

**Risky Behaviour Among Adolescents In Disadvantaged Communities In
India**

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Adolescents in disadvantaged communities are left out of the mainstream due to the status of their community and families they belong to, which can have damaging consequences in their development process. This study investigates adolescents in disadvantaged communities and influence of community disadvantage on their behaviour.

Methods: The study was conducted in the disadvantaged communities of Kerala, India. Sixty samples of adolescents of age group between 10 and 19 were collected from five communities, which were declared as slums or slum like areas by Municipal Corporation of Thrissur district in the State of Kerala, India. Both boys and girls were included in the study.

In this study, simple random sampling was used for data collection. Interview schedule was used as method of data collection. *Results:* The study found that risky behaviour is more among boys than girls. Results also showed that risky behaviour is positively correlated with educational disadvantage. There is a need for prevention efforts involving family and community level interventions targeted to the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Deliberate and focused public policy is required, along with economic development, to fulfill and protect the rights of every child.

Key words: Risky behaviour; Disadvantaged communities; Adolescents; Community context

INTRODUCTION

As community is one of the dimensions of social context which is closer to families and individuals it is most likely to play an important role in adolescents' development. The interaction between the adolescents and his/her context influences their behaviour. It promotes values, goals and identities that are conducive to adaptive or maladaptive behaviour in them. Living in the context characterized by widespread deprivation, few educational and livelihood opportunities, high rates of violence, and weak social ties increases the chances that children will have poor behavioural outcomes. In the state of Kerala, despite the general improvement, such kinds of pockets of deprivation are visible in all the cities and villages of the state in the form of concentrated colonies and slum-like human settlements. According to the Global Report on Human Settlements (2003) 43% of the urban population in developing regions lives in slums. In the least developed countries, this percentage rises to about 78%. People living in these settlements experience the most deplorable living and environmental conditions. They are also excluded from participating in the economic social, political and cultural spheres of the city. These settlements are also known for their atmosphere of fear and violence (Bloom et. al, 2008). Though behavioural issues have been part of all communities adolescents and young people who live in such kind of socially and economically disadvantaged pockets are more vulnerable and at high risk in developing deviant behaviour. Understanding influence of community disadvantage on the behaviour of adolescents needs genuine attention so that they can be empowered through a positive intervention to bring them out of their present state of economic and social backwardness and help them achieve better healthy lives.

There are numerous international studies on ecological risk and issues of adolescents. There is a dearth of Indian studies related to adolescents living in disadvantaged communities. The available Indian studies have focused more on socio economic status and its association with various issues of adolescents such as substance use, health and sexuality related problems. So there is a need to study the community disadvantage and the extent to which the adolescents develop risk taking behaviour.

ADOLESCENTS IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY

Adolescence is a critical phase of life because it is a period of major physical, physiological, psychological, and behavioural changes with changing patterns of social interactions and relationships. These changes are also accompanied by significant stress on young people and those around them, while influencing and affecting their relationships with their peers and adults. According to census (2011) India has the largest population of adolescents in the world being home to 253 million individuals aged 10-19 years. Adolescent population has increased from 85 million in 1961 to 253 million in 2011 (in five decades). In Kerala, there are 2823000 adolescents within the age group of 10-14 years and 2610000 adolescents in the age group of 15-19 years. Adolescents in age group of 10-19 comprise 20.9% in India and 16.26% in Kerala.

The poor living conditions in these slums are a major disadvantage for the children living in these vulnerable environments. Community disadvantage emerges out of the interplay between the characteristics of the residents in a community (e.g., employment, education levels, drug and alcohol use) and, over and above this, the effects of the social and environmental context in which they exist (Edwards, 2005; Vinson, 2007). Disadvantage threatens social cohesion and economic prosperity and can perpetuate social exclusion and marginalise diverse voices and experiences. High risk neighbourhoods are characterized by crowding, high levels of unemployment, crime and violence. They may become stigmatized and are often receive negative attitude from public (Kagan et al., 2007).

Community disadvantage presents youth with a variety of risks that can negatively influence behaviour and development. The children in disadvantaged neighborhoods are at greater risk of behaviour problems than children in non-disadvantaged neighborhoods. Disadvantaged neighbourhoods can increase adolescent risk for mental health and behavioural problems in several ways. Socially marginalized youth often have weakened or severed family and social ties. Psychological and physical abuse at home may have led many to prefer life on the street. Negative outcomes are stronger for adolescents living in a more disadvantaged community than for those living in a less disadvantaged neighbourhood because the areas of social disorganization disrupt conventional social values and controls and encourage weak informal social control and cohesion, which in turn leads to high rates of crime and delinquency.

Kabiru (2012) in his study found that living in a context characterized by widespread deprivation, few educational and livelihood opportunities, high rates of violence, and weak social ties increases the chances that young slum dwellers will have poor academic and behavioural outcomes. There are several studies that have found that adolescents growing up in resource-poor settings are at heightened risk for negative behavioural and psychological outcomes including risky sexual behaviour (Dodoo, Zulu, & Ezech, 2007), delinquency, and violence (Blum et al., 2000). In a study (Kokiwar & Jogdand, 2011) conducted on prevalence of substance use among male adolescents in an urban area, Andhra Pradesh, India, it was found that the overall prevalence of substance use was 32.7%. About 31% initiated substance use at 13 – 15 years of age, and the reason was peer pressure in 52.9%. Research suggests that poverty has a significant direct effect on adolescent antisocial behaviour and that parent-child conflict, neighbourhood problems, and deviant peer pressure are significant mediators (Eamon, 2002). The adolescents in poverty were also found to have higher propensity to delinquent behaviours (Smith, Ashiabi, 2007 & Wadsworth et al, 2008), such as substance abuse, sex-related problems, school failure, and school dropout. The poor neighborhoods and feelings of hopelessness associated with economic disadvantage also increased the tendency of delinquent behaviours among poor adolescents (Obwittler, 2007).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the socio-economic profile of adolescents
2. To measure the level of community disadvantage
3. To assess the risky behaviour of adolescents in the disadvantaged community

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research method was used in this study. The study is descriptive in nature. It describes socio demographic profile of the adolescents, level of community disadvantage, and its influence of risky behaviour among the adolescents. Both the male and female adolescents in the age group of 12 to 19 who reside in the disadvantaged communities were included in the study. In this study, simple random sampling was used for data collection. Communities declared as slums and slum like areas by Municipal Corporation of Thrissur in

the state of Kerala, India were selected for the study. The selected communities included SC colonies¹, concentrated Laksham veedu colonies², displaced communities³.

In the current study the interview schedule was the major tool for data collection. This semi structured interview schedule consists of 3 parts including questions regarding Socio-demographic profile of the adolescents, assessment of community disadvantage based on Tony Vinson's (2007) approach and risky behaviour of the adolescents. Collected data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Sciences) version 23.0. Descriptive statistics like frequencies, averages and cross tabulation and inferential statistics like t-test, correlation and Chi-Square test were used in the analysis.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table. 1 Socio economic profile of the participants

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent(%)
Age	12-14	19	31.7
	15-19	41	68.3
Gender	Male	35	58.3
	Female	25	41.7
Education	7-10	28	46.7
	Above 10	29	48.3
	School drop out	3	5
Religion	Hindu	42	70
	Muslim	12	20
	Christian	6	10
Occupation of the father	Daily wage	32	53.3
	Driver	5	8.3
	Others	8	13.3
	N.A	15	25.0
Mother	Daily wage	17	28.3
	MGNREGA	9	15.0
	Others	11	18.3
	House Wife	23	38.3
Family Income (INR)	Below 1000	32	53.3
	1000-3000	24	40.0
	Above 3000	4	6.7

¹ SC Colonies: Colonies for Scheduled caste. The Scheduled Castes are officially designated groups of historically disadvantaged people in India. The term is recognized in the Constitution of India.

² Lakshamveedu colonies: These are the colonies come under The “One Lakh Housing Scheme” implemented by the Government of Kerala from early 1972 to provide accommodation to the impoverished sections of society.

³ Displaced communities: These are the communities in which people were evicted from the Railway land and rehabilitated to another place.

In the study, majority (68.3%) of the respondents were within 15-19 age group and 41 (68.3%) were within 12-14 age group. Among them about 5 per cent of the respondents were school drop outs. Majority of the respondents were Hindu (70%) followed by Christians and Muslims. Seventy five percent of the respondents had both parents and 25 percent of them were with single parent. They are single mother children. NA mentioned in the Table1 represents absence of father. All the respondents' fathers do not have permanent job and were going for daily wages work and they do not have permanent job. 38.3 percent of their mothers were home makers. 28.3 percent of them were working for daily wages. About 15 percent of the respondents' mothers were working under MGNREGA⁴. Most of the respondents reported their family monthly income below Rs. 1000/-.

Table 2. Welfare services

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Respondents who have received welfare services	24	40.0
Respondents who have not received any welfare services	36	60.0
Total	60	100.0

The above table shows the number of children who had received scholarships, grant and other welfare services. Majority (60%) of the children reported that they did not avail any welfare services from the government. Only 24 children (40%) reported that they have got benefits from the government. They were not involved in any other welfare projects initiated by Government or any Non-Governmental organizations. The below figure shows the details of welfare services they received. It includes E- Grant and Scholarships. Out of the respondents who got benefits from the Government, 79 percent received it in the form of E-grant and 21 percent received the benefits in the form of scholarships.

⁴ MGNREGA: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 which provide a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment.

Table 3. Score of community disadvantage

Factor number	Factors of community disadvantage	MEAN	S.D	RANGE	
				Min.	Max.
1	Lack of community safety	.49	.23	0	.80
2	Family and economic disadvantage	.55	.16	.11	.78
3	Educational disadvantage	.58	.22	.00	.67
4	Mean score of Community disadvantage	.54	.15	.07	.75

The above table shows the descriptive analysis of factors of community disadvantage and mean score of community disadvantage. The main factors of community disadvantage consist of lack of community safety, family and economic disadvantage and educational disadvantage. Analysis revealed that educational disadvantage is high among respondents followed by family and economic disadvantage. Analysis also showed above average level of community disadvantage.

Table 4. Major Risky behaviours among adolescents

Items	Frequency	Percent (%)
Skipping schools	11	18.3
Using liquor	14	23.3
Use Tobacco	12	20
Use other drugs	3	5
Stealing	1	1.7
Physical fight	24	40
Teasing	14	23.3
Gangue Activities	13	21.7
Bullying	9	15
Staying out overnight	4	6.7
Lying	13	21.7

Eleven (18.3%) students reported that they skip schools without telling family members. 23.35 percent of the adolescents reported that they drink beer, wine or liquor. Analysis also reveals that 20% of them use tobacco and 5% of them use other kinds of drugs especially Cannabis. Analysis also shows other risky behaviour such as stealing (1.7%), lying (21.7%), teasing (23.3%) and bullying (15%). They also reported that 40% of them get in to physical fights with others and 21.3% of them are engaged in gangue activities. 6.7% of the adolescents reported that they stay out past midnight.

Table 5. Risky behaviour and gender

Factors	Boys		Girls		t score	df	P value
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
Behaviour	.409	.113	.284	.049	5.177	58	.001

The t-test was used to compare the difference in the behaviour of adolescents between boys and girls. Analysis showed that there is a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in their behaviour. It indicates that risky behaviour is more among boys than girls. In the analysis t value is 5.177 with significant at .01 level (P= .001).

Table 6. Community Disadvantage and gender

Factors of community disadvantage	Boys		Girls		t score	df	P value
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
Lack of community safety	.486	.22	.492	.247	-.104	58	.918
Family and economic disadvantage	.511	.169	.596	.124	-2.125	58	.038
Educational disadvantage	.591	.215	.560	.230	.525	58	.601
Total score of Community disadvantage	.529	.146	.549	.152	-.516	58	.607

The t-test showed that there is no a statistically significant difference in the mean score of community disadvantage between boys and girls. The analysis showed that there is a statistically significant difference in family and economic disadvantage between boys and girls. The girls feel more family and economic disadvantage than boys. Though the difference in lack of community safety between boys and girls is not statistically significant, mean score shows that the girls feel lack of safety in the community more than boys and educational disadvantage is more among boys.

Table 7. Risky behaviour and Age

Factors	Early adolescents		Late adolescents		t score	Df	P value
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
Risky behaviour	.361	.083	.355	.122	.180	58	.858

The above t-test reveals that there is no statistically significant difference in the behaviour among early and late adolescents. But the mean score shows that risky behaviour is more among early adolescents (.361) than late adolescents (.083).

Table 8. Association between family income and academic achievement

Variables	Family Income	
	χ^2	Sig.
Low academic achievement	6.125	.047
Lack of readiness to go to school	12.29	.002

The above table shows the association between family income and variables related to educational disadvantage. Chi-Square test was done and the analysis showed that there is an association between family income and low academic achievements ($\chi^2 = 6.125$ & $p = .047$). The association between their family income and lack of readiness to go to school shows highly statistical significance at .01 level.

Table 9. Educational disadvantage and risky behaviour

Variables	Educational disadvantage	
	<i>r</i> Value	P Value
Risky behaviour	.293	.023

Analysis revealed that risky behaviour is positively correlated with educational disadvantage showing the direction that as educational disadvantage increases risky behaviour among adolescents also increases ($r = .293$, $p = .023$).

DISCUSSION

Experiences in different contexts in which a person live influence their personality. In the current study, the community disadvantage was studied in the dimensions of lack of community safety, family and economic disadvantage and educational disadvantage. It was found that the income of the family has adversely affected the academic achievement of the adolescents. School drop outs are still there though it's a small percentage. It could be because of inadequate facilities and financial support for the study of the adolescents. They have not received any kind of benefits from the Government to improve their livelihood except education grants and scholarships. The study also found that there is a relationship between educational disadvantage and risky behaviour of adolescents. The studies have found that children who grow up in poor neighborhoods experience a variety of academic disadvantages (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sastry, 2012). The increased risk of school dropout is perhaps the most detrimental consequence experienced by youth who reside in communities of concentrated disadvantage. Risky behaviours such as skipping schools, use of alcohol and tobacco, stealing, lying, teasing and bullying, involvement in physical fights with others and gangue activities were observed in the adolescents. Similar findings were found by Kipping (2015). His study found that Risky behaviours in adolescence, such as alcohol intake, substance use, poor diet, physical inactivity and unprotected sex, are common. At the individual level, there was evidence of a strong relationship with decreasing SES across all three measures of SES and criminality, car passenger risk, TV viewing, scooter risk, early sexual behaviour and weekly tobacco use but insufficient evidence of a relationship for physical inactivity, cycling without a helmet and illicit substance use. In the current study it was found that risky behaviour is more among boys than girls. Similar

findings can be seen in Reniers' (2016) study. He found that males perceived behaviours as less risky, reportedly took more risks, were less sensitive to negative outcomes and less socially anxious than female participants.

There is a need for prevention efforts involving family and community level interventions targeted to the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Evidence based prevention strategies are needed for reducing psycho social risks and consequences which can improve adolescents' wellbeing. Deliberate and focused public policy is required, along with economic development, to fulfill and protect the rights of every child.

There is a scope for further research in the field of children in disadvantage communities. It is necessary to understand the psychological wellbeing and other mental health aspect of the children from disadvantaged communities. Qualitative research on risk and protective process in the community and its influence on adolescents can be studied.

CONCLUSION

The adolescent and the youth population constitute critical segments, as the future demographic, social, economic and political development depends on them. So society at large, are responsible for providing children with opportunities and resources so that each one can start equally and fulfill their potential throughout life. The relationship between risky behaviour and community disadvantage suggests that prevention of behavioural disturbances and promotion of positive health may target broad populations or specific families and individuals who have shown signs of distress. Interventions may also focus on strategies to prevent widening of social inequalities.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

- Participants were informed of the nature of the study
- Informed consent was taken from the participants

- They were made sure that they will not be hurt in any way during this research.
- Privacy was guaranteed to the participants
- This study was funded by University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India (MRP (H)/13-14/KLCA027/UGC-SWRO dated 15-Feb 2014)
- This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by the author

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