peak heat exposure and schooling routines.

4.3 Heat and health

Children described multiple forms of physical discomfort during severe heat (See Figure 2).

68% reported missing school or activities because of heat-related discomfort.

Physical effects children reported



% of all respondents; multiple answers allowed

Figure 2

Key findings

4.4 SCHOOL EXPERIENCES DURING HEAT

Many children described classrooms and school environments becoming physically uncomfortable (See Figure 3).

Children also frequently referred to crowded classrooms, outdoor assemblies, and limited first-aid or health support during heat.

4.5 HEAT AND LEARNING

The assessment strongly suggests heat is affecting children's ability to study and focus: 28.9% said their ability to study becomes "much worse" and 46.8% "a little worse". Children consistently linked tiredness, poor sleep, headaches, dehydration, and classroom discomfort to reduced concentration and learning.

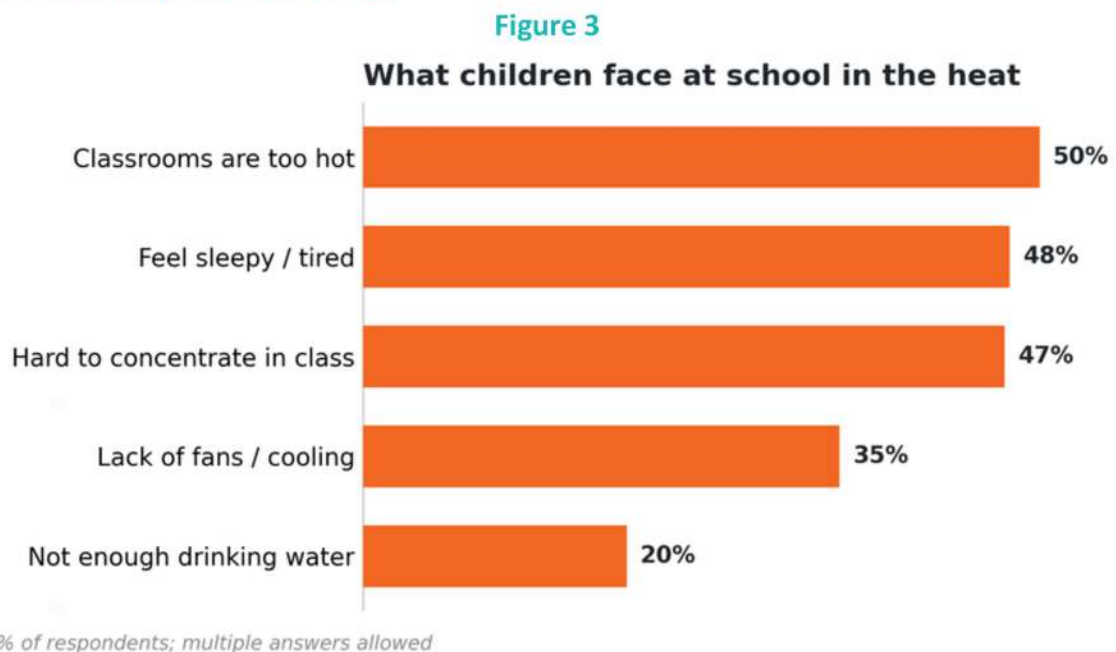
Research links extreme heat to lower concentration and learning, with the heaviest effects on children without cooling. A landmark study of 10 million students found each 1°F hotter school year cut learning by about 1% without air conditioning — larger for low-income students.²

4.6 HEAT AT HOME

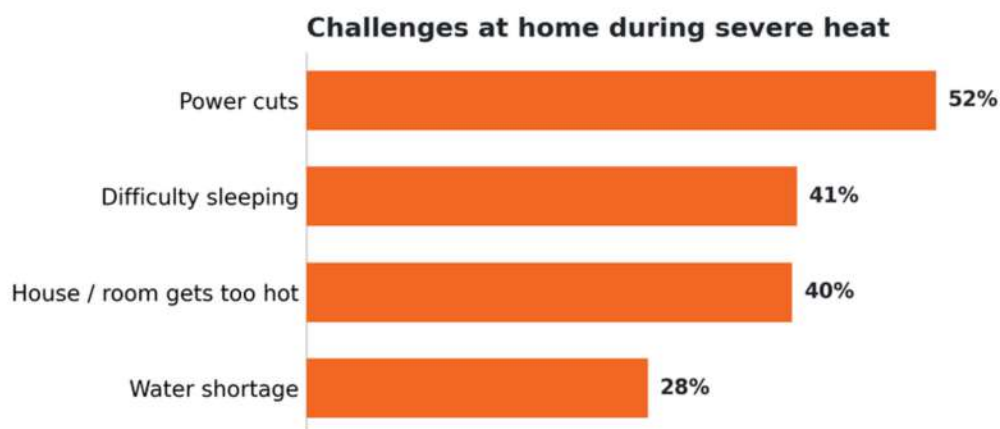
Children described multiple challenges within home environments during severe heat (See Figure 4).

70% reported that their daily routine was disrupted during periods of intense heat.

Heat measurably lowers learning.



Key findings



% of respondents; multiple answers allowed

Figure 4

4.7 CHILDREN WITNESSING FAMILY STRESS

Many children were keenly aware of heat's toll on parents and caregivers: 59% said work became harder for their parents, 43% noted stress or irritability at home, 33% observed rising household expenses, and 58% noticed a change in a parent's mood or behaviour. Children of outdoor workers and daily-wage earners often expressed particular concern about livelihood-related heat stress — a pattern explored in Section 7.

4.8 HOW CHILDREN ARE COPING

Children's most common coping strategies were drinking more water (80%), staying indoors (66%), using a fan, cooler or AC where available (64%), and changing study timings (21%).

At the same time, several children simply said that nothing really helps.

4.9 WHAT CHILDREN SAY THEY NEED

Asked what would help most during severe heat, children most frequently highlighted:

- 34.8% — Better school facilities (fans, water, ventilation)
- 21.1% — Shorter or rescheduled school hours
- 20.9% — Cooler / safe community spaces
- 10.3% — More water at home
- 7.5% — Awareness on how to cope with heat

Above all, children want adults to notice how exhausting school becomes in the heat, how poor sleep and overheating affect their learning, and how much stress their families carry around water, electricity, and work.

Children's Voices

Behind every percentage is a child describing an ordinary day made hard. The voices below — in children's own words, anonymised and balanced across gender, age, and region — each illustrate a finding from the data.

Heat is shutting children out of school worldwide.

In 2024, at least 242 million students across 85 countries had schooling disrupted by extreme climate events — heatwaves the biggest single cause (about 171 million), with India among the countries hit.³

"SCHOOL FEELS SUFFOCATING"

“One hot day at school, the classroom felt like an oven. My shirt stuck to the chair and my forehead kept dripping sweat. It was hard to concentrate, the fan barely moved the air and everyone kept fanning themselves with paper. I felt tired, thirsty, and distracted all day.”

— Boy, 17, Assam

“I felt like fainting because it was so hot. My clothes felt too heavy and I was not able to focus in my classes. I felt kind of sick. When I went home, it still felt very hot”

— Girl, 11, Telangana



One particularly hot day, I found it difficult to

concentrate at school because the temperature was extremely high. The classrooms felt warm and uncomfortable, and I became tired more quickly than usual. During lessons, it was hard to focus on what the teacher was explaining, and I often felt thirsty. Outdoor activities and recess were also less enjoyable because the strong sun made everyone feel exhausted”.

— Girl, 17, Jharkhand

"PARENTS CARRY THE STRESS, ME TOO"



One day, my father became very ill because of the heat

and couldn't go to work. With no income that day, we couldn't buy vegetables or even milk, as my mother's salary had already been spent on basic groceries. I stayed home from school to care for him, using a wet cloth to reduce his fever. A five-hour power cut made things even harder—I had to fan him by hand in the unbearable heat. By the end of the day, I was completely exhausted, and it felt like my skin was burning.”

— Girl, 11, Delhi

Children's Voices

"PARENTS CARRY THE STRESS, ME TOO"

“On very hot days, my parents ask me to stay home from school so I don't fall ill. After they leave for work, I look after my three younger siblings, wash the dishes, and cook for the family. By evening, both my mother and I are drenched in sweat and exhausted. I want to go to school and play outside like other children, but the heat and household responsibilities make that impossible.”

— Girl, 12, Uttar Pradesh

"I CANNOT REST OR SLEEP PROPERLY"

“One afternoon after school, it was incredibly hot, and the classroom had been crowded without enough water or working fans. By the time I got home, my head was hurting badly and I felt dizzy. To make it worse, there was a power cut at night, so I couldn't sleep at all because of the heat. I woke up the next morning feeling completely exhausted and had to miss school that day.”

— Boy, 10, Goa

“Yesterday, the public water tanker came to our lane very late, around 9:00 AM instead of early in the morning, and the sun was already scorching. My mother was feeling dizzy because of the heat, so I had to miss the first two periods of school to help carry the heavy plastic water cans upstairs before the water ran out. The plastic handles dug into my hands, and I could hardly catch my breath because the air was so hot and heavy. By the time I reached school, I was completely exhausted, and my uniform was dusty. My teacher scolded me for being late, and I felt so embarrassed and tired that I kept my head down on the desk for the rest of the day.”

— Girl, 10, Jhansi

“There was a severe water shortage for a week that it was very hard for us to get some drinking water.”

— Boy, 12, Tamil Nadu

Children's Voices

"THAT FEELING OF IRRITABILITY"

“On Thursdays 20/5/26 I got fever because of heat and I was unable to go to school because of it and I felt bad about it. I was facing difficulties in doing any work and sometimes I felt irritated.”

— Boy, 10, Uttar Pradesh

“One day we had PE on the grounds at 11 AM when the heat was already so intense. After coming back to class, the cooling wasn't working properly and the room felt suffocating and hot. With everyone tired and sweating, it was really hard to concentrate in the class. That day I realised how much heat can affect focus and make studying difficult.”

— Girl, 15, Maharashtra

"HEAT MAKES STUDYING DIFFICULT"

“Once I had become sick with jaw pain and other cold-related illness, and had to be taken to the hospital where I had to stay for a few days. I was also given saline.”

— Boy, 10, West Bengal

“I don't have health issues per se but because of the heat need more ORS, feel nauseous and sick almost all the time. Difficult to focus and unable to manage studies with a constant feel of dizziness”

— Girl, 12, Maharashtra

“One very hot day at school, everyone was tired even before classes began. I had forgotten my water bottle, and then there was a power cut during the second period. Without fans, the classroom became unbearable. I couldn't concentrate or finish my work and was scolded by my teacher. When I got home upset, my mother said I should have tried harder. I got angry, she slapped me, and my parents didn't speak to me for the rest of the day. It was one of the worst days I remember.”

— Girl, 12, Delhi

Children's Voices

"DEHYDRATION DISRUPTS LEARNING"

“One day I didn't drink enough water and I had a lab class. I was feeling very dizzy and drinking water wasn't helping so I went to the infirmary and the nurse gave me electrolytes.”

— Girl, 17, Karnataka

“I usually go school by walking, due to extreme rain yesterday night which lead to extreme moisture the next day. My School doesn't have any proper water services, leading to me being extreme vulnerable to the heat. I left that school later.”

— Boy, 17, Madhya Pradesh

“Last week, the power went out at school during our math class in the afternoon. The classroom became like a furnace, and my uniform was completely soaked in sweat. I felt so dizzy and thirsty, but when I went to the water tank, the water inside was completely hot like tea. On my walk home from the bus stop, the ground was burning through my shoes. By the time I reached home, my head was spinning so badly that I threw up and couldn't eat anything. I just lay on the floor crying because my head hurt so much, and I couldn't go to school at all the next day

— Boy, 13, Rajasthan

These voices are drawn from a screened master repository of ~4,500 entries – responses tagged by age, gender, geography, and family occupation.

What volunteers observed & reflected on

Alongside children's responses, volunteers and interns reflected on what they observed, felt, and learned. Many described becoming newly aware of how normalised discomfort has become for some children, the sharp inequalities in how heat is experienced, and the emotional maturity with which children spoke about family stress.

HEAT IS EXPERIENCED UNEQUALLY

Volunteers repeatedly noticed how access to cooling, housing quality, and school conditions shaped how severely a child felt the heat.

“What struck me most was that the child had no respite from the heat—neither at school nor at home. There were no fans in the classroom, making it difficult to concentrate, and back home, power cuts, a cramped room, mosquitoes, and sleepless nights meant there was no opportunity to recover from the day's exhaustion.”
— Volunteer, West Bengal

“She said she hadn't fallen ill, but the heat was stealing her sleep night after night. Her family's small shop earned less during the summer, frequent power cuts made the house unbearable, and she spoke with striking awareness about how reduced income was increasing stress at home. It was a reminder that children often carry the weight of family struggles far more than adults realise.”
— Volunteer, Karnataka

“What stayed with me was how strongly the impact of heat was shaped by the family's circumstances. With a father working long hours outdoors as a security guard and a mother with mobility challenges, the family faced multiple layers of vulnerability. The conversation reinforced how extreme heat disproportionately affects those who already have the least resources to cope”
— Volunteer, Telangana

“A small, poorly ventilated home and frequent power cuts left him with no comfortable place to study. As he prepares for his Class 10 board exams, it was clear that the heat wasn't just causing discomfort—it was standing in the way of his future.”
— Volunteer, Rajasthan

“As a volunteer, what stood out to me was how deeply extreme heat affects families who depend on daily wages. I realised that for them, hot weather is not just uncomfortable—it can impact their income, health, children's education, and overall well-being. I was especially moved by how parents continue to work in difficult conditions because missing a day of work means losing essential earnings. This interaction helped me understand the unequal impact of climate change and made me appreciate the importance of empathy, awareness, and community support for vulnerable families.”
— Volunteer, Delhi

What volunteers observed & reflected on

LISTENING ITSELF MATTERS

Several volunteers reflected that interacting directly with children made the realities of heat feel far more immediate and unequal than temperature figures or media reports alone could convey — a reminder of the value of concerned, participatory citizenship.

“I was struck by how mature she was for her age. Her biggest concern was not her own discomfort but her parents' hardships. Growing up in a tin-roofed slum house with limited access to clean water, she was already experiencing irregular schooling, poor nutrition, and responsibilities far beyond her years.”

— Volunteer, Delhi

“It was deeply concerning to hear how extreme weather directly alters family dynamics. The fact that a 13 year old boy is hyper aware of his father's silence and his mother's irritability shows that climate induced heat stress is actively straining the emotional peace of rural households.”

— Volunteer, West Bengal

“The conversation showed me that heat is not merely a health issue. It quietly shapes children's emotions, learning, sleep, and everyday experiences, underscoring the need for safer environments where they can continue to thrive despite extreme weather.”

— Volunteer, Andhra Pradesh

What children want adults to notice

When asked what parents, teachers, governments and other adults should do differently to help them cope with extreme heat, children did not ask for extraordinary solutions. Their expectations were remarkably practical and consistent across regions. Above all, they wanted adults to adapt schools, homes and neighbourhoods to the realities of extreme heat.

1. MAKE SCHOOLS HEAT-RESPONSIVE (MOST FREQUENT EXPECTATION)

The strongest and most repeated expectation was for schools to recognise that learning becomes difficult in extreme heat. Children overwhelmingly called for earlier school timings, more water breaks, cooler classrooms, fewer outdoor activities and greater flexibility during heatwaves.

"Schools should finish early, before the afternoon sun becomes too strong."	"Please don't scold us when we cannot concentrate because of the heat."
"I wish schools would give us more water breaks and avoid outdoor activities when it's extremely hot."	"There should be no sports period when it is too hot outside."
"Change school timings during very hot days so children don't have to walk home in the afternoon heat."	"Teachers should be more flexible with classes and homework during very hot days."

2. ENSURE SAFE DRINKING WATER AND COOLER SPACES

Safe drinking water was one of the most frequently repeated asks. Children described water, shade and ventilation not as comforts, but as essentials for staying healthy and being able to learn.

"No child should have to worry about being thirsty in this heat."	"Please make sure every school has cool drinking water."
"Even small things like letting children rest more often or giving them cool water breaks would make a big difference."	"Give us fans that work properly and enough shade to sit during breaks."
"The government should provide free clean drinking water to all areas."	

What children want adults to notice

3. LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND SHOW EMPATHY

One of the most powerful findings was children's call for understanding. Many wanted adults to recognise that heat affects not only their bodies but also their ability to think, learn and participate.

"Please don't ignore how hard the heat can be for children."	"Please understand that we don't become lazy because of the heat —we become tired."
"I hope adults listen to children's concerns and take quick action so that we can study, play and live safely even during very hot weather."	"Please ask us how we are feeling instead of getting angry."
"Don't think we are making excuses when we say it is too hot."	

4. PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

Children demonstrated a keen awareness that extreme heat does not affect everyone equally. Many called for governments to improve access to water, strengthen public services and support families with fewer resources.

"Support poorer families who may not have cool housing or enough water."	"Please help parents who have to work outside in this heat."
"Everyone should get enough water, even if they cannot afford it."	"People who work in the sun should get places to rest."

5. BUILD GREENER AND SAFER COMMUNITIES

Children frequently linked relief from heat with greener neighbourhoods and better public spaces. Planting trees emerged as one of the most common long-term solutions suggested by children themselves.

"There should be more parks with trees where we can play safely."	"Plant more trees so children can walk in the shade."
"Please protect nature because every year the heat is getting worse."	

What children want adults to notice

Theme	Frequently occurring words & phrases
SCHOOL ADAPTATIONS	School timings, early school, shorter hours, water breaks, homework, online classes, outdoor activities, exams
WATER & HYDRATION	Drinking water, cold water, water coolers, thirsty, hydration, refill, rest
COOLING & INFRASTRUCTURE	Fans, ventilation, cool classrooms, shade, electricity, power cuts, cool places
UNDERSTANDING & CARE	Listen, understand, don't scold, flexibility, empathy, care, support
HEALTH & WELLBEING	Concentration, dehydration, dizziness, headaches, fainting, tiredness, rest
ENVIRONMENT	Trees, shade, green spaces, climate change, clean environment
GOVERNMENT SUPPORT	Water supply, poor families, outdoor workers, public services, safety

KEY TAKEAWAY

Children's expectations are simple but powerful. They are asking adults to adapt systems—not children. Their repeated calls for earlier school timings, safe drinking water, cooler classrooms, shaded neighbourhoods, functioning fans, reliable electricity, empathy from teachers, and support for vulnerable families reveal that climate adaptation is not only about infrastructure—it is equally about responsive institutions and compassionate adults. Their voices make a compelling case that protecting children from extreme heat begins with making everyday environments safe, supportive and heat-responsive.

Emerging insights and patterns

Looking across the data, several patterns emerge — by socio-economic background, gender, and region — alongside clear links between sleep, attendance, and learning.

8.1 Socio-economic background & heat stress

The strongest equity signal in the assessment is livelihood. Children of daily-wage and manual-worker parents reported family heat stress far more than peers: “work becomes harder” at 71% versus 46% in other households, and parental mood change at 67% versus 49%.

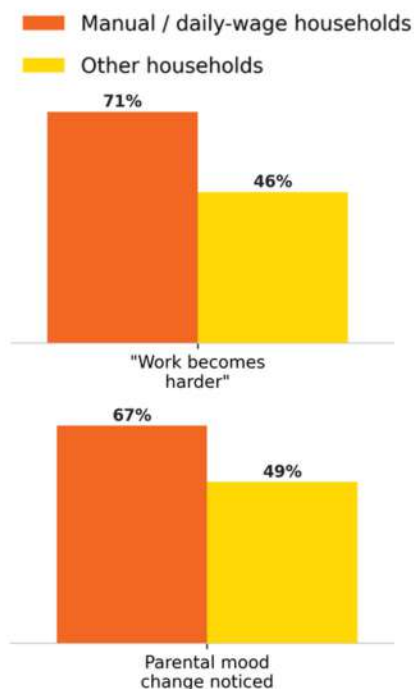


Figure 5



“I had to assist my mother entire day at a construction site and by the time I came back off I fainted because of dehydration. I also suffer from severe sunburns so continuous exposure to heat makes it a painful experience.”

— Boy, 14, West Bengal

8.2 A gender lens

Girls reported heat-related health effects more often than boys: headaches (54.7% vs 47.3%), dehydration (64.9% vs 59.6%), and extreme tiredness (46.3% vs 41.1%). Girls were also slightly more likely to say studying becomes harder in heat (77.3% vs 74%).

Girls reported more heat-related health effects.

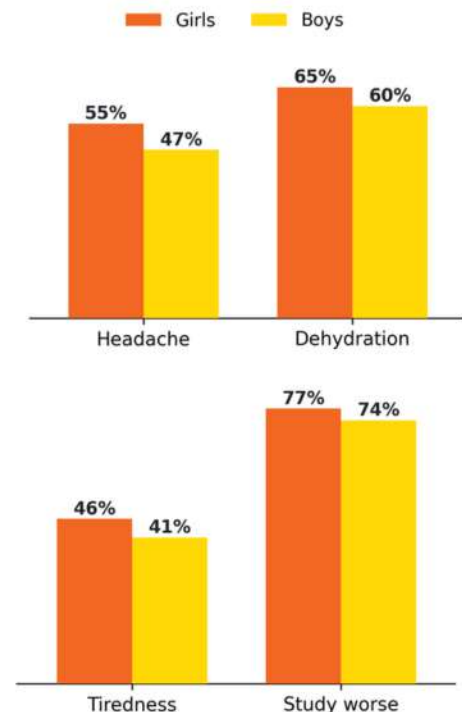


Figure 6

The structured data did not show a strong gendered gap in household-chore burden (girls 14.2% vs boys 12.7%); where such a burden appears, it surfaces more in girls' own narratives than in the survey checkboxes — a theme worth deeper qualitative attention.

Emerging insights and patterns

8.3 A regional lens

Experiences differ meaningfully across India's five regions. The sharpest contrast is water: children in South India report water shortage at home far more than any other region (Figure 7).

Other regional contrasts: East India — the largest group (n=1,040) — records the strongest sense that heat has worsened (91%) and the most heat-related school disruption (71.8%); North and Central India report the highest rates of power cuts (57.9% and 64%); and West India appears comparatively less affected across several measures. Given uneven sampling across regions, these are best read as indicative patterns rather than representative state rates.



"It was during a Tuesday, which was public holiday and kaveri water had just come so had to go help my mother carry it home in the heat and crowd with everyone pushing and fighting over who is first in line"

— Girl, 13, Karnataka

8.4 Sleep, attendance, and learning

Two further patterns stand out. Among children reporting difficulty sleeping, 83% said studying gets worse, versus 71% of others — overheated nights carry into the classroom. And children attending school irregularly missed school due to heat at 88%, against 63% of regular attenders — heat compounding existing vulnerability.

The summer they described.

For April–June 2026, the IMD⁴ projected above-normal heatwave days over parts of east, central and north-west India and the south-east peninsula — the regions many of these children wrote from.

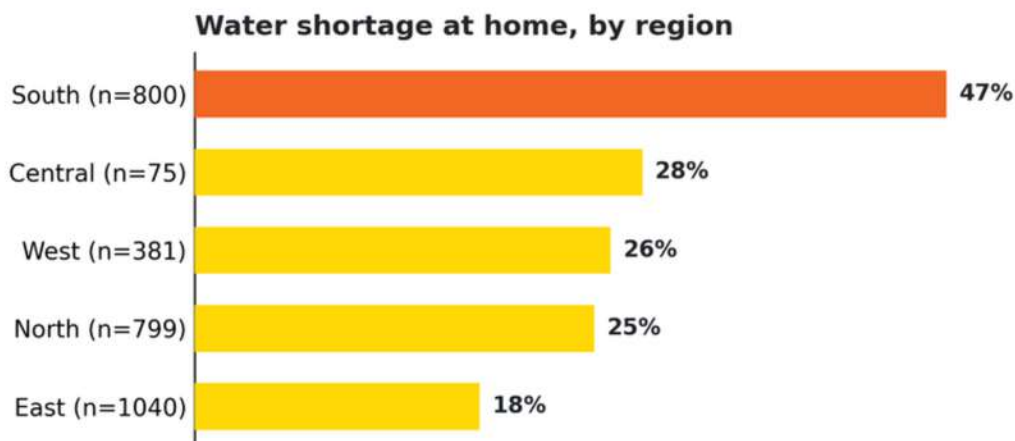


Figure 7

Conclusion

Listening, responding, and acting together.

Children may not describe climate change in technical language. They describe it instead through sleepless nights, headaches, overheated classrooms, exhaustion, difficulty concentrating, water shortages, power cuts, disrupted routines, and concern for parents struggling through difficult working conditions.

Together, these experiences point to an important reality: extreme heat is no longer an occasional or isolated event in children's lives. For many, it is increasingly part of their everyday experience — shaping how they live, learn, rest, travel, study, and feel.

The findings reinforce the need to view heat not only as an environmental concern, but as a matter of child well-being, public health, learning, and equity. The unequal nature of children's experiences stands out clearly: while some children cope through access to cooling and supportive surroundings, many others navigate heat with limited protection, inadequate infrastructure, and growing vulnerability — and that burden falls hardest on children from working families and from regions already stretched on water and power.

The assessment also demonstrates the role that participatory, volunteer-led efforts can play in surfacing lived realities that often remain under-documented.

Through conversation, listening, and shared reflection, volunteers became more closely connected to the diverse and unequal realities children experience — strengthening not only evidence and understanding, but also empathy, civic participation, and collective responsibility. This is the quiet power of concerned citizenship.

There is a role for all stakeholders:

- schools can strengthen heat-sensitive infrastructure and preparedness;
- families and communities can become more aware of children's physical and emotional needs during extreme heat;
- institutions and local administrations can prioritise child-sensitive responses in planning and public systems;
- media and civil society can continue amplifying lived realities and inequalities;
- and citizens, volunteers, and young people can keep building informed, compassionate engagement around issues affecting children.

The assessment underlines the importance of keeping our “ears to the ground” — creating spaces where children's experiences are heard directly, consistently, and meaningfully. Often, children are among the first to feel environmental and social stress, yet among the last to be heard in conversations about solutions and preparedness.



FEELING the HEAT

JUNE 2026

As heat intensifies across regions, building healthier and safer childhoods will require collaborative effort, sustained attention, and greater responsiveness from all of us — because meaningful change begins not only with recognising children's realities, but with choosing to respond to them collectively, thoughtfully, and with urgency.

Listening, responding, and acting together.