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Exploring the child-friendliness of high schools in two southern Karnataka districts: a cross sectional study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Children spend about 8-9 hours per day in schools. Hence, it is important to provide them with good physical, mental and social environment. The wellbeing during the childhood has a potential to provide the strong foundation for a positive health in later adulthood. This study was conducted to assess the child friendliness among the high schools in two districts the southern part of Karnataka.

Methods: A cross sectional study was conducted from March 2019 to December 2019 in Mysuru and Chamarajanagara districts of Karnataka. A total of 23 schools were purposively selected for the study. Data was collected using a self-administered, pre structured questionnaire. The data was represented using numbers and percentages and Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the data of urban and rural schools.

Results: The median score of child-friendliness recorded among the high schools in Mysuru and Chamarajanagara districts was 215 with an interquartile range of 198 to 228. The score was out of a maximum score of 248. A median score of 217 (interquartile range: 201-231) and 203.5 (interquartile range: 186.25-226.25) was observed among rural and urban school respectively.

Conclusions: The child-friendliness was better in rural schools compared to urban schools with a better participation, enrolment and completion, and community support for education in rural schools. Empowering the students to improve their participation in school planning and other activities, encouraging better enrolment and completion, and involving communities, especially parents in improving the school environment will improve the child-friendliness among urban schools.

Keywords: School child-friendliness, School health, Children

INTRODUCTION

Schooling is most important process by which the societies prepare their young for the future. Schools may function in permanent or temporary buildings, in tents or under trees which will ultimately develop the potential in young individuals to lead a healthy and socially and economically productive life. However, schooling can also be a bitter experience to some children due to threat of punishment, humiliation, bullying or even violence from teachers or their fellow pupils. Apart from these

psychological factors, many physical factors like climate unadjusted buildings, overcrowding, ill ventilation, lack of sanitary environment can be hindrances to proper schooling experience.²

The improved sense of belonging, better quality of life, wellbeing and happiness along with absence of negative aspects like bullying, injury and absenteeism will result in better academic achievement.³ The frustration to learn are worse when they have less competent teachers to guide and exercises, textbooks of inferior quality to work upon.

The learning by children is further hindered when there are no toilets, water facilities and electricity.⁴

The wellbeing during the childhood has a potential to provide the strong foundations for a positive health in later adulthood. The children who learn from a supportive environment in schools will have a sense of attachment and are more likely to respect their surroundings. Hence there are ample number of efforts which are being developed by the international organizations on education like UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO FRESH etc., to improve the quality of education.⁵ Child friendly school initiative addresses "the core components that attributes to a child friendly school; each component by integrating the factors regarding education, health and human rights of the child". UNICEF stresses and focus on the quality of teaching and learning, practices which consider the child as a centre in the learning process, learning which are enjoyable and excitable to the child, interactive teaching, organizing the learning places to the child. It is likely that the retention power and academic performance of the child depends on such child friendly environments.⁶

India has the largest number of school children in the world. Around 440 million children (20% of total global children's population) do schooling in urban and rural areas of the country.⁷ Parents often complaint that children are forced to carry heavy backpacks every day to school, punished either directly or indirectly for academic issues, and excess of homework and examinations over burden the children. There are no adequate number of safe and hygienic toilets and latrines in many schools in the country.⁸

The central and state governments develop curriculum and textbooks including the standards of teaching through the National Curriculum Framework as per the guidance of National Centre for Education and Research and Training (NCERT) which is an advisory organization of education policy. The NCERT also highlights the need for healthy physical environment, nurturing and enabling environments, equal participation of all the children, and appropriate use of learning resources. Also, Indian action plan 2011 had planned to implement child friendly school initiative to improve health and well-being of students.⁹

Despite there is an increase in the implementation of these practices in Indian education system, not many formal evaluations of their effects have been conducted. This study was conducted to assess the child friendliness among the high schools in the rural and urban areas of two districts the southern part of Karnataka.

METHODS

This was a cross sectional study, conducted from March 2019 to December 2019 in Mysuru and Chamarajanagara districts of Karnataka. A total of 23 schools were selected for the study through convenience sampling, 11 from the government and 12 from the private settings. Informed

consent was taken from the Head master/ Head mistress of each school and the data was collected from the head teacher or from the teachers assigned by them using a self-administered, pre structured standard tool named 'child friendly school survey questionnaire', available in internet. 10 The tool was pre validated in 3 schools, data of which is not included in the study and the required changes were made in the proforma according to the local scenario. The questionnaire filled by the respondents was crosschecked by the researchers by direct observation for correctness and completeness. The data collected included socio demographic details of the responding teacher and the location and management of the school. The child-friendliness of the schools were assessed under the domains of active participation of the child, health and wellbeing, safe and protective spaces for children, enrolment of the children, academic achievements by the children, morale and motivation among the teachers in school and community support for education of the children.¹⁰ Each domain had various questions with a response option in a 5-point Likert scale. The total number of items in the child-friendliness part of the questionnaire was 62 with an overall score 248.10 Data collected was entered in MS EXCEL and was analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0 (Armonk, NY) licensed to JSSAHER, Mysuru. The data was represented using numbers and percentages and Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the data of urban and rural schools.

RESULTS

A total of 23 heads of the schools, one from each school, responded to the survey. Among them, 13 (56.5%) were males and 10 were females. Majority of the respondents were postgraduates (56.5%) while the remaining were graduates. The mean age of the teachers who responded was 49.35 with a standard deviation of 7.70. Of the respondents, 87% were married and 13% were unmarried. (Table 1). Among the 23 schools assessed, 65.2% were located in urban areas while remaining was located in rural areas. Almost equal number of government (12) and private (11) schools were assessed in the study (Table 2).

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents across the different categories of demographic characters.

Demographic Characters		Frequency		
		N	%	
Condon	Male	13	56.5	
Gender	Female	10	43.5	
Educational	Graduation	10	43.5	
status	Postgraduation	13	56.5	
Marital	Married	20	87	
status	Unmarried	3	13	

The median score of child-friendliness recorded among the high schools in Mysuru and Chamarajanagara districts was 215 with an interquartile range of 198 to 228. The score was out of a maximum score of 248 (Table 3). The median score among rural schools was higher than that of urban school. A median score of 217 (Interquartile range: 201-231) and 203.5 (interquartile range: 186.25-226.25) was observed among rural and urban school respectively. However, this difference was not statistically significant with a Mann-Whitney U test p value >0.05. The median

score of child friendliness among government schools (216 with interquartile range, 202.5-230.5) was higher than that of private schools (210 with interquartile range, 190-228). However, this difference also was not statistically significant on performing a Mann-Whitney U test (Table 2).

Table 2: The median scores of child friendliness among the schools based on the location and type of management.

Cahaal tyma/anaa		Frequency		Median score of child-friendliness	P value#	
School type/area		N	%	(interquartile range)	r value	
Area	Urban	15	65.2	203.5 (186.25-226.25)	0.113	
	Rural	8	34.8	217 (201-231)		
Management	Government	12	52.2	216 (202.5-230.5)	0.216	
	Private	11	47.8	210 (190-228)	0.316	

#Mann-Whitney U Test

Table 3: The median scores of child-friendliness among the different domains scored by urban and rural schools.

Damain	Median score (Interquartile range)					
Domain	Urban	Rural	Combined	Maximum score	P value#	
Participation	15 (13.25-16.75)	17 (17-19)	17 (15-19)	20	0.022	
Health and well-being	39.5 (34.5-40)	39 (32-40)	39 (34-40)	44	0.695	
Safe and protective spaces	57.5 (50.5-65.5)	61 (54-64)	58 (52-64)	68	0.897	
Enrolment and completion	14 (12.25-15.75)	16 (16-16)	16 (14-16)	16	0.019	
Academic achievement and success	29.5 (28.25-31.75)	30 (30-31)	30 (29-31)	32	0.552	
Teachers' morale and motivation	26 (24.5-30)	29 (27-31)	28 (26-30)	32	0.283	
Community support for education	24 (19.25-29.5)	31 (30-34)	30 (24-31)	36	0.005	
Total child-friendliness score	203.5 (186.25- 226.25)	217 (201-231)	215 (198-228)	248	0.113	

#Mann-Whitney U Test

Different components of child friendliness were assessed among the schools. A median score of 17 (15-19) was observed for participation out a maximum score of 20. Out of a maximum score of 44, the schools evaluated showed a median score of 39 (34-40) for the health and well-being component. The median score of the schools for safe and protective spaces were 58 (52-64) on a maximum score of 68. The enrolment and completion domain showed a median score of 16 (14 to 16) out of 16 and the academic achievement and success domain showed a median score of 30 (29-31) out of 32. The median score of teachers' morale and motivation was 28 (26-30) out of maximum score of 32 among the 23 schools assessed. The maximum score allocated to community support for education according to the questionnaire was 36. A median score of 30 (24-31) was observed in this domain among the schools assessed. The difference in median scores obtained in each domain was compared across the rural and urban categories of schools. A trend of higher median scores was observed among rural schools except in the domain of health and wellbeing. On performing Mann-Whitney U test a statistically significant difference was observed between rural and urban schools in the components or domains of participation, enrolment and completion, and community support for education. A higher median score was observed in all three components in rural schools compared to urban schools.

DISCUSSION

There were only few studies related to child health friendly initiatives compared between private and government schools in India but only limited data is available comparing the child friendliness among different domains between urban and rural schools. This study unveils the difference in child-friendliness among the urban and rural schools of the southern Karnataka districts.

The present study assessed the active participation of the child, health and well-being, safe and protective spaces for children, and enrolment of the children, academic achievements by the children, morale and motivation among the teachers in school and community support for education of the children under child friendliness. The child-friendliness was significantly better in the rural schools compared to the urban schools. Three domains

under the child-friendliness showed a significant upper hand among the rural schools. These where participation of the students in governance, enrolment and completion, and community support for education. Our data suggest that presence of more active working student governments in rural schools with an active participation of students in the planning of schooling activities, involvement in community activities, and better opportunities like school publications, bulletin boards etc., led to a better child friendly atmosphere in rural schools. The children should therefore get opportunities to be involved in designing friendly atmosphere in schools where their voices are more clearly heard.

The enrolment and completion were better in rural schools than urban schools. This could be seen as a two-way phenomenon where the better enrolment leads to better-child friendliness and a better child friendliness leading to better enrolment and completion. Notably the community support for education was much better in rural schools and this has led to a better child-friendliness in rural schools. The parent-teacher associations (PTA) were more proactive in the rural schools. Better representation of parents in school governance is an important factor in improving the child-friendliness according to our observation.

In general, the results show that regardless of the better connectivity, facilities, infrastructure and many more opportunities in urban areas, the rural schools of Mysuru and Chamarajanagara performs better in terms of child-friendliness. This is an indicator of the falling living and schooling standards in the rapidly growing urban population and this should ring the alarm for improvement in the child-friendliness status of urban schools.

However, SN Das observed a lower level child friendliness in a study conducted among the rural schools in India associating the child friendliness and students' performance. The study was conducted among primary schools and only the domain of within class room child friendly pedagogical practices were considered in the study. 11 As this study considers a wider spectrum of practices contributing to child friendly schools, the results may not be comparable. Another study was conducted in Karkala taluka in south western part of Karnataka assessing the child friendliness based on the Indian Association of Paediatrics standards. The study showed that None of the school met the full criteria of child friendliness.⁵ In the predominantly rural study area, 90% of the schools had no adequate toilet facilities, 90% did not have safe transportation, 82% schools had their children carrying excess baggage, and 72% did not have safe drinking water facility. No periodic health check-ups were available in 72% of the schools and 43 % of the schools had no facility for first aid.⁵ As different studies have followed different criteria and assessing tools, a complete fruitful comparison could not be made.

The purposive sampling used in the study has affected the representativeness of the schools in the study area. A larger multi-centric study with a random selection of schools will give more robust evidence to the subject. Due to the limitation of data in the subject, a detailed comparison of our study results with similar studies from the country was not done.

CONCLUSION

The results of study suggest that the overall child friendliness of the high schools in Mysuru and Chamarajanagara districts is satisfactory. The child-friendliness was better in rural schools compared to urban schools with a better participation, enrolment and completion, and community support for education in rural schools. Hence more attention has to be given to urban areas to improve healthy environment of the schools. Empowering the students to improve their participation in school planning and other activities, encouraging better enrolment and completion, and involving communities, especially parents in improving the school environment will improve the child-friendliness among urban schools.

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Institutional Ethics Committee

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