



# Positive Youth Development, Happiness and Wellbeing among Youth: Recommendations for Educational Institutions

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## Abstract

Youth are the future leaders and citizens, and it is important that they are provided with a stimulating environment where they can thrive and make developmentally appropriate choices and made partners, rather than onlookers, in the developmental initiatives of the nation. Positive Youth Development (PYD) is closely related to the wellbeing of the nation, and wellness would also ensure that most of the youth are happy. Keeping in mind the present youth bulge in India and their important role in achievement of developmental goals at international level, an attempt was made to understand the level of PYD, Happiness and Wellbeing among 480 youth, selected from the government and private schools, and colleges located in rural and urban areas of Jammu Province of the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory. The tools used standardized Positive Youth Development Questionnaire, Subjective Happiness Scale, Subjective Wellbeing Scale, Home Environment Questionnaire and Educational and Occupation component of SES Scale. Though youth were rated medium on the levels of PYD, Happiness, Wellbeing and Home Environment, PYD was positively related to happiness and parental variables of education and occupation, but no significant relationship was observed among PYD and Wellbeing. PYD was negatively related to age, sex, and area of residence and home environment of the youth. First born were found to be happier than youth at other ordinal positions. Rural youth were significantly happier than urban youth. Based on the findings the present paper has forwarded some recommendations for the educational institutions of the youth.

**Keywords:** Youth; India; Jammu; Positive Youth Development; Happiness; Wellbeing; Educational Institutions

## Abbreviations

PYD: Positive Youth Development; NCC: National Cadet Corps, BSG: Bharat Scouts and Guides, NSS: National Service Scheme; SMS: Sanitization, Masks, Social Distancing.

## Introduction

Youth may be defined from any perspective social, cultural, literary, political, or historical, but one thing is common among these the zeal, enthusiasm and power of this age-

group of people to steer the change. They constitute the age group of 15-29 years [1] and the termed as Yuva in Hindi; the stage being known as *youwanawastha*. PYD (Positive Youth Development) works on the basic premise of the need for not only support and guidance but also the provision of opportunities during adolescence [2]. Previous literature on adolescents was focussed on the deficit model, where youth were considered as ones trying to impose their selves, often negatively in the family, and often against the social norms and conventions. The PYD approach considers youth as the resources and partners in development rather than weaknesses. It strives for building and strengthening assets that enable youth to grow and flourish throughout life [3].

National Youth Policy [1] of India reflects this philosophy when it endeavours “to empower youth of the country to achieve their full potential, and through them enable India to find its rightful place in the community of nations”. Having a rich history of PYD activities like National Cadet Corps (NCC), Bharat Scouts and Guides (BSG), National Service Scheme (NSS), Nehru Yuvak Kendra's etc., India has always striven to involve youth in its developmental processes by stimulating their interest in nation building right from the childhood. The stories of great heroes and heroines of Indian history are passed on to the children by their grandparents and parents through oral traditions and are also included in the schoolbooks. The celebration of National Festivals like Independence Day and the Republic Day reaffirm India's commitment to its youth power.

Though the youth initiatives are plenty and are part of the curricular and co-curricular activities of the educational institutions, the studies on impact of these on the youth of India are meagre. Hence the present research was conducted based on the construct of PYD given by Lerner, et al. [4] grounded in the Five Cs of Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring. Lerner, et al. [4] believed that incorporating these Five Cs leads to demonstration of a Sixth C i.e. Contribution, to the self, family, community, and the social institutions. Risks are envisaged in the development of youth lacking the Five Cs. It was expected that youth having higher levels of PYD would be happier, exhibit higher levels of wellbeing, and the home environment and the parental variables of education and occupation would be positively related to PYD, Happiness and Wellbeing. It was also expected that personal variables like age, sex, area of residence (rural/urban) and ordinal position would contribute to the variations in PYD. The present brief is outcome of the research project funded by the University of Jammu, Jammu, JKUT, India. Since the scope of the project was wider, only the recommendations for the educational institutions have been presented in this present write up.

## Results of the Research in Brief

PYD, Happiness, Home Environment and Wellbeing (SWB) in context of some demographic variables of age, sex, type of family and parental variables, education and occupation, were studied among 480 youth and their 120 parents selected from the government and private schools, and colleges located in rural and urban areas of Jammu province of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The tools used were PYD Questionnaire by Joorabchi TN, et al. [5], Subjective Happiness Scale by Lyubomirsky S, et al. [6], Subjective Wellbeing Scale by Sell H, et al. [7], Home Environment Questionnaire by Rezinchenko SI, et al. [8] and Educational and Occupation components of SES Scale by Tiwari SC, et al. [9,10]. The tools were pretested to assess their suitability and applicability. Qualitative data was also obtained from the youth and their parents regarding their concepts of happiness and wellbeing. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS 21 version.

Most of the respondents were studying in 12th class, living in nuclear families, and were first born, their fathers and mothers being middle adults mostly educated up to 12th standard, mothers being homemakers and fathers employed in Class IV occupations or working as skilled labour. Medium levels of PYD, Happiness, Wellbeing and Home Environment were observed among majority of the respondents. PYD differed significantly in context of age, ordinal position, area of residence, and type of family; it was significantly related to the parental variables, but it was negatively related to age, sex, area of residence and Home Environment. High rating was given to the Family and Peer Connections dimensions of PYD age wise and area wise (rural/urban), whereas moderate rating was given by youth to the dimensions of Conduct Behaviour, Social and Community Connection. Females had high Academic and Social Competence whereas males showed high levels of Social Conscience, Caring and Connection. Physical and Social Competence were high among rural respondents, Confidence, Caring, and Social Conscience was high among youth living in in joint and nuclear families [11]. Physical competence was found to be high among youth living in Joint and Extended families, and value of diversity was high in extended families. Among the respondents, happiness levels were found to be moderate, and were significantly different among rural and urban youth, favouring the rural youth. Though significantly related to parental variables, and PYD, happiness was found to be negatively related to the ordinal position, Home Environment, and area of residence, though 1st born were found to be happier than others.

Medium level of wellbeing was observed among the respondents. Wellbeing and Home Environment were

significantly different as per the ordinal position, favouring the 1st born respondents. Home Environment was positively related to age, and negatively related to PYD, ordinal position and occupation of the parents. The research findings revealed that parental education and occupation seem to have immense importance in determination of level of PYD. As children grow, they understand the challenges of living in low SES families and this seems to affect their overall wellbeing especially in urban areas, where these challenges are higher. Rural youth are protected by the close-knit society structure and the kinship network, which in urban areas become distant, which maybe one of the reasons for youth being happier in rural areas. Stability is required by the youth at homes, and positive response and feedback from the significant others to grow and thrive.

Positivity among youth is required if the nation must thrive as they are the flag bearers of the future, especially in countries like India where they are also in large numbers. No endeavour of the nation can be successful unless the youth are involved in the developmental process, unless the youth are more participative and unless their views are considered. The youth must feel connected, cared for, and these will generate a feeling of confidence, development of character and competence. Once they feel belongingness they would take care of their own selves, their families and ultimately their nation. If they feel isolated their identity formation will be surrounded by a lot of doubt and misconceptions which may take them towards a pathway of negative outcomes and risk taking or self-harming behaviours. Based on the findings following strategies have been devised for intervention.

### Recommendations for Educational Institutions

The educational institutions are the places where youth spend most of their productive time. These institutions must conduct activities for:

- PYD Dimensions of Community Connection, Conduct Behaviour, Value of Diversity
- Promoting Happiness and Wellbeing (physiological, psychological and social)
- Promoting better home- institution relationships.

### Educational Institutions and Youth

**Giving opportunity to all students to participate** in the different activities held regularly, rather than restricting participation to a few who are achievers. This would not only motivate participation but also self-expression, which is ultimately going to result in happiness and wellbeing. Systemic and systematic biases may sometimes demotivate the youth to drop out of education or lead to non-participation in activities where they have not been included.

**More involvement of youth in field-based activities**

**so that they develop a sense of belonging, care and commitment:** Encouraging the youth to live in a village or with a tribal family may help in developing a connection and stimulating a care for the diversity. Youth will benefit from this sensitization process, and they will understand the challenges of the people living away from the city centres, and their energies can also be channelized by involving them in spreading awareness about the various schemes initiated by the government, especially for vulnerable sections of the society. Youth can be excellent resource during conduct of events like the Pulse Polio Day, National Girl Child Day World Environment Day, International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, National Integration so that they are sensitised to the national issues and explore means to overcome the national problems. Visits can be conducted to the local Hospitals, Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics, Anganwadi Centres, One Stop Centres, Women's Police Stations, Courts etc. so that youth are sensitized to the issues of the people and in turn are enriched by the experiences. Being useful would instil not only feeling of accomplishment and happiness, but also build confidence and self-esteem among the youth.

**Motivating youth to engage in fitness related activities:**

A study by The Lancet Global Health has shown that most Indians are not physically active which makes them more susceptible to the risks of developing cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, dementia, and certain cancers later in life. Being physically active is also related to feeling of happiness. Khelo India, Yoga Day, Poshan Mah, and many more such events are being organised to motivate Indian youth to remain engaged and fit and channelize their energies productively. Even those youth should be engaged who do not usually take part in sports and physical education. Fitness should become a routine just like brushing the teeth or taking a bath if India's future must be secured since only physically and mentally healthy youth can contribute to the society besides realizing their own potential, which is important for their self-esteem and self-worth.

**Internships or placements in need-based community activities.** Since youth will hold leadership positions in future, they must be given exposure to the grass root level developmental initiatives. Working with the grass root level workers like DDCs and Panchayats, they can, for example, be engaged in research, collecting and analysing data from vulnerable population, so that they are sensitized to the issues faced by common people, and they must also be motivated to brainstorm for solutions. Such participation at grass root level, and encouragement and acceptance of their voice must be encouraged since they would hold the flag of the country in future. The familiarization with the functioning of various governmental bodies would develop an appreciation for these, and the youth would be encouraged to become good law-abiding citizens. Their knowledge of handling the Internet sources can help the aged and infirm

and those not well versed in handling the data, to complete their formalities or to submit their documents online to the different agencies. The youth, thus, would develop a feeling of connectedness, care and confidence.

**Organising youth festivals and cultural days:** Educational institutions have a diversity of students, who may feel isolated if inclusive policies are not adopted by the institutions. For developing a feeling of belongingness, institutions may hold youth festivals and cultural days of different folk groups where students from diverse backgrounds can participate and showcase their culture and traditions, folk songs, folk art so that they develop a feeling of ownership and belongingness. The true spirit of Unity in Diversity may be showcased so that students appreciate the uniqueness of all cultures.

**Training in resilience building:** Due to their experiences some students may be at the risk of choosing developmental pathways leading to risk behaviours like substance abuse, which they believe would mitigate their problems and issues. There is a need to train the youth to build their resilience so that they can better organise themselves and manage their stresses and are saved from harming themselves and are able to cope effectively.

**Training for development of Life Skills Training:** The ten core life skills identified by WHO include Self-Awareness, Empathy, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Decision Making, Problem Solving, Interpersonal Skills, Effective Communication, Coping with Stress, and Managing Emotions. Youth need to be trained in these so that they can live their lives well.

**Disaster Risk Management Training:** This will be especially helpful in giving the youth a feeling of control over their environment. Preparing youth would result in a trained workforce in hand if any crisis like COVID 19 pandemic arises in the future. It is author's personal experience that youth, especially the National Service Scheme Volunteers, helped a lot in spreading awareness about COVID 19 in their own areas of residence. They stitched masks and distributed them while maintaining safety, spread awareness about SMS (Sanitization, Masks, Social distancing) and helped in whatever safe manner they could, using social media.

**Interactions with Experts:** Due to many reasons students may not be prepared for the future life events and may need advice from experts. There are many students who may not be able to afford such services privately, institutions can help and generate confidence, among the students to take advantage of the facilities available and face any situation that may arise in life. Some areas where research has shown that the students require guidance are Career Decision Making, Parental Interactions, and Peer Interactions, Coping with Stress, Managing Time, Applying for admission to the institutions in India or Abroad, Personality development, Public Speaking, and handling Job Interviews. An Interaction Cell or a Guidance and Counselling unit in the institution

could facilitate interaction of students with Experts on the issues that cause worry to them or require building of skills in the areas. Trained counsellors should be part of the educational institutions so that the students in need or risk can be identified and given timely interventions. This can not only save many lives lost due to stress and anxiety but also direct these youth to select the correct developmental path.

## Parents and Educational Institution

**Parents should be active members of the educational programs of Youth:** It has been observed that as the educational ladder rises the connect of the parents with the educational institutions where their children are studying declines. The educational institution may find it intrusive to involve parents in their working committees, yet if this initiative is successful, it would be beneficial for not only for the institutions, but it would also lead to a feeling of ownership among both parents and the children, boost their self-esteem and make them active contributors in education. Parents having unique talents in music, arts, folk arts, folk dance and many more, can be an asset for the educational institutions.

**Enrichment programs for Parents in the field of Youth Development, Happiness, and Wellbeing:** The educational program should commence with orientation of parents so that a connect is established in home and educational institution. Some enrichment programs can be held on issues related to parents concerns about their offspring's, especially during adolescent and youth. Group interactions encourage parents to feel confident and ask questions since there are many others with the similar queries in their minds. Career counselling can also be inclusive of parents. Parents days can be celebrated even in the higher education institutions, which will additionally act as a check and balance for those youth who may have chosen a risky pathway of development. Higher education institutions can remain connected to the parents via social media technology or the Integrated Learning Management Systems, especially in cases where some risk behaviour is observed.

**Counselling the parents for enrichment of Home Environment:** Educational institutions should develop mechanisms to identify students facing issues in their familial or social environment and must extend help to the parents who are in need, since counselling services are very limited and expensive in India. Importance of Family Connection and Peer Connection for the youth has been exhibited in the results of the present study. Stimulating home environments have proven to enhance the positive youth outcomes. Hence more parental involvement will result in better outcomes.

## Conclusions

Guiding the youth towards a developmentally appropriate and productive pathway is not just the duty of the parents,

the role of educational institutions and policymakers cannot be underscored in this matter. Youth have always proved to be the force for steering the nations towards development; hence it's imperative that they be given opportunities to participate in nation building process. This will be possible when the beginnings are made early by their socialization agents. The findings and the recommendations presented in this paper are outcome of a research project funded by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell and supported by the office of Dean Research Studies, University of Jammu, Jammu, JKUT, India.

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