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The Role of Life Skills in Empowering Adolescents to Prevent and Respond to Violence

Shafina S*

Abstract

Violence against adolescents continues to be a nagging social issue impacting their physical, mental, social and intellectual well-being. The paper realises the importance of life skill-based education and its acquisition as an effective primary preventive approach to curbing such a threat. The paper posits that the life skills proposed by UNICEF when properly inculcated in adolescents, have the power to transform adolescents into change agents, thereby breaking the cycle of violence. Successful case studies on life skill-based education preventing adolescent violence substantiate this fact.

Key words: Adolescents, acquisition, Case studies, life skill-based education, preventive approach, UNICEF, Violence

Introduction

Violence against adolescents manifests itself in many ways, whether perpetrated by parents, other caregivers, colleagues or strangers in this life cycle, individuals are exposed to self-harm; domestic abuse and neglect by parents and caregivers; to youth violence outside the home, often in schools, in the community, or online; and intimate partner violence or dating violence, which occurs among adolescents involved in romantic relationships. Regardless of its form, violence is a traumatic event that has a negative individual, social, and economic impact. Depending on its occurrence – chronic or recurrent, consequences can be dire.

Developing life skills can help young people to avoid violence by improving their social & emotional competence, teaching them how to deal effectively and non-violently with conflict.

The WHO briefing for preventing violence by developing life skills in chil-

* Semester 3, BEd. English, Mar Theophilus Training College, Nalanchira, Trivandrum

dren & adolescents (2009), defines life skills as ‘abilities for adaptive & positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands & challenges of everyday life’. These include cognitive, emotional, interpersonal & social skills to foster:

- Self-Awareness – Self-esteem & confidence building, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, goal setting
- Self-Management – Anger & stress management, time management, coping skills, controlling impulses, relaxation
- Social Awareness – Empathy, active listening, recognising & appreciating individual & group differences
- Relationships – Negotiation, conflict management, resisting peer pressure, networking, motivation
- Responsible Decision Making – Information gathering, critical thinking, evaluating consequences of actions.

Evidence by WHO research (2009) suggests that pre-school enrichment & social development programs, which target children early in life, can prevent aggression, improve social skills, boost educational achievement & improve job prospects. Where effective, the benefits of such programs are most pronounced in children from poor families & neighbourhood & can be sustained into adulthood.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyse the nature and extent of violence faced by adolescents in schools and in general.
- To identify the specific life skills prescribed by UNICEF to prevent violence against adolescents.
- To review the case studies of life skill-based education in preventing adolescent violence.
- To examine the strategies and suggestions to empower adolescents in preventing and responding to violence.

Nature and extent of violence faced by adolescents

Violence happens to people at all stages of life. It is startling how early children are exposed to violence. According to UNICEF, almost 300 million children between the ages of two and four endure physical or psychological abuse at home from their caretakers. Seventy-two million children,

aged six to seventeen, reside in nations where the use of corporal punishment in schools is not completely outlawed. Intimate partner abuse affects one in four children under the age of five (176 million of them), putting kids and teenagers at risk of experiencing violence in their early adult relationships.

Teenagers are more likely to become victims because of their intricate social networks. Tragic outcomes can result from a variety of forms of abuse, exploitation, and violence. Bullying affects more than one in three kids between the ages of 13 and 15, and violence-related deaths have more than doubled over the first ten years.

Violence has a detrimental impact on teenage brain development, health, and social development in addition to causing harm and death. It also raises the risk of poor educational outcomes, early and unintended pregnancy, STDs, mental health issues, difficulties with social and emotional functioning, risk-taking, substance abuse, and obesity. Teenagers' access to social services, education, employment prospects, and support networks can all be negatively impacted by the experience or fear of violence, which can have a lasting negative impact on their present and future decisions.

Research shows that there are several ways in which violence against women and violence against children intersect, including through shared risk factors, underlying societal norms, co-occurrence, intergenerational effects, and common and aggravating outcomes. Adolescence offers a crucial opportunity to prevent violence against women and children. Violence that occurs in a school environment is referred to as school violence. Violence on school grounds, on school trips and events, and on the route to or from school are all included in this. Although it can be done by students, instructors, or other staff members, student-on-student violence is the most frequent type. An estimated 246 million children experience school violence every year; however, girls and gender non-conforming people are disproportionately affected.

School violence can take many forms. These are some of the types of school violence:

- **Physical violence**, encompassing any form of physical hostility, the brandishing of weapons, and illicit activities such as theft or arson.
- **Psychological violence**, encompassing verbal and emotional mistreatment. This can entail calling names, berating, isolating, rejecting, dehumanising, mocking, spreading rumours, lying, or

punishing someone else.

- Sexual violence, encompassing rape, unwanted contact, coercion, harassment, and intimidation.
- Bullying, defined as persistent, deliberate aggressiveness directed toward another individual, can manifest in physical, psychological, or sexual forms.
- Cyberbullying, which is when others related to you at school harass or sexually assault you on social media or other online platforms. This could entail sharing embarrassing images or videos online, nasty remarks, damaging rumours, or misleading information. Exclusionary behaviour is another form of cyberbullying.

Concept and importance of Life Skills

A consensus definition of life skills does not exist. This could be the case because context dictates both the definition and the critical abilities that need to be learned. According to Dupuy, Bezu, Halvorsen, and Knudsen (2018), life skills are those that support young people's mental health and competence as they deal with life's challenges. Thus, life skills empower youth to take proactive measures to safeguard against abuse, advance their health, and form deep social connections. According to Dhringra and Chauhan (2017), the idea of life skills comes from people's innate desire to live happy, meaningful lives in balance with the environment. According to the definitions given above, life skills are taught abilities that help young people develop behavioural and social competencies that enhance their development and good interpersonal relationships.

According to UNICEF (2012), Dupuy, Bezu, Knudsen and Halvorsen (2018), and Nalla (2018), life skills are practical competencies that help young people adopt positive behaviours, manage emotions, and improve their interpersonal relationships. As a result, life skills prevent or lessen their propensity to violate others and to engage in domestic violence. While life skills are different from academic and technical skills, they comprise social and personal skills, psycho-social in nature and needed for healthy adjustment and interaction with others. Life skills are those abilities made up of three interrelated concepts: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Skills pertain to the capacity to execute intricate and well-structured thought processes and actions in order to accomplish a particular objective. Knowing is based on information that has been acquired either formally or informally. Attitudes are influenced by knowledge, which in turn affects behaviour.

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands, challenges, and stress of everyday life. Childhood and adolescence are the developmental periods during which one acquires these skills through various methods and people.

The generic life skills that need to be taught at the school level, especially to adolescents, are as follows. (WHO 1997)

- Decision making and problem solving
- Creative thinking and critical thinking
- Communication skills and interpersonal relationships
- Self-awareness and empathy
- Coping with emotions and coping with stress

Specific Life Skills prescribed by UNICEF to prevent Violence against Adolescents

Self-awareness

Being self-aware entails understanding oneself, one's character, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as recognising when one is under stress, which can lead to irrational behaviour (Nalla, 2018). Self-awareness allows individuals to evaluate their emotional state, which in turn affects their behaviour. However, a rigid self-perception can hinder accurate self-evaluation, leading to negative reactions and poor interpersonal relationships. According to Morin (2017), people with low self-awareness, including adolescents, often turn to harmful behaviours like drug and alcohol abuse, risky sexual behaviour, and other aggressive behaviours. These behaviours make them more susceptible to domestic violence and may even lead them to commit it themselves.

Empathy

Empathy skill is the ability to understand and share the needs and feelings of others in an individual's circle of relationship (Bariso, 2018). Dahlberg (2013) identified key components for mutually empathic relationships as mutual respect, growth encouragement, connectedness, knowledge, value addition, and support. These attributes can only be expressed through empathy skills, which can reduce violence against adolescents. These attributes are essential for individuals to feel valued and not exploited, ensuring their vulnerability is not violated.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the objective analysis of information and experiences, assessing factors influencing behaviour and attitudes to determine their worth. It results in sound and logical judgments. Price-Mitchell (2018) emphasizes that critical thinking is vital for appropriate decision-making and behaviour change, enabling individuals, including adolescents, to evaluate information with an open mind and consider alternative solutions.

Decision Making

Effective decision-making is crucial for preventing adolescent violence, as it involves being constructive, objective, and able to process information rationally. Factors like aggression, power, control, alcohol and drug abuse, wrong association, and past abuse history can be averted through appropriate decision-making. Good decision-making skills prepare young people for successful adult life and help manage stressful situations positively.

Interpersonal Relationship

Interpersonal relationship skills are crucial for achieving harmony, social support, and a constructive ending of unhealthy relationships. They promote harmonious co-existence, social support, and a successful life. Ayo-dele (2011) asserts that interpersonal relationship skills are key indicators of adolescents' psychosocial adjustment and respect for the dignity of significant others, both within and outside the home.

Self-Management Skills

Self-management skills, such as self-confidence, persistence, patience, resilience, emotional regulation, and perceptiveness, are crucial for influencing behaviour change in adolescents. These skills enable individuals to evaluate their options, pursue goals without giving up, and remain calm in difficult situations. They prevent impulsive, reckless, and violent reactions, and these skills are essential for adolescents to develop and maintain a positive self-concept and self-efficacy, ultimately leading to better decision-making and overall well-being.

Emotional Skills

Emotional skills, as defined by Smith, Dutcher, Askar, Talwar, and Bosacki (2019), involve abilities such as emotional understanding and emotional intelligence, which are used to manage and understand one's emotions. Adolescents with emotional skills can moderate negative emotions, intensify positive ones, control anger, learn assertive strategies, and become

aware of the harmful consequences of negative emotions for themselves and others.

Stress Management Skills

Adolescents often struggle to recognise the impact of stress on their well-being, leading to irrational behaviours like anger, anxiety, bullying, and substance abuse. This increases their likelihood of becoming victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. Kempf (2011) suggests that skill building helps adolescents recognise stress sources and manage them effectively. Preparing adolescents to cope with multiple stressors, such as school, peers, finances, relationships, parents, and media, not only reduces present stress but also empowers them to handle future stressful situations in adulthood.

Case Studies of Life Skill-Based Education in Preventing Adolescent Violence

1. In 2020, Vaddu Central College in Sri Lanka revised its curriculum to include life skills instruction along side traditional academic learning. With the Department of Education's assistance, Principal Ms. Panchadcharalingam changed the formal education approach by focusing two hours a week on social and emotional development instead of the academic rigour that was the focus of the local curriculum. In 2019, Ms. Panchadcharalingam learned about life skill education through the Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programs (PATHS) to Change approach introduced by the Department of Education, Northern Province. The approach aims to build resilience and protective capacities of 11-15-year-olds against societal violence by improving fundamental social skills and life skills. It instils critical personal qualities like problem-solving, critical thinking, honesty, and empathy, which are essential for youth to navigate social situations and prevent violence.
2. The American Refugee Committee (ARC) implemented the PATHWAY (Preventive Activities and Training that Work for At-Risk Youth) program between 2005 and 2007 in Guinea's Forest Region, with financial support from USAID. The program aimed to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict in Guinea's border regions, a region with high levels of violence against women. It provided youth with conflict- prevention-oriented life-skills training and facilitated access to economic opportunities by removing economic incentives for conflict. The program's main objectives were to reduce participation

in violence through economic incentives and to develop coping skills and positive attitudes. Over 1,000 youth were trained by master artisans in skills like carpentry, tailoring, hairdressing, and electronics. The second sub-objective focused on coping skills, positive attitudes, and life-skills training modules based on a needs assessment.

Strategies for Life Skills Training

Both in and out-of-school, adolescents can have opportunities to acquire training in life skills. Life skills can be learned at school, they can be acquired in the home, community and other informal settings.

Life Skills Education (LSE)

LSE is a structured program that helps individuals develop and practice psycho-social skills to maximise protective factors, enabling the adoption of values, attitudes, and behaviours that promote a fulfilling life among adolescents. It incorporates psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills, helping adolescents make decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, and cope meaningfully with life challenges. LSE is an important health promotion intervention, especially at a time when behaviour directly impacts the quality of lives of individuals, families, and society.

Out-of-School Life Skills Education

Community-based life skills training can be implemented to teach out-of-school adolescents skills such as self-management, negotiation, conflict resolution, leadership, and gender-based violence. These skills can be integrated into interventions to prevent health issues like HIV/AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse, and risky sexual behaviours. These programs also empower vulnerable groups like physically challenged individuals, orphans, and slum dwellers to deal with domestic violence and other societal forces that impede their well-being.

In-School Life Skills Education

Formal education in primary and junior secondary schools embeds life skills such as critical thinking in the basic science and technology curriculum, empowering students with knowledge and skills to face daily challenges and prevent abuse. The curriculum includes subjects such as Physical and Health Education, basic Science, basic Technology, and Information Technology. Infusion is a recent method of teaching life skills by integrating preventive objectives and content into basic subjects, help-

ing learners translate information into their daily lives. Components of life skills are distributed across subjects through a diverse array of delivery methods. Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) is another secondary education approach, taught at the junior secondary school level, focusing on six major themes: Human Development, Personal Skills, Sexual Health, Relationships, Sexual Behaviour's, Society and Culture.

Home Life Skills Training

Parents and older family members play a crucial role in teaching life skills to children and adolescents. A study by Lidaka and Lanka (2014) found that a functional family with love, understanding, assigned roles, mutual trust, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence ranked highest in acquiring life skills. This type of family provides a solid foundation for children and adolescents to learn values, norms, skills, and positive attitudes, increasing their confidence, self-worth, and resilience to face life's challenges.

The Use of Technology in Life Skills Training

Technology plays a crucial role in teaching life skills, particularly for adolescents who find it exciting and creative. Technology-oriented programs can develop essential skills such as self-confidence, communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and teamwork. Common technology tools for life skill acquisition include email, the internet, digital cameras, video and audio-recording equipment, computer software, and mobile phones. Other tools include blogs, podcasts, polls/surveys, digital stories, text messaging, data tracking, online recruitment forms, and online training courses.

Blogs are web-based journals that allow program participants to reflect on their experiences, podcasts are audio blogs that can include motivational speeches from local experts or celebrities, and digital stories that collect stories about life skill program participants and share them online. With the proliferation of mobile phones, text messages can be used to communicate with program participants and send news updates. Social media platforms like WhatsApp can be used to discuss life skills issues with young program participants.

Data tracking is an online tool that helps program participants track progress in achieving program outcomes. Online application forms can streamline the recruitment process, and some program content can be delivered or reinforced through online training courses. However, lack of internet access and costs can be significant constraints.

CONCLUSION

To empower adolescents to take constructive acts, defend themselves, promote health, and cultivate strong social interactions, life skills education is essential. Better health behaviours, wholesome interpersonal interactions, and personal well-being can result from it.

For today's students, life skills education must be included in the curriculum. It attends to children's needs, offers useful emotional, cognitive, social, and self-management skills for adjusting to adulthood, and, by enhancing social and emotional competence, helps prevent violence in youth. It also helps them locate work and teaches them how to resolve conflicts peacefully and successfully.

Enhancing mental health and providing children daily training from life skills trainers, instructors, and counsellors can be accomplished through integrating life skills education into the regular school curriculum and offering them daily support.

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Need for Life Skill Education to Promote Gender Equality

Samim Sultana*

Abstract

In the 21st century, where all nations strive to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, one of the most significant goals is securing gender equality by 2030. Gender equality emphasizes establishing a society ensuring equal rights and opportunities for both men and women, and the vital realization of human rights for all. Life skills is a significant instrument to promote gender equality in the present society where various gender based issues emerge every day. Inclusion of life skills in education and enhancing life skills in women will contribute to women's empowerment, make them efficient and prepare them to face challenges in this progressive world. Life skills such as creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, self-awareness, coping skills and so on can unfold many avenues for women. The objective of the paper is to identify ways in which life skill education can protect and promote human rights and assure equality of opportunity for women. The paper is based on secondary sources and it is hoped that the study will reveal how life skills help ensure equality in all aspects of life for women which will contribute to establishing a gender just society. It will also underscore the fact that Life skills can empower women to realize their role in society's development.

Key words: Gender equality, human rights, life skill education, women empowerment

Introduction

Gender equality refers to the notion that men and women are entitled to equal dignity, equal rights and opportunities irrespective of their biological determinism. An empowered and educated woman can contribute to the development of society as well as to the nation, as the UNFPA 2023 State of World Population report illustrates. As of 2023, there are 4.04 billion

* Faculty, Department of Political Science, Maryam Ajmal Women's College, Science & Technology, Affiliated to Dibrugarh University, Assam

males in the world, representing 50.25% of the world population; the population of females in the world is estimated at 4.00 billion, representing 49.75% of the world population. The gender ratio in the world in 2023 is 101.016 males per 100 females. Therefore, by ensuring gender equality, a progressive and sustainable nation can be assured. Even representing half of the global population, women are still not progressive compared to men. In this regard, education has an indispensable role to ensure gender equality, which will assure a progressive and sustainable world.

Definitions of Life Skills:

Different organisations define the term ‘life skills’ in various ways, depending on their field of work and the context in which they operate.

UNICEF defines life skills as “a behaviour change or behaviour development approach to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills”. UNICEF’s Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) framework defines and states development of life skills as a process to be applied to various learning areas covering four dimensions: the cognitive, the individual, the social and the instrumental. According to this framework, life skills are regarded as a cross-cutting, interconnected and overlapping application of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills which are integral to quality education and are universally applicable and contextual”. (UNICEF MENA 2017)

The World Bank, through the lens of gender norms and human rights, defines life skills as a set of social and behavioural skills also referred to as “soft” or “non-cognitive” skills that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life. (UNICEF 2019)

Life skills are defined by the World Health Organization as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. (WHO, 1994)

The importance of life skills education can be understood by the World Health Organization’s Department of Mental Health definition, as it states that “Life skills education is designed to facilitate the practices and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way; it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights”. (WHO, 1999).

In this dynamic and challenging world, progress depends on the skills and abilities of a person to deal with every aspect of life. Skills are the keys to

a successful life that enable a person to adopt positive behavioural changes as the needs and situation demand. Life skills such as effective communication skills, problem-solving and decision-making capability, creativity, maintaining emotional health, etc., enable a person to become self-dependent. Since half of the world population is represented by females, providing women with life skills education not only makes them socio-economically strong, but also contributes to building a gender just world where women will have equal rights and opportunities in life. To eliminate gender disparity and achieve gender equality, life skills education must be gender neutral, which must be accessible for all and should be available from secondary to higher education levels. As inequalities are best addressed by education, life skills education can be utilized as a tool to promote gender equality in society.

Objectives

- To examine how life skills education contributes to promoting gender equality.

Methodology

The study is based on the secondary source of data. For the collection of data, books, journals, articles and newspapers etc. were used.

Discussion

Many worldwide initiatives have been taken to ensure equality through education. In 1990, a global initiative was adopted at the World Conference on 'Education for All' held at Jomtien, Thailand. It was launched by UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank with a commitment to provide quality education to children, youth and adults. Further, the international community identified six key education goals, including promoting learning and life skills for youth and adults (Goal 3) and securing gender parity and gender equality (Goal 5) to be achieved by 2015. Likewise, the United Nations initiative of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) committed to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (Goal 3) by 2015. This was followed by the launch of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aimed at ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5) and reducing inequalities (Goal 10) by 2030. Therefore, it is clear that the nations are striving to attain a sustainable world, and international efforts are made to meet these aims, where gender equality is a basic element. These aims can be fulfilled when the equality of education is characterized by the inclusion

of life skills education. As ‘education’ is the path to human development that opens doors for opportunities and assures a healthy life, life skills are indispensable for human beings.

The international organizations such as UNICEF, WHO and UNESCO recognized the ten core life skills:

- Self-Awareness
- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Decision Making
- Problem Solving
- Effective Communication
- Interpersonal Relationship
- Empathy
- Coping with Stress
- Coping with Emotion

These life skills are psycho-social abilities that are essential for the holistic development of an individual. These skills are related to interpersonal and intrapersonal skills as it helps an individual to deal with problems with the right decision-making capabilities, produce effective communication with others, improve creative and critical thinking capacity and enables self-management by coping with stress and emotions. These, along with the ability to be empathetic to others, help develop an individual’s personality with a positive attitude towards life.

Life Skills in Gender Perspectives

As the World Health Organization explains, gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of men and women, including the norms, roles, and behaviours associated with them. Gender is a concept that shapes the norms and relationships between men and women based on socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions. Therefore, gender equality denotes the similar values, rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and equal recognition of an individual’s potential, considering their gender identity, irrespective of the norms and conditions that are determined by unnatural factors. In simple terms, gender equality refers to equal treatment of both men and women. However, in this contemporary world, the attainment of gender equality necessitates the empowerment of women and the assurance of their equitable participation across social, economic, and political do-

mains. Life skills education can be an approach to achieve this objective through the teaching-learning process. Life skills education is not only significant for youngsters to adapt gender neutral behaviour but also to make a realization of a quality life. This makes inclusion of life skills an important element of quality education. Implementation of life skills in schools can take place through various participatory and explorative techniques such as role playing, debating, group discussion, community project, speech, peer learning, management games, brainstorming, etc.

In this context, life skills education moves beyond theoretical discussions of gender equality and actively contributes to its realization by fostering self-agency and autonomy among learners. The ways in which this is achieved are elaborated below with reference to related studies:

• **Strengthening Self-Agency and Autonomy with Life Skills Education**

Life skills education fosters self-agency and autonomy by equipping individuals with the confidence, critical thinking, and decision-making abilities needed to take control of their choices and actions.

The study by Singh et al. (2023) on Leadership and Attitudinal Change through Life Skills highlights that life skills education plays a crucial role in shaping leadership qualities and transforming attitudes among learners. It emphasizes that structured life skills interventions help individuals develop confidence, communication skills, and decision-making abilities, which in turn foster leadership potential and more progressive social attitudes.

Edmonds et al. (2022), through their study, demonstrated that life skills programmes significantly strengthen agency among adolescent girls by improving their self-confidence, aspirations, and socio-emotional support systems. Key findings from this study show that there was a 25–30% reduction in dropout rates among adolescent girls, increased agency and decision-making capacity and improved gender -equitable attitudes and socio-emotional support.

A study by Ashraf et al. (2020) in Zambia demonstrated that teaching girls specific life skills, particularly negotiation and interpersonal communication, improved their educational outcomes over the subsequent three years. This shows how life skills can protect people from unfair disadvantages in society.

3. Life Skills as Transformative Education:

Classrooms are key spaces for socialization, and these studies demonstrate

how life skills education can reshape the gender roles learned early in life.

The Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS) and United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) based on an expansive study across 15 countries, found that gender stereotypes become deeply entrenched before the age of ten among early adolescents from upper primary and lower secondary school students. It argues that "gender-transformative education", which uses life skills like critical thinking to question power imbalances, is the only way to prevent these stereotypes from limiting a child's future (UNGEI, 2021).

Data from the Room to Read life skills curriculum (2022) revealed that after just two years of implementation, students showed statistically significant shifts toward equity-mindedness. By explicitly teaching "gender roles and stereotypes" as part of a life skills package, the program successfully challenged the "limiting norms" that hold students back.

Research shows that life skills, particularly those related to emotional regulation, coping, and problem-solving, play a critical role in helping students from disadvantaged or marginalized backgrounds navigate social and institutional challenges. For instance, a study by Gayathri Surendran et al. (2023) found that life skills education significantly improved adolescents' self-efficacy, adjustment, and overall psychosocial functioning, enabling them to better cope with stressors such as peer pressure, academic demands, and social challenges. Moreover, the research by Deepthi et al. (2022) shows that students who have stronger coping skills tend to adjust better socially and emotionally, especially those dealing with learning difficulties or challenging environments. This highlights how important life skills are in helping young people manage stigma and navigate barriers within the classrooms and institutions.

This shows that life skills education is not just supportive, but essential in making equality a real, everyday experience in schools rather than merely a policy goal.

3. Informed Decision-Making and Effective Communication

Gender equality in adulthood often depends on how well individuals can navigate professional and personal hierarchies. These studies emphasize the advanced cognitive skills that support this ability.

A study by Harvard Business School (Chang & Milkman, 2020) shows that life skills such as 'individuation' (evaluating people based on individual merit rather than stereotypes) can significantly reduce bias in professional

decision-making, especially in hiring contexts. As life skills are termed as ‘traversal’ and ‘transferable’ by UNICEF (2017), once imbibed by individuals, they are applicable beyond school settings.

4. Life Skills Education with a focus on Boys:

Gender equality does not happen in isolation. Lasting change depends on actively involving boys, especially by helping them build empathy through life skills. Research shows that when boys are actively included in life skills education (LSE), it can help foster more equal gender attitudes and healthier relationships. A review by Room to Read (2022) points out that gender-responsive LSE programmes encourage boys to question rigid ideas of masculinity, such as always needing to appear tough or suppress emotions. As boys begin to reflect on and move beyond these norms, they tend to develop stronger social and emotional skills. These changes are widely seen as an important step toward reducing gender-based violence, a view also supported by global guidance from UNESCO (Alcalde, M. A., & Montgomery, P. (2018).

The OECD study of five-year-olds in England and Estonia (2021) found that gender-stereotyped futures are imagined very early. This research supports the view that life skills training must begin early to prevent boys from internalizing roles that disadvantage their female peers.

The following points highlight the role of life skills education in promoting gender equality within society:

1. Life skills education creates awareness among students regarding their rights, responsibilities, and especially makes girls aware of human rights. It helps students to become more gender responsive and to elevate gender related constraints.
2. Life skills education fosters an environment that enables learners to express their views freely within the learning framework, irrespective of gender identity.
3. Life skills education encourages students to critically re-examine existing practices, beliefs, and attitudes toward men and women in society. It also enhances their understanding of traditionally embedded gender roles and differences, while fostering a gender-sensitive perspective aimed at reducing inequalities.
4. The incorporation of life skills education within school settings contributes to personality development among learners, with pedago-

gical approaches such as role play, debates, group discussions, and case-based learning fostering critical thinking and decision-making skills.

5. Life skills education helps students, especially girls, to introspect on their potential, capabilities, and interests, strengthening their ‘agency’ that will give direction to their aims and objectives for the future.
6. Life skills education encourages positive behavioural change regarding gender issues while promoting respect, empathy, and acceptance. It also helps boys move away from oppressive attitudes and adopt a more inclusive and egalitarian outlook.
7. Life skills education can promote gender equality by enabling both girls and boys to participate equally across all spheres of life.
8. Life skills education can enhance students’ physical, mental, and emotional well-being by equipping them to effectively manage stress and emotions.
9. Life skills education can contribute to increasing female representation in economic and political spheres, thereby promoting gender equality.
10. Life skills education can serve as a strategy for gender socialization by fostering a positive perspective among boys and girls toward one another and helping students build healthy interpersonal relationships.
11. Organizing child safety programmes in schools, based on age-appropriate educational theories, can enhance students’ awareness and help build their self-confidence and assertiveness to protect themselves in various situations.

Conclusion

In today’s world, creating a supportive environment for everyone is crucial for real progress. A country’s development relies heavily on its people. This progress is limited when gender inequalities hold individuals back. As global efforts focus on building a future, it’s clear that children and young people need more than just bookish knowledge. They need life skills to tackle real-world challenges. Life skills education has become vital not for personal growth but for building a fairer society.

Life skills education can play a role in addressing deep-rooted gender issues, including violence against women and girls. Many still face forms of discrimination and violence at home, in schools or in public, which affects

their freedom and rights. By teaching life skills such as self-awareness, communication, emotional awareness, problem-solving and decision-making, life skills education helps young people understand themselves and others. It empowers them to confront situations, challenge unfair norms and develop healthier relationships. When introduced early, these life skills can have a lasting impact on how individuals see themselves and interact with the world. Life skills education is not an add-on in education. It is a powerful tool for promoting fairness and supporting human rights. It helps young people to question norms, develop empathy and treat other people with respect. It brings boys and girls together, encouraging responsibility for change. Over time, this can help reduce violence and create environments for everyone. Strengthening life skills education is not about individual growth; it's about building a fairer, more inclusive future for all.

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APPENDIX

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WHO: World Health Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

MDGs: The United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration consisting of 8 goals at the Millennium Summit in 2000 at UN Headquarters in New York to reduce extreme poverty by 2015.

SDGs: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, consisting of 17 goals adopted by all United Nations Member States at UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015 which are an urgent call by all developed and developing countries in a global partnership to ensure a sustainable world by 2030.

EFA: Education for all

An Analysis of Life Skills Education in Secondary Schools of Nagaland

Prof. Lungsang Zeliang*, Kesuihakle**,
Aloka Assumi*** & Eluheing Nsarangbe****

Abstract

Life skills are abilities that enable young people to improve their mental well-being and competency as they face life's obstacles. In today's environment, life skills are required to enrich and strengthen our life in order to optimize potentials. Life skill education serves to enhance an individual's aptitude to meet the needs and demands of the present society, it helps in dealing with challenges in a way that results in desirable behavioural practices. Instilling life skill education and offering life skill training will assist youth in overcoming such obstacles in life. The present study is an attempt to examine the status of life skill education in Secondary Schools of Nagaland, as well as the practices and activities used for imparting various types of life skills. The research will entail the survey of existing curricular subjects, journals, and secondary sources. This research abstract emphasizes the importance of imparting life skill education at the secondary level in Nagaland.

Key words: Life Skills, Life Skills Education, Training, Vocational education

Introduction

Cognitive abilities like reading and maths are undeniably among the goals of education and school. However, it also implies that children should be equipped with additional abilities that will allow them to succeed and contribute to their society. Broad qualities will include communication, critical thinking, creativity, self-management, decision-making, and perseverance.

* Professor, Department of Education, Nagaland University, Kohima campus, Meriema, Email lu_zeliang@yahoo.in,

** Research scholar, Department of Education, Nagaland University, Kohima campus, Meriema, Email: Kesuihak77@gmail.com

*** Research scholar, Department of Education, Nagaland University, Kohima campus, Meriema, Email: aloswu99@gmail.com,

**** Senior Academic Officer, Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE), Kohima, Email: ilunsarangbe@gmail.com

Life skills can be defined as a set of psychological and cognitive abilities that enable children to make educated judgments and choices, regulate their emotional well-being, and communicate effectively (Singh and Me-non, 2015). It is commonly acknowledged that in the present millennium, education is undergoing a revolutionized metamorphosis in terms of science and technology, globalization, privatization, urbanization and industrialization. Today's youth are confronted with a slew of new concerns, including global warming, famines, poverty, suicide, population expansion, and social, emotional, physical, and psychological issues. Cut-throat competition unemployment, job insecurity, etc. are some of the key concerns for the educated, and as a result they get caught in the frantic race (Sharma D and Prajapati, R. K. 2017).

It is well acknowledged that school education, particularly at the secondary level, has a significant impact on the development of positive personality traits among students. Throughout this stage of transition, students face many problems, such as forming an identity, regulating emotions, building connections, rejecting peer pressure, acquiring information, education, and services on issues of adolescence, etc. To overcome the problems that students confront in life, it is vital to build qualities in them that prepare them to face diversity and unfavourable circumstances on their own. These qualities are commonly referred to as life skills. Life skills are the abilities and strengths that enable people to approach and complete their everyday tasks with a positive attitude. Life skills are essential for enhancing one's life and efficiently maximizing one's potential (Meenu and Rani, 2021).

India currently has the world's youngest population, presenting the country with a huge demographic dividend; specifically, 600 million people under the age of 25 make up more than half of India's total population. However, a variety of variables, including globalization changing economic landscape, societal transformation, lack of educational infrastructure, and negative elements such as poverty and malnutrition, among others, have created an environment of uncertainty and stress for many young people. More specifically, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF 2016) claimed that 160 million of India's 460 million young people under the age of 18 were living below the international poverty line, or no less than US \$1.25 per day. The various problems that children and teenagers encounter in the country have been accompanied by a lack of articulation of adversity and the resulting inability to thrive, leading to a misinterpretation of the problem. This indicates that Indian policy visions for life skills are rooted in the priorities of the country's evolving economy and growth agenda, more

specifically, skilling the employable demographic dividend is considered crucial for achieving sustainable developmental outcomes. Adversity is so generally viewed as a source of unemployment, with solutions envisioned in terms of producing more jobs, developing employability skills, and establishing vocational or remedial teaching institutes (Talreja. V et.al 2018)

Importance of Life Skills Education

International organisations, including the World Health Organization, UNESCO, and UNICEF, have consistently emphasised the significance of life skills in enabling individuals to address the challenges of daily life effectively. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) defines life skills as abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that allow individuals to manage the demands and challenges of everyday living. The ten core life skills are self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, coping with emotions, and coping with stress. These are typically categorised as thinking skills, social skills, and emotional skills.

Over time, multiple frameworks have broadened the concept of life skills to encompass leadership, resilience, citizenship, employability, and digital awareness, reflecting evolving societal needs. These frameworks emphasize that life skills extend beyond academic achievement and are equally critical for emotional well-being, healthy relationships, personal development, and active participation in society.

The UNICEF Middle East and North Africa (MENA) framework (2019) offers a comprehensive and contemporary perspective on life skills through the Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) model. Here, life skills are defined as the integration of knowledge, values, attitudes, and socio-emotional competencies that enable individuals to navigate education, employment, personal life, and civic responsibilities successfully. The UNICEF MENA framework classifies life skills under four key dimensions of learning: Learning to Know (cognitive), Learning to Do (instrumental), Learning to Be (individual), and Learning to Live Together (social). Within these dimensions, the framework identifies twelve core life skills essential for the 21st century, namely creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperation, negotiation, decision-making, self-management, resilience, communication, respect for diversity, empathy, and participation. The framework emphasises that life skills are interconnected and should be cultivated holistically rather than in isolation. These lifelong competencies support the development of confident individuals, productive workers, re-

sponsible citizens, and emotionally balanced persons. In contrast to earlier models that primarily addressed psycho-social adjustment, the UNICEF MENA framework connects life skills with employability, active citizenship, social cohesion, and personal empowerment, thereby increasing its relevance amid rapid social and economic transformation.

Life skills education is essential for developing students' competencies and overall abilities. It plays a crucial role in enhancing motivation, self-management, emotional well-being, and social adjustment. Integrating life skill-based education into the standard school curriculum is vital for preparing students to address real-life challenges effectively. Therefore, governments, educators, and stakeholders should prioritise the integration, implementation, and reinforcement of life skills education programmes in schools to promote holistic student development and foster a more responsible and capable society.

Review of Related Literature

The Comprehensive Life Skills Framework, developed by UNICEF (2019), emphasises the systematic development of children and adolescents through life skills education focused on empowerment and holistic growth. This framework underscores the necessity of equipping individuals with effective strategies, competencies, and behavioural skills to respond constructively to diverse life situations and challenges. Within the Indian context, the framework delineates four primary dimensions of life skills development: empowerment, employability, citizenship, and learning. These dimensions are supported by clusters of ten core life skills. Additionally, the framework outlines an operational approach for implementing life skills programmes by integrating training, support systems, and developmental opportunities to foster overall growth and societal participation.

K. Nokmarenba (2023) examined the process of skill development in Mokokchung District of Nagaland, with particular focus on the various government schemes and programmes aimed at improving employment opportunities and supporting job seekers. The study pointed out that many young people from the North-Eastern region continue to migrate to other Indian cities due to limited educational and employment opportunities within the region. It also highlighted concerns such as social insecurity, conflict, and institutional challenges that influence migration patterns among the youth, as discussed by Kikon and Karlsson (2020).

Prabhat Kishor (2022) states that Samagra Shiksha has broadened educational opportunities for all children and promoted equitable access to quali-

ty education from pre-primary to class 12. The initiative consolidates three previous schemes: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Teacher Education (TE). It also seeks to strengthen life skills education for secondary school students. The government has introduced smart classrooms with internet connectivity, information and communication technology (ICT), and digital tools in numerous schools. In addition, vocational education is planned for implementation in 50% of combined secondary and senior secondary schools.

Saravanakumar A R.(2020), in his paper, mentioned how life skill education strengthens and builds knowledge to aid people in leading their lives as efficaciously and efficiently as possible. He suggested that the successful implementation of life skill education in the school curriculum relies and depends on the teacher's positive attitude. The findings further revealed that, in this technological era, students depend on software-assisted instruction to help them in any hypothetical situation, which is impacting education, business and life. Therefore, to deal with different challenges of the child, life skill education, like dealing with frustration and stress, needs to be incorporated.

Dream A Dream, a Bengaluru-based non-profit organization report emphasizes the importance of life skills in India, exploring the strengths and challenges faced by people today. After a comprehensive study, the report revealed that in India, there is a need to build a collaborative impact among stakeholders and uplift the importance of life skills for every child to be independent. (Sinha S 2015).

Munsi Krishnendu and Debjani Guha (2014) did a comparative study on the status of life skill education in teacher education curriculum of SAARC countries, where the study revealed that members of the countries felt the need to incorporate life skill education in secondary teacher curriculum. The study found that some countries considered life skill education as co-curricular activities, whereas some kept it in the core curriculum and envisaged that life skill education should be framed adequately to develop different socio-psycho skills and should be incorporated as an effective part of the education curriculum.

R Kalaiselvi, et.al (2012) highlighted that life skill education is the basic need of every child to equip themselves and live an independent life. The paper includes a skill-based approach in life skill education to identify and direct appropriate steps to enhance their skills, enable rational decisions and develop problem-solving methods.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives for the present study are:

- To examine the status of life skills education in secondary schools of Nagaland.
- To explore the practices and activities used for imparting various types of life skills education in secondary schools of Nagaland.

Steps taken by the Government of India in respect of Skill-based Education under NEP 2020

With the introduction of the National Education Policy NEP 2020, India has emphasized on building a holistic development among students and improving the educational system in institutes across India. It aims to promote and integrate vocational education and training at various levels of formal education, starting from grade 6th, by creating the National Committee for Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE).

NEP 2020 has a focus on providing basic and structural life skill-based education, where students will learn practical skills and acquire various experiential learning strategies. The Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL) is implementing the scheme of Vocational School Education under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme -Samagra Shiksha by aligning with Skill India Mission. The policy also aims to envisage Vocational Education in all Secondary/Senior level by establishing the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) to standardize and bring quality education and development from class 9th to 12th in different schools in India. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), with the Ministry of Education (MoE), is implementing the 'Skill Hub Initiative' under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna 3.0. All these schemes and the policy intend to bring holistic and skill-oriented learning among students.

Life Skill-Based Education and Skill Development In Nagaland: An Overview

Life skill-based education emphasises equipping students with skills beyond the traditional learning system of education. Nagaland, with an approximate population of 19 lakhs, with 60% of youth (The Morung Express Nagaland, 3rd Oct 2022), aims to instil a productive and valuable outcome in society. The Nagaland Education Mission Society regulates the governmental programmes and policies to promote education in the state, with a literacy rate of 79.55 per cent. According to the 2011 census, the male pop-

ulation has a literacy rate of 82.75 %, while the female population has a literacy rate of 76.11%. Nagaland District has 716 Government Higher Secondary Schools, Secondary Schools and recognised Private High Schools and Secondary Schools (nbsenl.edu.ac). The implementation of skill-based education in Secondary Schools involved imparting of various practical learning sessions in all the schools with regard to effective communication skills, interpersonal skills, decision-making skills, media-based skills, adaptability and flexibility skills, creative thinking, leadership skills, and physical and emotional intelligence. These were integrated into educational curricula and programmes in the context of Nagaland.

North-East Institute of Social Sciences and Research (NEISSR), Chumukedima, Nagaland, launched the ‘Skill Me Program’ on October 1, 2022, to incorporate life skills that will help youths of Nagaland to bridge the employability gap for local youth, by fostering life skills and vocational training. Under the Department of Employment, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of Nagaland, there are 9 training Institutes in the state imparting training in 22 trades, 14 Engineering and 8 Non-Engineering streams and Industrial Training Institutes in most of the districts (K Nokmarenba 2023) for young aspiring youths to engage themselves in learning and live an independent life.

Curricular Perspective

The Nagaland Board of School Education, established on November 15, 1973 (50 years ago), is the state board of school education in the Indian state of Nagaland. Nagaland’s Secondary and Higher Secondary Education is promoted and developed by the NBSE. The sole goal and purpose of NBSE is to prescribe instruction courses, administer examinations, publish results, produce curricula, syllabi, and textbooks, inspect schools, and organize seminars and workshops (Priyanka Vij Monga (2016), (Nagaland Board of School Education, 2023).

The Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) developed the Life Skills Education textbook in the year 2016 for Secondary and Higher Secondary level students, i.e., classes IX-XII, to impart and educate pupils at the secondary level.

Secondary Level Contents:

- Physical Development
- Health Education
- Adolescence and its behavioural changes

- Work Education
- Art Education
- Civility
- Career Guidance

Higher Secondary Level Contents:

- Physical Development
- Health Education
- Work Education
- Art Education
- Civic sense
- Peace Education
- Career Education

As is evident from the above curricular materials, the Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) has covered almost every aspect to instil and integrate life skills education as part of important existing curricula. The life skills education course textbook was brought out to emphasize that education is more than just providing a child with intellectual information; it is also about bringing out the best in every child- physically, psychologically, and emotionally. It is a sincere and honest endeavour to bring the importance of health and related problems and healthy living into focus, to instil dignity of labour, and to open up vistas of artistic expressions in the field of music, visual arts, dance, and other disciplines. Even though the course curriculum has been established for further implementation and incorporation into the general curriculum, it has been observed that the majority of secondary schools are yet to incorporate life skills education into their curricular structure, which is a huge hindrance and issue because the majority of students are deprived of access to life skills enhancement.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and review-based research design to examine the role of Life Skills Education in facilitating personal and professional empowerment among individuals and communities, with a particular focus on secondary schools in Nagaland. The research aims to assess the current status of life skills education and to analyze the practices and activities used to impart life skills at the secondary school level. Given the emphasis on educational practices, policies, and experiences within their social and institutional contexts, a descriptive and exploratory approach is

utilized.

The study relies primarily on secondary data sources. An extensive literature review was conducted to provide insights into the concept, scope, and significance of life skills education in both global and local contexts. Academic journals, research articles, books, policy documents, reports, educational frameworks, and curricular materials related to life skills education were systematically examined. Special attention was devoted to curricular subjects and educational practices in secondary schools, with a focus on identifying the integration of life skills into teaching and learning processes. This review facilitated an understanding of the theoretical foundations of life skills education and its importance in fostering emotional, social, personal, and professional competencies among young individuals.

In addition to the review-based analysis, the study incorporates a qualitative component through interviews with selected heads of secondary schools in Nagaland. These interviews were designed to obtain practical insights regarding the implementation, challenges, and effectiveness of life skills education within schools. Respondents were purposively selected based on their experience and involvement in school administration and student development initiatives. The interviews aimed to capture institutional perspectives on life skills education, the activities and strategies used for imparting life skills, and the perceived impact of such education on students' overall development and empowerment.

Data collected from both secondary sources and interviews were analyzed using descriptive and interpretative methods. Information from the literature review and curricular analysis was systematically organized into themes related to life skills education, empowerment, teaching practices, and student development. Responses from school heads were similarly examined to identify recurring patterns, observations, and experiences associated with life skills education in secondary schools.

In summary, the methodology combines review-based research with qualitative inquiry to provide a comprehensive understanding of life skills education and its role in fostering personal and professional empowerment

among students and communities in both global and local contexts.

Findings

The findings based on the review are as follows:

1. Life skill education has been implemented in some of Nagaland's 716 government and private, secondary and higher secondary schools, and includes activities such as setting goals, building confidence, self-esteem, friendship, smart study, peer pressure, team building, teaching etiquette, and logical thinking.
2. Although the Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE), has advised that life skills education be included, many secondary schools do not incorporate Life Skills Education seriously.
3. There is a lack of awareness about the significance of life skill education as a subject in the general curriculum.
4. There is a scarcity of trained or professional teachers who are enthusiastic about teaching life skills education.
5. To incorporate life skills education into the curriculum, infrastructure is also essential for its practical implementation. The lack of basic infrastructure in most secondary schools in Nagaland may be a contributing factor to its adoption.
6. Financial allocations for various activities of life skills education are required; yet, with the majority of schools operating only on pay disbursement, it is impossible to assign separate funds for this specific content in many schools.
7. Lack of emphasis placed by schools in general on a full-fledged curriculum of life skills education; while life skills education is incorporated in some schools, the courses are not taken regularly.

Suggestions

The following are some proposals for improving and implementing Life Skills Education in Nagaland Secondary Schools:

1. All schools under the Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) should sincerely implement the Life Skills Education programme following the NBSE requirements.
2. The government should allocate funds to assist schools in constructing basic infrastructure for the implementation of life skills education in Nagaland.
3. Innovative measures should be developed by the concerned stakeholders

for the implementation of life skills education in Nagaland's secondary schools.

4. There is a need for qualified and professional teachers who have particular knowledge of life skills education. Pre-service or in-service training could also incorporate life skills education curriculum to help prospective teachers become more effective in knowledge delivery.
5. The concerned stakeholders should raise more awareness and sensitization about the relevance of life skills education through modes of seminars, conferences, and workshops.

Conclusion

Although there has been an increased awareness, resulting in some schools in Nagaland taking Life Skills Education seriously, it cannot be denied that there is still considerable work to be done. Mass awareness and sensitization are required to implement it across the state, beginning with stakeholders and progressing to communities, parents, and children. As students spend the majority of their time interacting with and participating in school activities, instructors have a far-reaching effect and impact. Competence is the key to developing qualities and nurturing students, therefore, teachers must equip themselves and be solely interested in the nature of this subject. The current curricular structure is still in its infancy and requires more attention, and with the changing times, modification, integration, and adaptation of new and innovative concepts must be enhanced progressively. As a result, it can be concluded that life skills education in Nagaland's secondary schools must be closely monitored and assessed on a larger scale to ensure that its implementation and progress are efficient and effective.

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Emotional Expressivity, Emotional Regulation and Life Satisfaction among Young Adults in Chennai

Mr. Nishanth S*, Mr. Dhanish S*, Mr. Adithya N**,
Dr. Subasree V***

Abstract

Emotions are very short-lived feelings that come from a known cause. They are displayed through sudden physical body language and facial expressions, such as by smiling when happy or crying when sad. Emotional expression is simply the acknowledgement of these emotions we are built to feel. This study intends to explore the relationship among emotional expressivity, emotion regulation and life satisfaction of young adults in Chennai. Life satisfaction has been defined as "a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life". The study aims to find the relationship between these three variables comprising 162 samples constituting males and females using convenience sampling technique. The study is quantitative in nature and adopts ex post-facto research design using the standardized tools such as Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire - Gross, J.J., & John, O.P. (1997)., Emotional Regulation Questionnaire - Gross, J.J., & John, O.P. (2003)., Satisfaction with Life Scale - Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The data drawn was analysed using SPSS with appropriate statistics. The results, the inferences drawn and the implications will be discussed in detail in the paper.

Key words: Emotional regulation, emotional expressivity, life satisfaction, young adults

Introduction

One of the most distinctive and exclusive features of human beings is the ability to outwardly showcase their emotions. In fact, throughout

* Final year, Counselling Psychology, Madras School of Social Work ,

* Final year, Counselling Psychology, Madras School of Social Work

** First year, Counselling Psychology, Madras School of Social Work

*** Head of the Department, Department of Counselling Psychology, Madras School of Social Work

the evolutionary history of this species, emotional expressivity is found to accompany individuals throughout the whole process. The act of expressing emotions is an integral part of the adaptive functioning of human beings, who are also fondly referred to as ‘Social Animals’. This act of expressivity of emotions gives human beings a unique distinction in the identification of themselves as a more socially friendly organism. According to Sloan and Marx (2004), Emotional expressivity has been linked to positive physical and mental health in the general population. Emotional expressivity is defined as the extent to which a person outwardly displays emotions regardless of valence or channel. It is also described as a stable and individual-different characteristic. The way of expressing emotions is uniquely attributable to individuals. A certain individual may express his or her emotions in a different way when compared to another individual. In general, various behavioural changes such as laughter, pouting, crying, etc. are often linked to emotional expressivity. A huge emphasis is placed on observable behavioural responses and the level of emotional expression, which is actually determined by the degree of behavioural impulses of the individuals. According to Mendes et al. (2003), emotional suppression may potentially lead to harming of the physical and mental health as well as cognitive processes. When an individual is not open or finds it difficult to express emotions, it may result in a reduction of abilities to improve his or her mental state and develop a weak perception of themselves that ultimately leads to underpowering the individual to handle any crisis. This brings us to an inevitable concept of emotional regulation.

Emotional Regulation refers to the process by which people influence which emotion they have, when they have it, and how they express their feelings. In simpler words, emotional regulation is the ability to exert control over one’s own emotional state. It is common that we as human beings, feel and experience emotions everyday, whatever it might be either negative or positive. As we all know, emotions are a normal part of our everyday lives, it is indeed important to properly manage these emotions. This management is termed as emotional regulation, and if we fail to look after this, it might lead to emotional dysregulation, which is also said to bring various negative and adverse effects to our daily lives.

Life satisfaction is the evaluation of an individual’s quality of life. It is assessed in terms of mood, relationship satisfaction, achieved goals, self-concepts and self-perceived abilities to cope with life. No other species on the planet is said to possess the ability to scientifically and evolutionarily withstand a chance of assessing its quality of life. Human beings

have the ardent ability to explain various constructs of life and livelihoods. One such important factor is life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is more than just happiness. Often, life satisfaction is not given much importance. But when an individual tends to look back at his or her life at the later stages or at old age, there is a regretting phase that the majority of individuals tend to go through. Thus, it is crucial to teach and preach the importance of life satisfaction to individuals at earlier stages of life. In this era of technology, individuals find it really easy to lose their purpose in life, which pushes them to a life with very little satisfaction. A good life necessarily entails well-being. This collectively upholds the umbrella term for happiness, health, flourishing and optimal functioning of the entire human population. A huge responsibility lies in the hands of the present generation to let the future generation live a satisfactory life. It lies among us and our credibility, responsibility and the values that the present generation brings up, stands for it and instigates it in the lives of future generations to ensure that the race of humanity keeps moving forward with a satisfied quality of life and thus ensuring that the world is a better place to live.

Emotional expressivity, emotional regulation, and life satisfaction are closely related aspects of human psychological well-being. The manner in which individuals express and manage their emotions often plays an important role in shaping their overall sense of happiness, adjustment, and satisfaction with life. In order, to gain a deeper understanding of these concepts and their interrelationship, review of some key existing literature in this area are discussed below.

Review of Literature

The relationship between psychological functioning in daily life and emotional expressivity as determined by the emotional expressivity scale (EES) was examined by Burgin et al. (2012) in an experience sampling study. A personal digital assistant that signalled them eight times a day to complete questionnaires measuring affect, activities, and social contact was carried by 429 participants. Positive affect was higher in participants with high emotional expressivity, as expected, but negative affect was not. Additionally, these participants showed improved social functioning when they were around others and were less prone to be by themselves. The link between social setting and functioning in the moment was found to be regulated by emotional expressivity, according to cross-level interactions. The results show the value of experience and validate the EES as a measure of emotional expressivity.

Rashid & Mustafa (2016) in their study aimed to explore and analyze the connection between life happiness and emotional expressivity in males and females. In addition, the study looked at how respondents' perceptions of their level of emotional expressivity and life satisfaction varies depending on their gender and compared nuclear and joint families. The study's sample comprised thirty early adult participants, aged 19 to 25, who were selected from a university in Faisalabad and followed a cross-sectional pattern. The study was conducted for a time period of four months in the year 2015. The impact of emotion was examined in this study using two measures: the Diner's Life Satisfaction Scale and the Ann M. Kring, David A. Smith, and John M. Neale Emotional Expressivity Scale. The findings suggested that there would be a substantial difference between males and females in terms of emotional expressiveness and life satisfaction. Correlation study design was used. SPSS was used to determine the outcomes. A modest sample size allowed the study's findings to be extrapolated to a larger population, which might encourage people to adopt a more optimistic outlook on life. The hypothesis, which states that expressivity is positively related with life satisfaction while there is no difference in the level of life satisfaction and emotional expressivity between the two sexes, was accepted in light of the results, which show a positive relationship between expressivity and life satisfaction ($r=.522^*$ with $M= 60.42$ & $SD= 11.85$ for the emotional expressivity scale and $M= 60.12$ & $SD= 11.20$ for the life satisfaction scale).

The study by Esmaeilinasab, M., Khoshk, A. A., & Makhmali, A. (2016), aimed to compare gender differences in nine strategies of cognitive emotion regulation and to predict life satisfaction through these strategies. The participants consisted of 302 students (202 female and 100 male) of Allameh Tabataba'i University that were selected through Multi-stage cluster sampling and assessed by Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ). The results showed that females reported more usage of rumination, while strategies of positive refocusing, refocusing on planning and Positive reappraisal were often used by males. Multiple regression analysis in females showed that Rumination predicted life satisfaction negatively, and strategies of Positive reappraisal and putting into perspective predicted life satisfaction positively, whereas in males, strategies of Positive reappraisal and refocus on planning predicted life satisfaction positively. The results demonstrated that there were some differences between males and females in selecting cognitive emotion regulation strategies, and also that a number of these strategies have a crucial role in predicting life satisfaction. Thus, teaching some adaptive

strategies and removing maladaptive strategies might prove useful in increasing life satisfaction.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Research problem:

Is there a relationship between the level of Life satisfaction, Emotion Expressivity, and Factors of Emotional Regulation among young adults in Chennai?

Aim:

To determine the relationship of emotional expressivity with emotional regulation and life satisfaction among young adults in Chennai.

Objectives:

- To identify the relationship between emotional expressivity and emotional regulation among young adults in Chennai.
- To determine the relationship between emotional expressivity and life satisfaction.
- To compare the level of emotional expressivity and life satisfaction among male and female young adults.

Hypotheses:

- I. There will be a significant relationship between emotional expressivity and emotional regulation (Cognitive Appraisal) among young adults.
- II. There will be a significant relationship between emotional expressivity and emotional regulation (Emotional Suppression) among young adults.
- III. There will be a significant relationship between emotional expressivity and life satisfaction.
- IV. There will be a significant difference in emotional expressivity between male and female young adults.

Research Design:

Variable of the study :

Independent variable - Emotional Expressivity & Emotional Regulation

Dependent variable - Life Satisfaction

The current study is descriptive in nature, and the ex-post facto design was

adopted to test hypotheses. The researcher aims to determine the relationship between the variables and then examine the differences by comparing the groups of participants in terms of gender ie, male and female. Therefore, the research design is described as ex-post facto research. Also, the study involves a quantitative approach to measure the variables.

Nature of sample:

A total of 161 samples were gathered as the primary data collection. 99 of the samples were male young adults, and 62 samples were female young adults. The participants' age, gender, and current level of education were all obtained as part of their demographic information.

Instruments used:

a) The Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ)

The Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire, created by Gross, J.J., & John, O.P. (1997), measures how participants express their emotions. The Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire assesses three different facets of emotional expressivity: negative expressivity, positive expressivity, and impulse strength. A 16-item scale was used to assess an individual's level of emotional expressivity. Participants responded to each statement using a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree").

Facets of Emotional Expressivity:

Positive Expressivity - The tendency to express positive emotions. The items of Positive Emotionality facet - 1, 4, 6, 10.

Negative Expressivity - The tendency to express negative emotions. The items of Negative expressivity - 3, 5, 8, 9, 13, 16

Impulse Strength - These items refer to strong emotional reactions that are accompanied by the experience of physical and behavioural changes that participants find difficult to stop or hide. The items of Impulse Strength - 2, 7, 11, 12, 14, 15

Tool Reliability and Validity:

The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated for each style to determine the reliability of the scale, and it was discovered that the positive expressivity had an Alpha coefficient of 0.70, negative expressivity 0.70, and impulse strength 0.80, respectively. The total BEQ's alphas were 0.86. Exploratory factor analysis revealed that the 16 items in the BEQ were all

positively inter-correlated, with a mean inter item correlation of .27.

b) The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

Gross and John (2003) have developed a psychological scale, namely The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) that measures to what extent an individual uses emotion suppression and reappraisal regulation strategies. An individual's emotional regulation factors are assessed using a 10-item scale. A seven-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 7 denoting "strongly agree," is used for each question.

Factors of Emotional Regulation:

Cognitive Reappraisal - Reappraisal emotional regulation strategy is a strategy that processes emotions by cognitively reframing the events that cause emotions before the tendency of emotional response is entirely produced, making new interpretations of an event that (s)he has experienced, and reinterpreting the experiences as a stimulus that cause emotion. Items of cognitive reappraisal are 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10.

Emotional Suppression - The suppression emotion regulation strategy is a strategy that processes emotions by avoiding stimuli that can cause emotions, accumulating negative emotions originating from the events experienced, and decreasing the expression of behaviour, both from negative and positive emotions. The items of emotional suppression are 2, 4, 6, and 9.

Tool Reliability and Validity:

Reliability analysis with the alpha coefficients of reliability for the reappraisal is .80 ($M = 31.87$, $SD = 4.29$) and for the suppression is .60 ($M = 18.30$, $SD = 5.42$).

c) The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS):

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) is an instrument to evaluate how satisfied individuals are with their overall quality of life. It was created and published in the year 1985 by Diener et al. A 5-item questionnaire intended to assess one's overall cognitive assessments of life satisfaction (not an indicator of either positive or negative affect). A 7-point scale, ranging from 7 strongly agree to 1 strongly disagree, is used by participants to indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of the five statements.

Tool Reliability and Validity:

The Satisfaction with Life Scale has been shown to have strong test-retest reliability, with a correlation of 0.82 over a two-month period, and very

strong internal consistency, with an alpha of 0.87. Scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale correlate positively with results on nine other well-being measures and a self-esteem assessment, demonstrating concurrent validity for this measure as well.

Procedure:

This research was conducted through an online survey. Google Forms had been used to collect data. The participants were requested to fill out a consent form, which was displayed first among contexts. All of the participants were fully informed about the study’s goals and the confidentiality of the data. The participation was entirely voluntary.

Data Analysis:

Data was entered in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using the SPSS software (version 25). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentages) were used for summarizing the study and outcome variables. For hypothesis IV, an independent sample t test will be administered. Pearson’s t test will be administered to analyze the results For hypotheses I ; II ; III p value less than 0.05 was considered significant.

Statistics used:

The statistical analysis used for the study is mean, standard deviation, correlation and independent t-test.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 - Indicates the relationship between Emotional Expressivity and Emotional Regulation (Cognitive Appraisal)

	Emotional Expressivity	Emotional Regulation (CA)
Emotional Expressivity	1	.408**
Emotional Regulation (CA)	.408**	1

** Significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

According to the above table, there is a strong correlation between Emotional Expressivity and Emotional Regulation (CA) among emerging adults that is significant at the 0.01 level. The relationship appears to be positive. The relationship between Emotional Expressivity and Emotion-

al Regulation (CA) in different ethnic minorities is also discussed in an earlier study by Lü, W., & Wang, Z. (2012) which included 370 college students. The findings indicate that minority ethnic based students experience more negative emotion and are less likely to adopt emotion regulation strategies than Han students. As a result, the first hypothesis, which states that “There will be a relationship between Emotional Expressivity and Emotional Regulation (CA),” is accepted.

Table 2 - Indicates the relationship between Emotional Expressivity and Emotional Regulation (Emotional suppression)

	Emotional Expressivity	Emotional Regulation (ES)
Emotional Expressivity	1	.189*
Emotional Regulation (ES)	.189*	1

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Based on the above table, there is a substantial direct relationship between young adults’ levels of Emotional Expressivity and Emotional Regulation (ES) at the 0.05 level. It appears that the correlation is positive. As additional evidence to our current finding, a previous research study by Haga et al. (2009) investigated the use of expressive suppression in 489 university students in Norway, Australia, and the United States and how these strategies related to measures of well-being (affect, life satisfaction, and depressed mood) shows that increased use of expressive suppression predicted increased levels of negative well-being outcomes. Hence hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Table 3 - Indicates the relationship between Emotional Expressivity and Life satisfaction

	Emotional Expressivity	Life Satisfaction
Emotional Expressivity	1	.193*
Life Satisfaction	.193*	1

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The relationship between Emotional Expressivity among emerging adults and Life Satisfaction appears to be positively correlated significantly at the

0.05 level, according to the above table. An earlier research by Lee, S., & Kim, B. (2022) carried out in South Korea using 500 young adults sample results shows that the high emotional expressivity group showed higher life satisfaction. The study results imply that even though expressing emotions does not result in immediate mood elevation, it eventually leads to higher life satisfaction. Therefore, the third hypothesis, particularly, claims that “There will be a significant relationship between Emotional Expressivity and Life Satisfaction.” is accepted.

Table- 4 Indicates the difference between female and male young adults on Emotional Expressivity

	GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D	Std. Er.Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Emotional Expressivity	1	62	80.15	18.799	2.387	.000
	2	99	70.06	12.027	1.208	.000

The above table indicates the significant difference between young adult females and males on the Emotional Expressivity seems to be significantly differing at .01 level $t = .000$. In previous studies, researchers reported there is significant difference in Emotional Expressivity among both the groups. Therefore based on our findings, hypothesis 4, “There will be significant difference between males and females on emotional expressivity” is accepted.

In a nutshell,

- There is a strong positive correlation between Emotional Expressivity and Emotional Regulation (Cognitive Appraisal).
- There is a significant relationship between emotional expressivity and emotional regulation (Emotional Suppression) among young adults.
- There is a significant relationship between emotional expressivity and life satisfaction.
- There is a significant difference in emotional expressivity between male and female young adults.

Life skills are essential for strengthening emotional expressivity, emotional regulation, and overall life satisfaction among young adults. Skills such as self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, decision-making, stress

management, and interpersonal relationship abilities enable individuals to understand and express their emotions in socially appropriate and healthy ways. Young adults who possess strong life skills are better equipped to regulate their emotions through constructive cognitive appraisal rather than resorting to unhealthy emotional suppression. These competencies assist individuals in coping with academic pressures, relationship challenges, career uncertainties, and other common stressors during young adulthood. Furthermore, life skills significantly enhance self-confidence, emotional resilience, and social connectedness, all of which positively affect life satisfaction. Encouraging young adults to communicate their feelings openly, manage emotions effectively, and build meaningful relationships increases the likelihood of psychological well-being and attain a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment. Integrating life skills education and emotional learning programs within educational institutions and community settings represents a critical step toward promoting healthier emotional functioning and improving the overall quality of life for young adults.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to examine emotional expressivity, emotional regulation, and life satisfaction among young adults in Chennai, emphasizing the significant role of emotions in psychological well-being and overall quality of life. The findings indicate a strong positive correlation between emotional expressivity and emotional regulation, particularly regarding cognitive appraisal. Young adults who openly express their emotions are more likely to understand, reinterpret, and manage their emotional experiences in a constructive manner. The study also identifies a significant relationship between emotional expressivity and emotional suppression, suggesting that the manner in which emotions are expressed is closely linked to how individuals control or suppress their feelings in various contexts. Additionally, the results demonstrate a meaningful association between emotional expressivity and life satisfaction, indicating that emotionally expressive individuals tend to report greater satisfaction and positivity toward life. Emotional openness contributes to improved interpersonal relationships, enhanced self-understanding, and greater emotional well-being, collectively supporting a more satisfying life experience. The study further reveals a significant gender difference in emotional expressivity between male and female young adults, reflecting the impact of social, cultural, and psychological factors on emotional communication and experience. These findings emphasize the significance of promoting healthy emotional expression and effective emotional regulation among young adults, as these

factors are closely linked to mental well-being and life satisfaction. The results further emphasize the necessity for increased awareness, comprehensive emotional education, and supportive environments to foster emotionally balanced and fulfilling lives in this population.

Limitations and future researches

The study has some drawbacks, including a small sample size, and low generalizability. There was a majority of samples collected from male students unexpectedly therefore, tests for gender differences were not accurate. Future research with bigger and more representative samples and qualitative investigation is required to validate the current study's conclusions.

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Developing Life Skills through Direct Social Work Interventions: Transformative Experiences of Children of Mannan Tribe

Asha P Kuriakose*, Ayisha S H * & Ajesh P Kuriakose**

Abstract

The Mannan community, the sole surviving tribal kingdom in South India, residing in Kovilmala, Idukki district, embodies distinct cultural and traditional practices. Currently being in a transitional phase, they grapple with the shift from tradition to modernity, including a shift in educational preferences towards contemporary learning methods. Assimilation of Mannan children into mainstream schools poses challenges in adapting to this new environment, leading to instances of discrimination. The School of Social Work at Marian College, Kuttikanam initiated the "NAI-PUNYA" project within the Mannan community. Focused on cultivating life skills, it targets children in tribal settlements in the Kovilmala region.

This qualitative study focuses on understanding how life skills were inculcated in the children through the project Naipunya and how it acted as an enabler towards personal and professional empowerment of individuals and the Mannan community as a whole. It employs a case study approach, utilizing in-depth interviews from the beneficiaries of the project and thematic analysis is used for data collection and interpretation. The sampling method used is purposive sampling.

The study reveals the transformative impact of the life skills project, enhancing children's adaptability in formal education. The enhanced motivation in children to pursue further education, along with their developed soft skills can be considered as the success of the project. The research also highlights the community's desire for empowerment through similar initiatives, acknowledging the gradual nature of this process.

Keywords: Life skills, Mannan community, social work intervention, transformative experience

* Post graduate Student, Department of Social Work, Marian College Kuttikkanam

** Head of the MSW Programme, Marian College Kuttikkanam

Introduction

India is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation. In India, tribes are dispersed throughout the nation. The Himalayan foothills lead to the land dip of Lakshadweep, India from the Gujarati plains to the hills of the north-eastern state. The state of Chhattisgarh in India has the highest number of tribes-30.6%. There exists in India a total of 641 tribes. The 176 tribes that make up this group live in central India and have a distinctive culture, geographical location, indicative of primitive culture, and a shyness to contact other communities. (Anup et al., n.d.) Backwardness are the characteristics of the tribal. The social, economic, and educational development of tribal tribes varies. There are 75 Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) that are characterized by (a) a pre-agriculture level of technology, (b) a stagnant or declining population, (c) extremely low literacy, and (d) a subsistence level of economy. On the other end of the spectrum, some tribal communities have adopted a mainstream way of life. (n.d.).

Only two tribal groups in India had kings as their rulers: The Mannan tribes of Kerala's Idukki district and the Tripura tribes. "Mannan" does not inherently combine "Manna" (earth) and "Manusian" (man) in common linguistic or historical contexts. Additionally, "Manna" typically refers to a substance mentioned in the Bible, and "Manusian" seems to be a variation of "Manushya," meaning human or man in Sanskrit. It is important to note that the origins and meanings of words can be complex and often have historical, cultural, and linguistic variations. (Reeja, 2018). The Mannan tribal community resides in Kovilmala (Kozhimala) of Kanchi-
yar Grampanchayth in Idukki district. The Mannan community exhibits a strong connection to Tamil culture, evident in their language and customs. According to historical accounts, they are believed to have originated from Tamil Nadu and migrated to Idukki during the Poonjar Rajavamsham era. Oral tradition suggests that the Pandya King of Madurai granted them extensive forest lands as a reward for their support in the conflict against the Cholas. After the war, the king honoured them with the title of Forest Chiefs and provided them with land holdings in the surrounding regions of present-day Kerala. Their main occupation is agriculture, which includes growing herbs and coconuts, among other things. Over time, the Mannan people have begun exploring alternative occupations and are now largely employed as labourers in various sectors. (Rajendran, 2023).

Researchers engaged with the community as part of a rural camp at Kovilmala with the objective of gaining insights into the contemporary circumstances of the Mannan community. This community is currently un-

dergoing a transitional phase, marked by a shift from traditional to modern societal norms. The researchers identified various challenges during this phase, notably a high rate of student dropouts and a lack of enthusiasm for higher education among the community's children. The concerns observed during the rural camp were alcohol abuse, relationship issues, eloping, school dropout, issues in adapting to formal education, unemployment among educated youth, constraints in accessing government schemes and infrastructural problems. The representatives of local self-government and key persons in the community shared that the concerns of children and adolescents need to be addressed. MSW students arranged classes and interactive programmes in the local study centre called 'Padanamuri'. Students experienced the need for educational programmes that aid their foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and adaptation to modern educational and career needs. The first-semester field practicum was planned in Kovilimala based on the needs identified in the rural camp exposure. MSW students posted in Rajapuram, Anchuruli, Murikkattukudy and Pampadikuzhi shared the need for focused intervention among children to address the concerns of language skills, adapting to modern educational and career needs, intra-personal and interpersonal skills and drug abuse. The analysis of the data collected during the rural camp and concurrent field exposure reveals the need for a life-skill-based social work intervention.

A project is introduced as a life skills-based social work intervention with the goal of enhancing life skills among children in tribal settlements in Kozhimala, Kanchiyar Panchayat, Idukki District. The objective is to enhance self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, and coping with stress and emotions. This will be achieved through social work interventions at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Micro-level intervention means direct intervention and one-on-one assistance with individuals, families, and small groups. Navigating social and personal challenges is a key component of micro-level social work (Mariah, 2022). Activities done under micro level interventions include therapeutic interventions, demonstration and guided interaction and practice, role-play, brainstorming, small groups activities, educational games and simulations, case studies, storytelling, debates, decision mapping or problem trees and promoting efforts to connect with family and peer are through group work method of social work

Mezzo-level intervention refers to community-level interventions. Workshops, camps, exposure visits to MRS and higher education institutions,

and efforts to connect with community resources were some of the community-level interventions undertaken. These interventions included arts, music, theatre, dance, small-group activities, educational games, and simulations, case studies, storytelling, decision mapping or problem trees, on communication, public speaking, linking with higher education opportunities, preparing for public exams, accessing government schemes, etc. Promoting efforts to connect with family and peers, promoting efforts to connect with community resources and documenting and evaluating the response to a real-life situation.

The broadest spectrum of social work is called macro-level social work. At this level, professionals deal with systemic problems that have an impact on local, state, national, and worldwide communities. Research, policy, and advocacy are all part of macro social work, which aims to develop a thorough understanding of social issues and identify successful interventions (St John, 2022). The project focused on the macro level intervention, such as research - evidence-based practice and practice-based research, policy level intervention-iInfluencing policy formulation based on the field data, advocacy- activities and publications to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions.

It was understood from community visits and feedback from children that they had transformations in their lives due to the life skill-based social work interventions. Then the researcher, gaining inspiration, decided to conduct a systematic study on transformative experience of children in Mannan tribe through the life skill based social work intervention. Transformative experience means experiences that radically change the experience in both an epistemic and personal way (Chan, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

Since it emphasises practical understanding drawn from real-life experiences, the case study method is considered one of the most effective qualitative research approaches for exploring issues in a detailed and subjective manner. For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant using an interview guide.

Participants

With case study method and in-depth interviews serving as the medium for data gathering, the study was carried out using a qualitative research strategy. From Rajapuram Hamlet in the Kozhimala tribal area, two children

who are part of Naipunya project were selected using a purposive sampling method

Data Accumulation

The data was collected through direct interview sessions with the participants. The researchers interviewed the participants over the phone as they weren't available for an in-person interview due to time constraints. Each interview lasted for 45 minutes and was recorded on a voice recorder. The interviews helped us to gain information about the transformative approach of life skills-based social work intervention on the participating children.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. We were guided by several qualitative studies and available literature for the analysis. The interviews were analysed after transcribing them. The data was encoded with an open coding process, and the themes were analysed individually and by means of the interviews conducted. We sorted out themes from the data accumulated: Mannan community, life skill, social work intervention and transformative experience.

Mannan Community

As reported in the UNDP Report 2010, Kerala, the state with the second-highest percentage of literacy, is extremely contemporary, civilised, and scientifically and technologically advanced. Amartya Sen claims that Kerala is the development role model, the second-largest district in Kerala and the one with the greatest concentration of scheduled tribes and tribal ambiguities is Idukki.

Reeja's study on the Mannan tribal culture (2018) shows that the younger generation is gradually losing interest in their traditional culture. Earlier, people followed their customs and traditions very sincerely. Before starting their daily work, they would gather together and offer prayers to their gods. Today, such traditional morning prayers are rarely seen. These practices were once an important part of their cultural identity. Earlier, everyone in the community would also take part in festivals without fail.

Transitional Phase

The findings from the interviews with the research participants demonstrate that the Mannan community is currently undergoing a period of transition. This transition has generated significant pressure on the younger generation as they are required to navigate the new circumstances and

communities they encounter in their lives. A critical moment in this process of acculturation and adaptation for Mannan students is enrollment in educational institutions. This phase of life presents opportunities for exposure to cultural differences and enhances the development of skills needed for successful navigation of diverse environments.

According to student X, adapting to the school environment was highly challenging for her and her peers as they felt excluded from the classrooms. The predominant languages used in the classrooms were Malayalam and English, which posed difficulties in understanding for them as they primarily spoke Mannan tongue, a language similar to Tamil. Consequently, they found solace in Tamil films as they were more comprehensible compared to Malayalam films. Due to their distinct cultural background, their classmates distanced themselves from them. Over time, however, they assimilated elements of their classmates' culture, such as dress, communication styles, and social interactions, for survival purposes.

“It was very difficult for us to adapt to our school environment, as we find excluded from the classrooms. The language used in the classrooms is either Malayalam or English. We were not able to comprehend what the teachers and our classmates were telling us. In our community, we used to speak Mannan tongue, which has some resemblance to Tamil. That's why we are interested in Tamil films, which are more understandable to us than Malayalam. Our classmates used to distance us because of our particular culture. Gradually, we also adopted their ways of dressing, communicating, interacting etc., which was essential for us for our survival” (Interview-1 2023).

In another student Y's class, there are students from the general community with whom she feels a clear differentiation owing to factors such as attire, ornaments worn, and language used for communication. In contrast to her classmates, Y's family background is tumultuous, with her mother engaging in an extramarital relationship and her father struggling with alcoholism. This has further isolated her from her peers, resulting in moments of emotional distress in which she has found herself in tears. Y explains that her classmates only engage with her when they need something, otherwise disregarding her as a person with emotions. However, she is grateful to her supportive friends and teachers, who provide her with considerable support during these challenging times.

“In my class, there are students from the general community. We are very much different from them because of the way in which we dress, the orna-

ments we are wearing, the language we are using for communication, etc. Their parents are well settled and have money. In my case, I don't even have support from my parents- my mother is having an extramarital relationship, therefore, I stopped talking to her, and my father is an alcoholic. When I went to school, I got excluded from them because of all these reasons. There are times when I used to cry because of that. They will talk with me when they have any needs; otherwise, nobody even considers me as a human with feelings. But some of my friends are very supportive, and even my teachers stand as a huge pillar of support for me" (Interview-2, 2023)

The researchers analyzed and observed that, in this transitional phase, students face indirect discrimination, such as teachers giving more preference to those who excel academically. These students encounter language barriers in their academic lives because their mother tongue is Mannan language and they struggle to learn subjects in Malayalam. Nowadays, young children are not interested in speaking their traditional language, and their parents are also not inclined to teach them, as they seek more acceptance externally. This language barrier creates difficulties in communication, affecting their academic performance in areas like presentation skills, viva, and writing. Through one year of continuous contact, the researcher created awareness about the seriousness of language and communication issues, leading many students to write their exams with the help of a scribe. These children are not a disabled group, but face difficulties in communication, such as reading, writing, and presentations. This problem could be addressed through changes in the education curriculum that embrace diverse cultures. The need for survival compelled them to gradually adopt the ways of dressing, communicating, and interacting with their classmates, even though this meant distancing themselves from their own cultural practices. The narrative highlights the impact of linguistic and cultural differences on individuals' integration into the school community and the subsequent assimilation into mainstream culture for the sake of acceptance and survival.

Excerpt of the interview with student Y reveals a stark contrast in socio-economic backgrounds and family dynamics between the speaker and their classmates in the same class. The speaker highlights the noticeable differentiation based on clothing, ornaments, and language, emphasizing the financial stability of their classmates' parents compared to the challenges in their own family. The personal struggles, including a mother's extramarital relationship, a father's alcoholism, feeling of exclusion in school, all create emotional disturbance in her life. The relationship with

classmates appears transactional, with interactions occurring only when others have needs. However, the narrative also emphasizes the crucial support received from some friends and teachers, underscoring the importance of supportive relationships in mitigating the challenges posed by these difficult circumstances.

Challenges

Student X states that after her 10th grade, she struggled with deciding which stream to choose for her higher secondary education. Ultimately, she ended up taking science because it was the decision of her family, but she found it difficult to adapt to this choice. Initially, she had a hard time interacting with classmates and teachers due to language barriers, which caused her to be isolated and lonely. This further intensified her emotional turmoil, leading to outbursts and difficulty coping with her feelings.

“I was very bad at making decisions. After my 10th, I was very confused about which stream to choose for my higher secondary education. I ended up taking science. It was the decision of my family. It was very difficult for me to adapt because of this. Coming to school initially, it was very difficult for me to interact with my classmates and my teachers because of the language issue. That’s why I did not have many friends, and I used to be a loner initially. The distancing from my classmates added gravity to this, and I was unable to cope with my emotions, and there are times at which I broke out” (Interview-1 2023).

Y reveals that she faced challenges dealing with stress within her family and found it difficult to express her emotions to others. She had limited interaction with her friends at school, making it harder for her to find support. Presentations in the classroom caused her anxiety and a lack of confidence in expressing her ideas, as she was afraid of criticism or rejection. Y also admits to distancing herself from activities like arts day in school, as she was unsure of her abilities and uninformed about what she could do. However, she does enjoy dancing and occasionally participates in that activity.

“When issues arose in my family, I found it very difficult to cope with the stress of the situation. It was not even possible to ventilate my emotions with others, as I have limited interaction with my school friends. When I am asked to do some presentation in classroom, I will get very tensed and I am not at all confident to stand in front and to communicate my ideas. I was always frightened of being criticized or rejected. Though I love participating, I keep distancing myself from the programmes like arts day happening in school. Moreover, I was unaware of what all things I can do or what

abilities I have. I know I am good at dancing, so sometimes I join in dance’ (Interview-2 2023)

These excerpts give insights into the challenges faced by two individuals in their educational journey. Student X expresses her struggle with decision-making, particularly in choosing the science stream for higher secondary education, a decision influenced by her family. The language barrier further complicates her experience, leading to a sense of isolation and difficulty in building connections with classmates, making her feel like a loner. The emotional impact becomes more profound when family issues arise, exacerbating the stress and limiting her ability to share emotions with others.

Similarly, the excerpts from the interview with student Y discusses the difficulty in coping with stress within her family, highlighting limited interaction with school friends as a factor. This isolation contributes to her struggles with presentations in the classroom, leading to tension and a lack of confidence in expressing ideas. The fear of criticism or rejection and a tendency to distance herself from events like arts day highlight her challenges in exploring her abilities and interests. She is a good dancer but she is frightened of being criticized or rejected.

Both narratives highlight the emotional toll of educational and interpersonal challenges, shedding light on the need for support systems and effective communication to navigate such difficulties. The excerpts highlight the impact of external influences on educational choices and the importance of creating an inclusive environment to foster confidence and self-discovery among students through life skill-based intervention.

Nipunya- Project

Student X’s life underwent a dramatic shift through NAIPUNYA, which gave her hope for a better future. The programme enabled her to achieve noteworthy accomplishments and provided her with an opportunity for self-reflection, helping her recognize her strengths and areas of weakness.

“NAIPUNYA served as a major turning point in my life as it gave me hope of a better future, a better life. Through the programme I was able to achieve a lot, and it was through it I was able to understand myself and my greatest strengths, weaknesses, and resources available for me to flourish ” (Interview-1, 2023).

According to student Y, her greatest takeaway from NAIPUNYA was the community’s priceless support. She overcame obstacles in life with the

support of other participants. Memories of the group time spent together are evoked when one thinks back on NAIPUNYA days, emphasizing the direction and assistance that the programme and its members offered.

“The major gain I got from NAIPUNYA is you all. The support you have given to me, helped me overcome all the hardships in my life. Recalling Naipunya days, will kindle immense memories about the time we all spent together and the guidance and support you all gave me through the programme” (Interview-2 2023).

These excerpts state that NAIPUNYA project created a transformative experience in their lives. In the first case, NAIPUNYA served as a pivotal turning point, instilling hope for a better future and providing a platform for personal growth. Through the initiative, she gained valuable insights into her strengths, weaknesses, and the resources available for her development. Similarly, the second case emphasizes that the assistance provided played a crucial role in overcoming life’s hardships. The memories of their time together bring immense joy, and she acknowledges the guidance and support received during the programme as instrumental in her personal journey. These testimonials underscore the significance of programmes like NAIPUNYA in fostering personal development, resilience, and a sense of community among participants.

Trust Building

According to Student 1, when the NAIPUNYA team first arrived at Vikas School, she felt nervous because she viewed them as strangers. She thought the programme introduction was just another educational exercise. Her perspective, however, was altered when the team unobtrusively launched the programme and offered a welcoming environment where she felt free to express herself without feeling compelled or under pressure.

“When you guys first visited us in Vikas school, I was afraid of you, since you are outsiders of this community. When you gave an introduction about the programme, Naipunya, I thought it as a name-seeking activity which was part of your curriculum. But the way in which you initiated the programme was very comfortable for me, as you didn’t force me to do anything. The space given to me helped me to bring out myself” (Interview-1, 2023)

According to Student 2, she was initially indifferent to the programme, but as she participated in weekly visits and went to the 10-day camp, her viewpoint changed for the better. The assistance that she received during

difficult moments was very important in building trust in the programme and, by extension, in herself. It strengthened her conviction that the programme would be beneficial and that she was capable of accomplishing significant goals.

“I was not at all interested in participating in your programme at the beginning. But as I started to attend your weekly visits, the camp you have conducted, I gradually developed a belief that this programme is going to benefit me. The support you gave to me during my difficult time helped me a lot in building a trust in you and thereby trusting myself that I am able to do something “(Interview-2, 2023).

The excerpts from interviews provide valuable insights into how individuals feel and how the Naipunya programme influences children. Initially, in excerpt 1, there was apprehension as an outsider to the community, perceiving the programme as a mere name-seeking activity. However, her perspective shifted positively when she experienced the uncompelled initiation of the program, appreciating the space provided that allowed her to express herself freely. In the initial stage of the program, children showed disinterest, taking about a month to gather at a common area, and they lacked confidence to speak with the MSW students. However, ice-breaking sessions and orientation about the programmes helped the students overcome trust issues. The initial disinterest transformed into belief and trust through consistent engagement in the programme’s activities, including weekly visits and camps. The support she received during challenging times played a pivotal role in building trust not only in the programme but also in her own abilities. These testimonials collectively highlight the programme’s success in creating a comfortable and supportive environment, fostering personal growth and self-confidence among the participants.

SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS

Community living camp

Student 1 draws attention to the special features of her encounter with the rural camp, pointing out a discernible difference in the way she was welcomed with open arms, shared meals, and engaged in the cultural programme. She highlights the programme’s dedication to tackling the problem of rising school dropout rates and expresses gratitude for the efficient communication strategies used with different age groups. The community has benefited from the cooperative attitude and persistent efforts, which have had a favourable effect.

“It was not our first experience visiting a rural camp. Many similar camps

have happened, but there was a difference that I observed, that is, the way you included us in your cultural programme, you shared food with us, you welcomed us wholeheartedly. I didn't see any sort of prejudging attitude from your part. The methods you used to communicate with people of different age groups were fascinating. You do have plans for all of the various age categories, but the most important thing to specify about the camp is the continuity of the activity. You have identified a cause through the interaction with our community of the increasing number of school dropouts, and the methods you employed to ensure continuity of the work were of a collaborative approach, and it benefited us a lot" (Interview-1, 2023).

Student 2 did not have the chance to attend the initial camp but was familiar with it through hearing about the camp's activities and its focus on improving the community.

"I actually didn't get an opportunity to visit the first camp. But I used to hear a lot about your camp and your activities focusing on the community betterment" (Interview-2, 2023)

In these two excerpts both students shared the difference in the rural camp compared to other camps conducted by MSW students of Marian College Kuttikkanam. This camp and concurrent field work opened a window for finding the needs and problems of the community, and also in understanding the real situation of the community. NAIPUNYA project is the result of the rural camp, and it's a sustainable intervention. They commend the effective communication methods employed with diverse age groups and acknowledge the organization's comprehensive plans for various age categories. Particularly noteworthy is the organization's commitment to addressing the issue of increasing school dropouts within the community, by expressing appreciation for the collaborative and sustainable methods used to ensure the continuity of their transformative work.

Naipunya 10-Day camp

Student 1 calls her time at the camp "incredible" and credits the ten days for changing her life and giving her a newfound understanding of the value of education. Her passion and motivation to pursue higher studies were strengthened through her interactions with the group. After completing the 12th grade, she attended the full 10-day camp during her break and found activities such as cooking classes and college visits to be highly beneficial.

She was inspired by this experience to pursue a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) at Marian College Kuttikkanam, and she was able to accomplish her

aim with the help she received.

“It was an unforgettable experience for me, and I am grateful to God. I was able to understand the importance of education. When I interacted with you all, I developed a desire and motivation to continue my studies. As I was taking a break after my class 12, I got enough time to be in the camp. I attended the camp for all 10 days. The activity, such as cooking in the camp was really fruitful. Visit to college gave me an opportunity to visit a vast campus, and it motivated me to pursue BSW in Marian College Kuttikanam (Autonomous), and with all your support, I was able to achieve that” (Interview-1, 2023).

Student Y discloses that she was experiencing an emotional breakdown because of family matters during the programme. Even though she was exhausted, the camp gave her energy since it allowed her to talk to other students, express herself, share her feelings without fear of criticism, and develop her public speaking confidence. The day they cooked, when they made chattri and kappa, is still remembered as a happy occasion. After the exposure tour to Marian College Kuttikanam, Student Y expressed a sense of motivation and excitement, which had a lasting impact on her. The remarks made by the college principal inspired her to pursue her graduation at the institution.

‘During that camp time, I was actually going through a time of emotional breakdown. Family issues had already tired me, but the camp energized me. It gave me opportunity to interact with others of my age, I was able to share or ventilate my emotions without being judged, I was able to convey my ideas, I was able to stand in front of others to express myself etc. The most memorable thing in the camp was the cooking day. We cooked kappa and chattri, remembering all those moments brings laughter always. When we were taken on an exposure visit to Marian College Kuttikanam, I was very excited. I didn’t even sleep the previous night. It was my first time travelling such a long distance and seeing such a big institution. The words of the college Principal were very motivating, and I decided to do my graduation in Marian College itself’ (Interview-2, 2023).

The provided excerpts share personal narratives shedding light on the transformative influence of a 10-day camp on their lives. The excerpt reflects a shift in her perspective on education, attributing a newfound understanding of its importance to the interactions and activities during the camp. The cooking sessions and the visit to Marian College Kuttikanam played a pivotal role in shaping her decision to pursue BSW. On the other

hand, the next excerpt highlights the camp's role as a source of emotional transformation during a challenging period in her life. The camp provided her a platform to share her emotions without judgment, fostering a sense of friendship among peers. The memorable cooking day and the exposure visit to Marian College Kuttikanam motivated her to pursue her graduation at the same college. These experiences collectively highlight the multifaceted influence of the camp, including educational motivation, emotional support, and the development of lasting aspirations.

Individual Level

Student X expressed gratitude to one of the social work trainees for her encouraging support and communication, which helped her overcome stress and negative thoughts, enabling her to focus on her work. She felt comfortable discussing issues related to her family and studies, knowing that she would receive understanding and supportive guidance. A major factor in student X's choice to pursue a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree was the advice she received from a church sister of the institution. This help was vital when adjusting to a new environment and overcoming educational obstacles. Student X now understands how important 'mentoring' is to achieving her goal of becoming a student.

"From the beginning itself, the way the church sister communicated with me helped to relieve my stresses and unwanted thoughts and helped in pursuing my career. I was able to share my family problems, academic problems with them as I am sure that I won't be judged by them. When I was confused, the guidance provided helped me to choose BSW as my graduation, and when I was confronted with some sort of difficulties in education and the adaptability issue in the new place, sister called me and supported me. I can understand the importance of your guidance now that I am a student realizing my dream" (Interview-1, 2023).

Student Y recognizes that she had a great deal of one-on-one help throughout the camp, especially with emotional breakdowns brought on by family problems. Even though she was experiencing mental health issues, the support from the one-on-one conversations gave her the courage to address her troubles head-on. Student Y's emotional well-being improved through the therapeutic counselling sessions, which played an essential role in helping her cope with her difficulties and emotional distress.

"The major help you did through your individual level interaction is the support you gave to tackle all the emotional breakdowns. As I said earlier, I was seriously mentally ill during the camp time because of my family

issues, but you gave me the courage to face it bravely, and it helped me in coping with stress and emotions. The counselling you arranged was having a therapeutic approach, which helped me in wiping out most of my sorrows and problems” (Interview-2, 2023).

In these excerpts, the importance of individual-level support is evident as it aids students in overcoming their felt needs with the guidance of MSW students. These students’ harbour numerous aspirations for their future, yet they encounter various struggles in their lives. With proper guidance, they manage to navigate these challenges.

In the excerpts, the support received during a period of confusion motivated the individual to pursue BSW as her graduation, showcasing the positive influence on her educational choices. Support during difficulties and adaptability issues highlights the importance of a supportive network in overcoming challenges. It also emphasizes the significant role played by individual-level interactions in helping the student cope with emotional breakdowns, particularly during a challenging time marked by mental illness due to family issues. The therapeutic approach of arranged counselling is noted as instrumental in alleviating sorrows and problems, showcasing the positive impact of personalized support on emotional well-being.

Group work

According to Student X, a spirit of competition surfaced when groups were given tasks to complete, which fuelled the need to succeed. A student mentor was assigned to each group, which helped them reach their maximum potential. As she participated in group activities such as storytelling, card making, public speaking, and comparison, her team provided her with a lot of support. As the camp’s hostess, she did a fantastic job showcasing the supportive and cohesive collaboration that helped their group take second place in the overall contests.

“When you divided us among groups and assigned activities, we have automatically developed an urge to do maximum and be first. You also assigned a student from your side to be our mentor. She helped us to utilize our full potential. Within the groups, we were asked to do small tasks like card making, storytelling, public speaking, compering, etc. I got good support from my group, and I was extremely glad to say that I was the host of the concluding session of the camp. The team members were very supportive that we supported each other and we worked diligently to secure the second place in the overall competitions” (Interview-1, 2023).

Student Y highlights how important the group dynamic is in giving her a place to understand who she really is and what her potential is. She found understanding from others in the group, who had similar living situations. She felt safe in talking and expressing her difficulties and frustrations. Her ability to actively participate in all programmes and to provide her best effort was made possible by the group's support.

“The important thing the group offered me is the space to be myself. I was able to share my feelings and express my pains and stresses with the group members. They understood it because of the similarity in the living circumstances. The group support helped to participate actively in all the programmes and to give my maximum” (Interview-2, 2023)

These excerpts from interviews reflect the impactful experiences of participants in a group setting, shedding light on the positive outcomes derived from their involvement. In the first excerpt, the division into groups and assignment of activities based on those groups sparked a collective motivation to excel and achieve. The introduction of a mentor from the organizing team further enhanced the participants' ability to harness their full potential. Engaging in various tasks within the groups, such as card making, storytelling, public speaking, and compering, created a supportive environment. The narrator expresses gratitude for the support received within the group, culminating in the honour of hosting the concluding session of the camp. The collaborative efforts of the team resulted in a noteworthy achievement of securing second place in the overall competitions.

In the following excerpt the emphasis is on the emotional and psychological support provided by the group. The individual found a safe space within the group to express personal pains and stresses. The shared living circumstances among group members facilitated a deep understanding of each other's struggles. This support system proved instrumental in enabling active participation in all camp programmes, allowing the individual to contribute their maximum effort.

Transformative Approach

Student X stated that her encounter with NAIPUNYA was life-changing. Before joining the programme, she lacked confidence in making decisions and was shy, especially while interacting with boys.

Her personal growth was greatly aided by participating in Naipunya's group activities. She overcame her phobia of voicing her opinions in front of others and developed her leadership abilities by taking on different posi-

tions within the groups. She was able to present programmes at the camp, which helped her overcome her stage fright considerably. These experiences also helped her develop greater self-awareness and confidence in her abilities.

“Naipunya was a life changer for me. Before that, I was very shy in communicating with others, especially boys. Since my childhood, all my decisions were made by my parents, as I lacked the ability to make decisions on my own. But when I became a part of Naipunya, the various activities within it helped me a lot. We were grouped during the programme, and activities were also in groups. I gradually learned about my leadership skills through the roles I performed in groups, especially because I previously was unable to stand in front of others or a group and express my views. The camp gave me the chance to host programmes, and it considerably reduced my stage fright. I got more informed about myself and my abilities” (Interview-1, 2023).

According to Student Y, the programme helped her discover her passion for art, which she began to recognize as one of her strengths. She also had the opportunity to travel outside her hometown to places such as Kuttikanam and the beautiful campus of Marian College Kuttikanam, for which she remains grateful to the project. This experience inspired her to pursue her studies in such a positive and enriching environment. NAIPUNYA played a major role in motivating her to continue her education and helped her realize the importance of education in her life.

“Previously I used to draw, but nobody acknowledged it. But during the camp, I identified it as my strength, and I decided to work on it. Previously, I had not been to any place outside my community, but through the project I got an opportunity to go and visit a place like Kuttikanam and a wonderful campus like Marian college Kuttikkanm. It created a strong motivation in me to pursue my education in such a wonderful campus. Naipunya helped me to make a decision- not to quit my studies, whatever happens, and to be educated as much as possible” (Interview-2, 2023).

The provided excerpt offers information about the transformative experience of the students. Initially, they were hesitant to come forward in front of the audience and were even shy about introducing themselves. However, through the programme, a noticeable change took place. These cases illustrate the transformative nature of this experience.

DISCUSSION

In Mannan community, one of the existing tribal kingdom, language barriers were identified as a major obstacle, with the community speaking Mannan tongue, which is similar to Tamil, while mainstream education uses Malayalam or English. The Mannan community is going through a transitional phase, marked by shifts in language, culture, and societal norms. The younger generation faces challenges in adapting to the mainstream education system, leading to high rates of student dropouts. The participants talked about their own struggles with decision-making, family problems, and cultural differences. The participants experienced emotional anguish as a result of the interviews, which brought to light instances of prejudice and exclusion in schools.

The launching of Naipunya project was for addressing these challenges identified by social work trainees of Marian College during their field visit. Offering encouragement and hope for a brighter future, the Naipunya project turned out to be a significant turning point in the lives of those involved. The development of trust was an important component, since the participants had misgivings at first but eventually came to trust the social work interventions.

The social work interventions included micro-level interventions that addressed personal and social issues through one-on-one interactions with individuals and small groups. Mezzo-level interventions involved community-based initiatives such as workshops, exposure tours, and efforts to establish connections with local resources. Macro-level interventions focused on research, policy advocacy, and lobbying to address systemic issues at the local, state, national, and international levels.

The participants shared stories of life-changing experiences that led to increased self-awareness, improved communication skills, and a positive shift in their attitudes toward education. Life skills-oriented social work interventions, including exposure visits, individual counselling, and group activities, played a significant role in their personal development. A considerable transformation was observed in the lives of children belonging to the Mannan tribe. They developed a positive outlook on life and began aspiring toward a brighter future with a stronger focus on their studies. The students also shared their remarkable progress in life skills such as communication, problem-solving, decision-making, and coping with emotions and stress.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted a comprehensive exploration of the challenges faced by the Mannan tribal community in India, with a particular focus on the transitional phase experienced by the younger generation. The research highlighted the linguistic and cultural barriers faced by the Mannan tribe, especially in the context of mainstream education, leading to high rates of student dropouts. The study also shed light on the various challenges, including language barriers, family issues, and cultural differences, faced by individuals within the Mannan community.

In response to these challenges, the Naipunya project was introduced as a life skills-based social work intervention aimed at enhancing various aspects of the participants' lives. The project was designed to address issues such as self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, and coping with stress and emotions. The intervention was implemented at micro, mezzo, and macro levels, encompassing direct interactions with individuals and families, community-level initiatives, and broader systemic interventions.

The study detailed the methodology employed, utilizing a case study approach with in-depth interviews to gather qualitative data from participants in the Rajapuram Hamlet of the Kozhimala tribal area. Thematic analysis was then applied to the collected data, revealing key themes such as Mannan community, life skills, social work intervention, and transformative experiences.

The findings of the research showcased the transformative impact of the Naipunya project on the lives of the Mannan tribal community members. Through individual and group-level interventions, participants reported positive changes in areas such as decision-making, communication skills, emotional well-being, and a newfound motivation for education. Trust-building emerged as a crucial factor, with participants initially apprehensive but eventually developing trust in the social work interventions.

The discussion section provided a deeper exploration of the challenges faced by the Mannan community, emphasizing language barriers, cultural shifts, and the emotional toll of exclusion and prejudice. The Naipunya project was recognized as a significant response to these challenges, offering support, guidance, and transformative experiences to the participants.

In conclusion, the research demonstrated the efficacy of life skills-based

social work interventions in bringing about positive changes in the lives of tribal communities facing unique challenges. The study contributes valuable insights into the importance of culturally sensitive and context-specific social work approaches for promoting holistic development and well-being among marginalized populations such as the Mannan tribe.

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Addressing Disparities in Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Education through Life Skills Integration

Sharmila Madhu Madkaiker*, Nikitha Kisan Naik*

Abstract

Adolescents constitute a significant demographic in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), equipping adolescents with comprehensive life skills and reproductive and sexual health education (ARSHE) is critical for promoting informed decision-making, reducing health risks, and fostering gender equality. Despite its recognized importance, disparities in the implementation and accessibility of ARSHE persist, particularly across geographic and gender divides.

This study explores integrating life skills education into ARSHE programs to evaluate their effectiveness in addressing these gaps. A mixed-methods approach, using questionnaires for teachers and students, was employed to assess awareness, implementation, and gaps in ARSHE. The findings highlight the importance of life skills education in shaping informed, empowered individuals who contribute to sustainable development and social progress. This research offers evidence-based recommendations to enhance ARSHE implementation, fostering equitable access to education and health services.

Key words: Adolescent health, Gender awareness, Health Literacy, Health Promotion, Life skills education, Peer Education Programs, Reproductive and sexual health (RSH), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Teacher Training in ARSHE

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage that impacts an individual's physical, emotional, and social well-being. The education adolescents receive, particularly in reproductive and sexual health, significantly

* GVM's College of Education, Farmagudi - Ponda, Goa

influences their health choices. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) emphasizes that comprehensive sexual education and life skills training help prevent health risks, early pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). When integrated into RSHE, life skills education can empower young people to make informed choices, reduce risky behaviours, and promote gender equality (UNAIDS, 2016). However, the integration of Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Education (ARSHE) into school curriculum remains inconsistent, with disparities across regions, genders, and academic streams (UNFPA, 2018).

In India, challenges such as resource limitations, cultural resistance, and a shortage of trained teachers hinder ARSHE implementation, especially in rural areas (Goswami, 2017). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF)2005 emphasizes the integration of life skills education to foster critical thinking and emotional resilience among adolescents (NCERT, 2005). Life skills education plays a key role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). by empowering adolescents to make informed decisions about their health and relationships (WHO, 2003), help adolescents navigate the complex social and personal challenges associated with reproductive and sexual health. However, various challenges prevent the effective delivery of ARSHE, including cultural barriers, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of resources, particularly in rural areas (Das, 2020; Singh & Bhattacharya, 2019).

Goa, a state with unique cultural and social dynamics, a limited research exists on enhancement of ARSHE through life skills integration. While Goa have made efforts to incorporate life skills into the curriculum through programs like the Adolescent Education Program (AEP), introduced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the depth and quality of these programs vary, particularly between urban, rural, and town schools. Ravindran and Balasubramanian (2003) conducted a study in Goan higher secondary schools highlighted adolescent's reproductive health needs and psychosocial issues, provided valuable insights into general health gaps. However, there is limited data addressing gender disparities, rural-urban differences and variations across academic streams (Arts, Commerce and Science) in delivery and effectiveness of ARSH programs.

Additionally, the role of teachers in integrating life skills into ARSHE, their preparedness, confidence and training in this area remains underexplored.

Further, while the studies, such as the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) project implemented in various regions of India, including Goa, have demonstrated the potential of life skills interventions in promoting gender equality and empowering adolescents (Achyut et al., 2011) but primary focus was not on to RSHE.

This study examines the integration of life skills education into ARSHE programs in Goan schools to evaluate their effectiveness in addressing these gaps. The objectives include:

- To assess how life skills are incorporated into school curricula.
- To determine gender-based differences in awareness and understanding of reproductive and sexual health education (RSHE).
- To conduct a comparative analysis of ARSHE implementation in rural, urban, and town schools.
- To assess the difference in awareness of RSHE among students from different academic streams, including Arts, Science, and Commerce.
- To build on this knowledge and offer practical recommendations for addressing the challenges identified.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Health Organization (1997) defines life skills as abilities that help individuals manage day-to-day challenges. Integrating life skills into ARSHE helps students make informed decisions about their sexual health (UNESCO, 2018). These skills, including decision-making, communication, and self-awareness, are essential for understanding reproduction and engaging in healthy behaviours (WHO, 2003).

In India, RSHE implementation faces significant challenges, particularly in rural areas. Studies by Mehta and Verma (2017) and Sharma (2019) show that urban areas often have more comprehensive programs, while rural regions face barriers such as cultural resistance, limited resources, and a lack of trained teachers. Gender disparities in RSHE persist, with girls often receiving less information due to socio-cultural norms (Chandra, 2018). Research indicates that urban schools typically have more resources and modern teaching methods, while rural schools struggle with traditional norms and limited access to materials (Sharma, 2018). Gender-based engagement differences are also notable, with male students often less engaged than female students (Singh, 2020). Gender-sensitive, context-specific teaching methods can improve the effectiveness of RSHE (UNESCO, 2018).

Life skills education equips adolescents with essential tools for navigating health decisions (Chaudhary & Ghosh, 2021). Ravindran and Balasubramanian (2003) underscore the need for integrating life skills education into ARSHE to address knowledge gaps, gender disparities, and cultural challenges in reproductive health education, emphasizing the need for life skills integration into ARSHE programs in Goan schools. Peer education and gender-sensitive approaches have proven effective in improving RSHE outcomes (WHO, 2021). Studies like Patil (2020) demonstrate that schools with life skills curricula see improved decision-making and reduced risky behaviours. However, there is a need for further research on interactive methods like peer-led education to enhance adolescent engagement (UNICEF, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to assess the integration of life skills into ARSHE across rural, urban, and town schools, as well as different academic streams (Arts, Science, and Commerce). A survey was conducted using Google Forms, with separate questionnaires for students and teachers used for data collection. Both instruments included quantitative and qualitative sections focusing on demographic characteristics, life skills integration, awareness of Reproductive and Sexual Health Education (RSHE), gender and stream-based perspectives, rural–urban–town comparisons, peer influence, and cultural sensitivity. The qualitative questions explored participants' perceptions of challenges, teaching practices, contextual influences, resource needs, and suggestions for improving life skills and RSHE programmes.

The questionnaire was designed in accordance with ethical research guidelines and included an informed consent form for all participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured that their information would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purposes.

Research Design

Two types of questionnaires were used:

- **Student Questionnaire:** Focused on students' awareness and understanding of RSHE, stream based awareness, gender-specific differences, the incorporation of life skills education in their curriculum and general feedback and suggestions.

- **Teacher Questionnaire:** Focused on teachers' perceptions of RSHE integration, gender inclusivity, teaching approaches and effectiveness, stream based awareness, cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, life skill integration in the subjects, their comfort levels in teaching such topics, teaching methods, and challenges in delivery, general feedback and suggestions.

Sampling Method

Random sampling was used to distribute the questionnaires to students and teachers across various schools in Goa. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions to gather a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Participants

A total of 172 student responses (from Higher Secondary Schools) and 25 teacher responses (from Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools) were collected from various regions of Goa (Panaji, Vasco, Bicholim, Mapusa, Velguem, Mayem, Navelim, Usgao, and Parye).

Data Collection

Quantitative data from multiple-choice questions were automatically summarized using Google Forms, displaying frequencies and percentages through bar graphs and pie charts. Based on this, data tables were created to enhance visualisation and analysis. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were manually reviewed and analysed to identify themes and trends.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

The data collected from Goan school students, reveal key disparities in awareness and implementation of Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Education (ARSHE). These disparities vary across gender, academic streams, and geographic locations. Below is a summarized report based on the questionnaire responses of students and teachers.

STUDENT DATA ON REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

(A) QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The following sections present the key findings from the quantitative survey data, categorized by topic and demographic factors.

Section 1: Demographic Information

- Gender: Majority female (74.4%); 24.4% male.
- Grade Level: Split between 11th (51.2%) and 12th (48.8%) grade.
- Academic Stream: Predominantly Science students (90.7%).
- School Location: Most students in Town and Village areas (47.1%), with fewer in urban schools (15.7%).

Section 2: Life Skills Integration

- Awareness: 64.5% somewhat aware, 27.3% fully aware.
- Curriculum Inclusion: 50% say life skills are somewhat included, 29.7% feel it's well integrated.
- Teaching Subjects: Mostly taught in Biology (37.36%).
- Comfort: 44.8% comfortable discussing reproductive health.
- Improvements: Suggestions for more discussions (38.6%) and workshops (33.3%).

Section 3: RSHE Awareness & Understanding

- Understanding of RSHE: 57% rated “Good” understanding.
- Integration: 63.4% say RSHE is somewhat integrated.
- Gender Equality: 66.5% feel RSHE is gender-equal.
- Peer Comparison: 48.8% felt equally aware of RSHE as peers.

Section 4: Behavioural & Attitudinal Changes

- Behavioural Change: 48.7% reported changes due to RSHE.
- Confidence: 47.2% very confident discussing RSHE.
- Health & Relationship Decisions: 55.8% say RSHE positively influenced decisions.

Section 5: Gender-Based Questions

- Comfort with Teachers: 39.4% very comfortable with same-gender teachers.
- Education Equality: 66.7% believe there's equal access for both genders.
- Relevance to Both Genders: 54.8% say topics are equally relevant.

Section 6: Stream-Based Awareness

- Relevance: 39.2% think RSHE is highly relevant to their stream.
- Tailoring Content: 36.2% feel content is tailored to their stream.

- Peer Awareness: 53.9% feel equally aware as peers in other streams.

Section 7: Comparative Analysis (Rural, Urban, Town)

- Effectiveness in Urban Areas: 36.9% feel it's more effective in urban schools.
- RSHE Understanding: 34.9% believe urban students have a better understanding.

Section 8: General Feedback

- Impact on Community: 51.7% believe RSHE can address community challenges.

Sections 9 & 10: Peer Influence, Cultural Sensitivity, and Inclusivity

- Peer Influence: 44.4% say peer influence is significant.
- Peer-Led Discussions: 60.3% find them helpful.
- Cultural Sensitivity: 39.2% feel RSHE is culturally sensitive.
- Inclusivity: 43.9% think RSHE is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

(B) QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The analysis of 172 responses revealed several key challenges, suggestions, and considerations for improving reproductive and sexual health education (RSHE) across different school settings.

Challenges

1. Lack of Comprehensive Education:
 - a. Students receive limited education, focusing on basic biology, leaving out topics like contraception, consent, and sexual orientation.
2. Cultural and Social Barriers:
 - a. Rural Areas: Cultural taboos and religious restrictions limit open discussions.
 - b. Urban Areas: Stigma and peer pressure discourage open conversations.
 - c. Gender Bias: Girls get more focus on reproductive health; boys miss out on topics like consent and emotional health.
3. Misinformation:
 - a. Urban Areas: Misleading information is readily available online.

- b. Rural Areas: Gaps in education are filled with myths and misconceptions.
- 4. Limited Resources and Access:
 - a. Rural Areas: Lack of trained educators, proper materials, and health care services.
 - b. Urban Areas: Resource overload but competing priorities hinder focus on sexual health.
- 5. Lack of Open Dialogue:
 - a. Fear of judgment and societal stigma prevents open discussions on sexual health.
- 6. Peer Pressure and Social Expectations:
 - a. In urban schools, peer pressure influences sexual behaviour, leading to risky decisions.
- 7. Geographical Barriers:
 - a. Rural areas face limited access to health care services due to geographic isolation.

Suggestions for Improvement

- 1. Inclusive and Comprehensive Curriculum:
 - Cover topics like consent, relationships, and gender identity. Use gender-neutral language and ensure equal education for boys and girls.
- 2. Cultural Sensitivity:
 - Address sexual health while respecting cultural values and breaking down taboos.
- 3. Interactive Teaching Methods:
 - Use workshops, group discussions, and peer-led education to engage students.
- 4. Regular Workshops and Sessions:
 - Involve health care professionals and conduct regular awareness programs.
- 5. Access to Resources and Support:
 - Provide access to counselling and reliable online resources.
- 6. Involvement of Parents and Community:
 - Engage parents and community leaders in the educational process to support open discussions.

7. Addressing Misconceptions:

- Correct myths and misconceptions directly through accurate, evidence-based information.

Resources and Training

1. Resources: Updated textbooks, interactive tools, and access to expert knowledge.
2. Training: Educator training on cultural sensitivity, trauma-informed care, and communication skills.

Stream-Specific Education

1. Pro: Tailoring content to academic streams (Arts, Science, Commerce) makes the material more relevant.
2. Con: A universal baseline education on sexual health is necessary for all students.

Challenges in Rural Areas

1. Cultural and Social Barriers:
 - Strong cultural resistance limits discussions, focusing on abstinence and basic biology.
2. Limited Resources:
 - Rural schools lack educational materials, trained educators, and access to healthcare.
3. Geographical Barriers:
 - Distance from healthcare services hinders access to reproductive health services.

Differences in Education Delivery

1. Urban Schools: More comprehensive and open discussions with better resources.
2. Town Schools: A mix of rural and urban approaches, with limited resources.
3. Rural Schools: Traditional, lecture-based teaching with minimal resources and teacher discomfort in addressing sensitive topics.

Suggestions for Life Skills Education

1. Integrate Life Skills Across Subjects: Include communication, problem-solving, and emotional well-being in the curriculum.

2. **Interactive Learning:** Use workshops and case studies for practical learning.
3. **Parental and Community Involvement:** Reinforce learning through family and community engagement.
4. **Teacher Training:** Ensure teachers are well-trained and comfortable discussing sensitive topics.
5. **Technology Use:** Utilize digital tools and online resources for accessible learning.
6. **Regular Feedback:** Continuously assess and improve life skills programs to meet students' needs.

TEACHERS DATA ON REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

(A) QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Section 1: Demographic Information

- Majority of respondents are female (88%) and teach Biology (48%).
- Most teachers have over 16 years of experience (48%) and work in village locations (52%).

Section 2: Life Skills Integration in Curriculum

- 52% of teachers are fully aware of life skills integration; 64% report it is integrated into the curriculum.
- Most teachers teach life skills occasionally (48%) and use online resources (43.5%).
- 73.9% face challenges due to time constraints.

Section 3: Reproductive and Sexual Health Education (RSHE)

- 60% of teachers consider their understanding of RSHE “Good”.
- 92% believe RSHE is relevant across all academic streams, though 64% feel some streams receive more focus.
- 87.5% are comfortable teaching RSHE, but 48% feel uncomfortable discussing reproductive health.

Section 4: Gender-Based Questions

- 45.8% report differences in access to RSHE between genders, with 82.6% believing male and female students engage differently.

Section 5: Stream-Based Awareness

- 68.2% think RSHE is equally relevant across streams, though 61.9% believe it is not tailored to specific streams.

Section 6: Comparative Analysis (Location)

- 54.5% feel RSHE is more effective in urban schools, with 71.4% believing urban students have better understanding.

Section 7: Gender and Inclusion

- 57.1% of teachers believe life skills education addresses gender equality and sexual rights.

Section 8: Teaching Methods

- Common methods include multimedia (71.4%) and group discussions (61.9%), with guest speakers (68.2%) seen as the most effective method.

Section 9: Impact of Peer Influence

- 68.2% believe peer influence significantly impacts RSHE understanding, with 81.8% saying peer-led discussions improve awareness.

Section 10: Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity

- 66.7% think RSHE is culturally sensitive, and 42.9% feel it is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

(B) QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The study identified key themes in the integration of life skills into Relationship, Sex, and Health Education (RSHE) across various school locations. Findings reveal significant disparities between urban, town, and rural schools regarding access to resources, cultural attitudes, and student engagement.

1. Integration of Life Skills in RSHE

Life skills such as communication, empathy, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, decision-making, and interpersonal skills were consistently integrated into RSHE lessons. Teachers used a variety of methods, including discussions, real-life applications, expert talks, and visual aids, to help students develop practical competencies. However, the implementation was not always structured, with many teachers integrating life skills informally within existing lessons.

2. Geographical Variations in RSHE Delivery

- **Urban Areas:** Students had better access to resources, media, and open discussions around RSHE, leading to a higher level of awareness and fewer cultural barriers. Urban schools generally provided a more comprehensive and liberal environment for teaching RSHE.

- **Rural Areas:** Challenges in rural areas included cultural taboos, limited access to resources, and misconceptions about sexual health. Students were often shy and hesitant to engage in discussions, and teachers had to adopt more sensitive approaches to address cultural resistance.
- **Town Schools:** Town students fell between rural and urban students in terms of prior exposure and comfort levels with RSHE topics. Teachers reported challenges in engaging students effectively but found them more open than rural students.

3. Challenges in RSHE Delivery

The study identified several barriers to effective RSHE delivery across locations:

- **Cultural Barriers:** In rural areas, cultural norms often hindered open discussions about sexual health. Though less pronounced in urban areas, some cultural resistance still existed.
- **Lack of Resources:** Rural schools had limited access to educational materials, multimedia tools, and guest speakers, affecting the quality of RSHE education.
- **Misconceptions and Myths:** Both urban and rural students carried misconceptions about sexual health, although urban students generally had more exposure to accurate information through media.

4. Teacher Influence and Comfort

Teachers' comfort levels with discussing sensitive topics were crucial in determining the success of RSHE lessons. Educators who felt confident in addressing RSHE topics were more likely to create open environments for students. In contrast, teachers in rural areas faced additional challenges related to cultural stigma and a lack of teacher training.

5. Student Engagement and Understanding

- **Urban Students:** These students exhibited a higher level of comfort and engagement with RSHE topics due to greater exposure to media and family discussions.
- **Rural Students:** Shyness and cultural restrictions made it difficult for rural students to participate in discussions. Teachers often needed to address basic misconceptions and foster a safe space for students.
- **Town Students:** These students were more open than rural students but still lacked the level of exposure that urban students had.

6. Improvement Suggestions

Recommendations for improving RSHE included:

- Making RSHE a compulsory part of the curriculum.
- Providing more teacher training to address sensitive topics and cultural barriers.
- Using multimedia resources and expert talks to make lessons more engaging.
- Implementing gender-inclusive and stream-specific RSHE to ensure relevance for all students.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of context in delivering effective RSHE. While urban areas benefit from better resources and more progressive attitudes, rural areas require tailored approaches to overcome cultural taboos and ensure students receive accurate and comprehensive sexual health education.

DISCUSSION

This research examines the perspectives of both students and teachers to evaluate how effectively life skills are integrated into the RSHE curriculum and their impact on students' understanding of reproductive and sexual health. The findings highlight key insights from both groups, focusing on the challenges, gaps, and areas for improvement in the current approach to life skills integration.

I. As per Students Perspectives

This study explores students' perspectives on integrating life skills and reproductive sexual health education (RSHE) in schools. Combining quantitative survey data with qualitative feedback highlights key challenges and opportunities for enhancing RSHE, particularly in relation to life skills development. The findings reflect varied student experiences based on gender, academic stream, and geographic location.

Quantitative Findings: Engagement, Comfort, and Awareness

The quantitative data reveals positive engagement with RSHE but highlights gaps in life skills integration. While 64.5% of students reported some awareness of life skills, only 27.3% had full awareness. This indicates that while RSHE reaches students, life skills such as communication, decision-making, and consent need further emphasis in the curriculum. Additionally, 44.8% of students expressed comfort discussing reproductive health, suggesting that many still feel uneasy or unprepared to engage

fully with these topics. Suggestions for improvement, such as more discussions and workshops, emphasize the need for an interactive, inclusive approach to teaching life skills.

Location-based disparities were also evident. Urban schools (36.9%) felt RSHE was more effective, benefiting from better resources and open dialogue. Conversely, rural students faced challenges like limited access to qualified educators, healthcare, and cultural taboos, calling for a more tailored approach to RSHE in these areas.

Qualitative Findings: Challenges, Suggestions, and Life Skills Integration

Qualitative responses shed light on contextual challenges regarding RSHE and life skills integration. Key issues included the omission of essential topics like consent, contraception, and sexual orientation, which undermine life skills such as decision-making and emotional regulation.

Cultural barriers were also significant. Rural students faced resistance to discussing reproductive health, while urban students dealt with peer pressure and stigma. These challenges highlight the need for culturally sensitive approaches that integrate life skills like communication, empathy, and critical thinking. Additionally, rural areas faced resource shortages, while urban areas had competing educational priorities, limiting the focus on sexual health and life skills.

Students suggested strategies like workshops, group discussions, and peer-led education to improve life skills integration. Tailoring RSHE content to different academic streams was also suggested, though students emphasized that life skills should be taught universally to ensure a well-rounded education.

Linking Life Skills Integration to RSHE

Integrating life skills into RSHE is crucial for preparing students to make informed decisions in their personal and social lives. Life skills such as communication, decision-making, and emotional intelligence are essential for overall well-being and relationship success. The findings show that while life skills are somewhat integrated into RSHE, more comprehensive and tailored approaches are needed.

Workshops and peer-led discussions, highlighted by students as effective tools, provide interactive platforms for practicing life skills. These methods help break down discomfort and stigma around sensitive topics. Furthermore, integrating life skills across subjects—such as communication in

biology and emotional intelligence in social studies—would reinforce their real-world applicability and enhance students’ social effectiveness.

Recommendations for Improving RSHE and Life Skills Integration

Based on the findings, several recommendations can improve the integration of life skills in RSHE:

1. **Comprehensive Curriculum:** RSHE should include a broader range of topics, such as consent and sexual orientation, ensuring life skills like critical thinking, empathy, and communication are integrated.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity:** RSHE must be taught in a culturally sensitive manner, respecting community values while breaking down taboos around sexual health discussions.
3. **Interactive Learning and Peer-Led Education:** Using peer-led discussions and workshops can enhance engagement and provide students with real-world scenarios to practice life skills.
4. **Resource Accessibility and Teacher Training:** Ensuring all schools, especially rural ones, have access to updated materials and trained educators is essential for effective RSHE delivery. Teacher training in communication, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed care will help educators navigate sensitive topics.
5. **Community and Parental Involvement:** Engaging parents and community leaders in RSHE programs can support students and bridge the gap between formal education and community practices.

II. As per Teachers perspectives

This study analyzes the integration of life skills into Relationship, Sex, and Health Education (RSHE) from the perspective of teachers. The findings reveal significant patterns regarding the challenges, strengths, and opportunities for improving RSHE delivery. While life skills such as communication, empathy, emotional intelligence, and decision-making are important in the curriculum, their effectiveness varies across different geographical contexts and educational settings. Improvements are needed to ensure that RSHE and life skills reach all students equitably, especially in rural areas.

Integration of Life Skills into RSHE

Quantitative data shows that 52% of teachers are fully aware of life skills integration, and 64% acknowledge it in the curriculum. However, life skills

are often taught informally, with 48% of teachers indicating they teach them occasionally. This informal approach may limit students' ability to fully grasp essential life skills. The qualitative data shows that various methods, such as discussions and expert talks, help integrate life skills, but a formal, structured approach would ensure more consistent and effective learning.

Geographical and Cultural Variations in RSHE Delivery

Geographical location influences the delivery of RSHE and life skills. Urban schools benefit from better resources, a more liberal environment, and greater student engagement with RSHE. Life skills integration is more effective in urban settings due to prior exposure to sexual health topics. In contrast, rural schools face barriers like cultural taboos, limited resources, and misconceptions about sexual health. Teachers in rural areas often encounter resistance, requiring culturally sensitive approaches to integrate life skills effectively. Town schools show mixed engagement, highlighting the need for tailored strategies in different geographical contexts.

Teacher Comfort and Influence

Teachers' comfort with addressing sensitive topics is vital for successful life skills integration. While 87.5% of teachers feel comfortable teaching RSHE, 48% express discomfort discussing reproductive health topics, particularly in rural areas where cultural barriers are stronger. Teacher training is essential to help educators address sensitive topics confidently. Ongoing professional development focused on cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed care would improve life skills integration.

The Role of Peer Influence and Engagement

Peer influence plays a significant role in RSHE understanding, with 68.2% of teachers believing it impacts student engagement. Peer-led discussions are seen as an effective method to improve awareness. However, cultural norms and geographical context affect engagement. Urban students tend to be more comfortable with peer-led discussions, while rural and town students may be more reluctant due to social stigma. Encouraging open, culturally sensitive peer-led discussions could enhance life skills integration across all contexts.

Improving RSHE and Life Skills Integration

Several key recommendations emerged to improve RSHE and life skills integration:

1. **Compulsory Curriculum Integration:** RSHE should be compulsory to ensure that life skills such as emotional intelligence, communication, and decision-making are consistently taught.
2. **Teacher Training:** Targeted training for teachers on sensitive topics, including reproductive health and overcoming cultural barriers, is essential for creating a safe learning environment.
3. **Use of Multimedia and Guest Speakers:** Multimedia resources and guest speakers can enhance engagement and provide real-world perspectives on relationships and sexual health.
4. **Gender-Inclusive and Stream-Specific Education:** RSHE should be tailored to be inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations, and relevant to different academic streams, ensuring life skills resonate with all students.
5. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Teachers should be trained to navigate cultural sensitivities, especially in rural areas, to break down taboos and foster open discussions.

Suggestions for Improvement and Life Skills Focus

Teachers suggested frequent workshops, gender-specific education, and better resources for both students and teachers. Continuous professional development is vital for teachers to handle sensitive topics and correct misconceptions. Making RSHE a compulsory subject and teaching it regularly through interactive, student-centered approaches would normalize discussions about sexual health. Consistently integrating life skills across all schools, regardless of location, would greatly enhance RSHE education quality.

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

The findings from both students and teachers emphasize the critical role of integrating life skills into Reproductive and Sexual Health Education (RSHE). Both groups highlighted the importance of skills such as communication, empathy, self-awareness, and decision-making to foster a deeper understanding and healthier attitudes toward sexual and reproductive health. These life skills are essential not only for promoting healthy behaviours but also for creating an open, respectful, and supportive learning environment where sensitive topics can be addressed effectively.

From the students' perspective, there was a clear recognition of the gaps in their understanding and engagement with RSHE. While 64.5% of students

reported some level of awareness, only 29.7% felt that life skills were well integrated into the curriculum. Many students, particularly those in rural areas, also reported discomfort and cultural barriers when discussing topics such as contraception, consent, and emotional health. This suggests that while RSHE provides valuable information, it needs to incorporate more life skills to engage students meaningfully.

On the other hand, teachers also acknowledged the importance of life skills in enhancing the effectiveness of RSHE but pointed out significant challenges. Time constraints and cultural sensitivities were cited as major barriers, particularly in rural areas where discussing sexual health is often seen as taboo. Teachers also stressed the need for tailored RSHE content to cater to different academic streams, ensuring that lessons are relevant and relatable to students from diverse backgrounds.

To bridge the identified gaps and enhance the overall effectiveness of RSHE, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Integrate Life Skills into RSHE Curriculum:** Ensure that life skills such as communication, empathy, decision-making, and self-awareness are consistently embedded into the RSHE curriculum. These skills are crucial for fostering respectful, open, and informed discussions about sexual health.
2. **Provide Targeted Teacher Training:** Offer professional development programs that focus on life skills, cultural sensitivity, and gender inclusivity. Teachers need training in handling sensitive topics and overcoming cultural and societal taboos, especially in rural areas.
3. **Adapt RSHE to Cultural and Geographical Contexts:** Tailor RSHE content to reflect the cultural and geographical contexts of different regions. In rural areas, where cultural barriers often limit open discussion, integrating life skills such as empathy and communication can help create a more comfortable environment for students to engage with sexual health topics.
4. **Promote Peer-led Discussions:** Encourage the use of peer-led discussions as an effective strategy for engaging students. Peer influence is a powerful tool in shaping attitudes, and life skills like interpersonal communication, negotiation, and decision-making can empower students to lead respectful and informed conversations with their peers.
5. **Ensure Gender-Inclusive Education:** Integrate gender-sensitive education that addresses the unique health needs of both girls and

boys. Life skills such as empathy and self-awareness can help foster mutual respect and understanding, ensuring that RSHE is inclusive and relevant to all genders.

6. **Increase Access to Resources:** Provide adequate resources such as multimedia tools, guest speakers, and online platforms to support teachers in delivering high-quality RSHE lessons. These resources can help make RSHE more engaging and accessible to students.
7. **Make RSHE Compulsory and Regular:** Ensure that RSHE is a compulsory subject in schools and is taught regularly through interactive, student-centered approaches. This will help normalize discussions about sexual health and promote a culture of openness and understanding.

By implementing these recommendations, schools can create a more inclusive, accessible, and effective RSHE program that better prepares students for the challenges they may face in their personal lives and futures.

Limitations of the Research

1. **Sampling Bias:** The study had more responses from biology students and teachers, which may affect the generalization of findings to other subjects and academic streams.
2. **Teacher Participation:** Many teachers didn't respond due to not teaching RSHE or time constraints, leading to overrepresentation of biology teachers.
3. **Geographical Bias:** More responses came from rural and village schools, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings to urban and town schools.
4. **Non-Engagement with the Topic:** Teachers outside the biology field didn't engage with the survey, which may have impacted the diversity of perspectives.
5. **Time Constraints:** The research was conducted within a limited time-frame, which may have restricted the depth of data collection and analysis.

CONCLUSION

Although in Goa, the Adolescent Education Program (AEP) was implemented in 2005 to integrate reproductive health education and life skills into the school curriculum, significant gaps still persist in its application.

The integration of life skills into RSHE is crucial for addressing the gaps identified in the study and fostering a holistic understanding of sexual and reproductive health among students. By focusing on life skills such as communication, empathy, decision-making, and critical thinking, RSHE can be made more engaging and effective, ensuring that students are better equipped to navigate complex health-related decisions. Implementing these recommendations, with particular emphasis on teacher training, cultural sensitivity, and gender inclusivity, will bridge the existing gaps, leading to a more informed, empowered, and healthier generation. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and inclusive RSHE curriculum, as well as greater support for teachers to effectively deliver this education and compulsory life skills in-tegration to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs-3,4, and 5)

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INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION

Door No. 17/13, 16th Avenue, Ashok Nagar

Chennai - 600 083. Tamil Nadu, India.

E: ialse.india@gmail.com | www.ialse.in

