

V. SUMMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The research initiative titled “Adolescents of Arunthathiyar population - An exploratory study” was under taken with the broad objective of exploring the key factors influencing the overall wellbeing of adolescents in Arunthathiyar population. A base line survey was carried out in five taluks of Coimbatore district. The details pertaining to socio economic and cultural profile of Arunthathiyar adolescents was drawn in detail as a backdrop to understand their life styles and living status in general. This survey was followed by a detailed study of adolescents in the selected taluk, to go deeper and paint a broad picture of their general profile, familial and economic profile, neighbourhood / community and the locale. With this background, the adolescents were the centre of focus of the study and the three aspects of their well being considered were – academic achievement, nutrition and mental health The specific objectives for the study were:

1. Assess the socio economic and cultural profile of Arunthathiyar adolescents in the selected district
2. Characterize the personal and family profile of Arunthathiyar adolescents in the selected taluk
3. Appraise the academic status and identify the determinants of academic achievement
4. Understand the nutritional status and categorize its determinants
5. Recognize the mental health status and trace its determinants and
6. Implementation of SPSS programme and assess the efficacy of the programme

With exploratory research design as the framework, multistage sampling method was chosen as the population of Arunthathiyars is spread out all over Tamil Nadu. The process involved in the selection of sample went through seven stages. The journey of selection of sample began with selection of four out of 32 districts in Tamil Nadu in the first stage, and concluded by selecting

494 adolescents in the age group 11 – 19 years from six villages in the selected taluk, in the sixth stage. In the seventh stage 30 adolescents were selected from the interior village of the study taluk, and they formed the experimental group for the intervention programme (SPSS - Sensitization to Problems and Seek Solutions)

The study opted for a package of tools, relevant to assess the objectives. Interview schedule was prepared to collect data from 626 adolescents in five taluks as part of base line survey. The detailed survey was conducted in the selected taluk, and data was collected from 494 adolescents using a questionnaire.

The other tools presented to the adolescents in the selected taluk were – The Likert's scale to assess academic achievement, a five point perception scale on socio economic status. As part of assessment of nutritional status, BMI (Body mass Index) was calculated with height and weight measurements. DASS was the standardized tool with 42 - item questionnaire which includes three self-report scales designed to measure the negative emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress.

SPSS (Sensitization to Problems and Seeking Solutions) was the three day intervention programme that was conducted to 30 adolescents in the selected taluk. The programme components were related to strengths in education, personal life and nutrition. In order to assess the efficacy of the programme a pre and post test questionnaire was developed related to the three components to be evaluated on a five point scale. The pre test was administered to the 30 participants prior to the intervention programme and the same questionnaire was given as post test was after a gap of three weeks to the same participants.

The data was consolidated and statically analysed, the results were presented in six sections as follows:

Section I: Socioeconomic and cultural profile of Arunthathiyar adolescents in five taluks – An overview

- The participation of female adolescents was better than the male counterpart.
- The major age group was 14 – 16 years, and the majority of them (87 – 100%) were enrolled in government schools with Tamil as the medium of language
- The nuclear families out numbered joint families, and the monthly income was in the range of ₹. 8000- 10,000/-.
- They lived in tiled roofed houses (37 – 70%) and had house sites as their assets. Two wheelers and live stock was owned by significant few
- The major amount ₹. 1000 – 5000/- was spent towards food consumption. There were other minor expenses, the loans were taken on heavy interest rates and a part of the income went towards debt repayment
- They had their own deities and temples built, the celebrations of traditional practices were quite heavy, starting from birth of the child through puberty and pregnancy.

Section II: Adolescents in the selected taluk - General profile

- The participation of female adolescents were 2 percent more than the males. The major age group was between 17 to 19 years. Majority (87%) were enrolled in government schools and their medium of instruction was Tamil. Most of them were in their high school and higher secondary, 11 percent were in degree and two percent in diploma courses
- Although the mother tongue was Telugu, they spoke Tamil basically to avoid reveal their caste identity. 80 percent of the mothers were aged between 30 – 39 years. The highest education of parents was high school level. The family income was ₹. 5000 – 8000/- and the parents were

mostly occupied as agricultural labourers, some fathers were factory employed

- The problems faced by adolescents were related to financial constraints, and lack of teaching support at home, 50 per cent of adolescents realised the problems of money lenders and congested living space. On the positive side, 68 per cent of the adolescents felt that their parents were very supportive.

Section III: Adolescents in selected taluk - Determinants of Academic Achievement (AA)

- The marks scored by majority (37%) of adolescents was in the range 60 – 79 and were grouped under “V. good” category.
- Age and AA was significant at 5 per cent level, the adolescents in the age group of 17 to 19 years scored higher marks than the other age groups
- Gender and AA was significant. It was interesting to note that female adolescents fared well than the male counterpart. A small majority of (4- 5 %) female adolescents scored 60 - 79 and also above >80 percentage of marks and were placed at the “V. good and excellent” level
- Mother’s high school level education as compared to fathers was significantly associated (p value – 0.010) with AA
- Family income and AA was significantly associated, adolescents whose family income was ₹. 5000 – 8000/- scored percentage of marks 60–79 and also above >80 and were placed at V. good and excellent levels
- Other variables like type of family, housing, mother’s and father’s occupation was not significantly associated
- Factors such as age and gender, type of school, mother’s education and family income had significant influence on academic achievement of

adolescents, Therefore the hypothesis numbered 1 that states that 'the socio- economic factors do not influence the academic achievement of the selected adolescents' has to be rejected.

Section IV: Adolescents in selected taluk - Nutritional status and factors associated.

- 48.2 per cent of the adolescents were under nourished and 47 per cent were normal, and the rest 4.8 per cent were overweight and obese
- Age and BMI was not significant, gender and BMI was also not significant
- Family type and BMI was significant, comparatively more percentage of adolescents from joint families were under normal level of nutritional status
- Type of school and BMI was significant, the adolescents from government schools enjoyed better nutritional health than those in private schools. This could be attributed to the midday meal programme provided in the schools
- Mother and father's education and occupation and BMI was not significant
- Influence of various determinants on the nutritional status of adolescents found that type of school and the type of family they hail from determine their BMI. Therefore the hypothesis numbered 2 that state that 'the socio-economic factors do not influence the nutritional status of the selected adolescents has to be rejected.

Section V: Adolescents in selected taluk - Determinants of Mental Health (MH) status

- Majority (53 – 73%) were normal, while 24 – 37 percent were suffering from mild and moderate levels of mental health

- Gender and depression was significant, with the percentage of male adolescents with depression slightly higher than the female adolescents. However, there were no gender variations with respect to anxiety and stress levels
- Age and MH was significantly associated, the lower (11years) and higher age group (17 – 19 years) enjoyed better mental health than the other age groups
- Type of family was significantly associated with anxiety and stress, the adolescents from joint families experienced anxiety and stress, as compared with those from nuclear families
- Father's occupation, and MH was significant, the adolescents (33 – 48%) whose fathers were engaged as Agricultural labourers and factory employees were stress free
- 43 percent of the adolescents whose family income was in the range of ₹. 5000 – 8000/- were in the normal level of stress, with the family income and stress was highly significant
- Other factors like type of school, mother's occupation, mother's and father's education was not significantly associated with MH
- Influence of various determinants of mental health status of the identified adolescents found that gender, age, type of family, father's occupation and family income had significantly influenced one or all aspects of their mental health. Therefore the hypothesis numbered 3 that state that 'the socio-economic factors do not influence the mental health status of the selected adolescents' has to be refuted.

Section VI: Socio-economic status, perceptions of adolescents and their overall well being

- As far as the perceptions of adolescents on their socio economic status were concerned, the chi square analysis found that the gender variance was insignificant. However, a small majority (2-3%) of more female adolescents had better perceptions on their socio economic status as compared to the male counterparts

- Adolescents whose perceptions on their socio economic status were moderate, high and very high (51.4%) scored relatively good marks. Hence, the hypothesis numbered 4 that state 'academic achievement is not affected by the perceptions on socio-economic status' gets refuted
- The p value- 0.517 of the chi square analysis indicated that the perceptions of adolescents and nutritional status were not significant. Hence, The hypothesis numbered 5 gets accepted
- The perceptions of adolescents on their socio - economic status were associated with a negative correlation with anxiety and stress, however not with depression. Hence the hypothesis that states 'mental health is not affected by the perception of adolescents over their socio-economic status' was accepted.

Section VI: Efficacy of the awareness programme

The pre and post test scores of the SPSS programme were analysed statistically, the paired t' test p – values 0.0002 were found to be highly significant for all the three aspects covered - education, personal life and nutrition. Gender and efficacy of the education programme was significant and insignificant with aspects of personal life and nutrition. The findings on the whole were indicative of the usefulness of the programme for the wellbeing of adolescents.

Limitations and insight into future research initiatives

The study related to adolescents of Arunthathiyar population was a pioneering effort undertaken to understand the aspects of well being with its relative influencing factors. Some of the practical problems experienced and suggestive alternatives were:

- Late arrivals of adolescents due to the distance of the schools and timely availability of public transport system
- After their arrival from schools, some of them were expected to attend domestic to chores. During holidays, the boys went out to play grounds, while girls went to work to earn their pocket money

- Availability of suitable and sufficient place for the adolescents seating and participation in the study
- The base line study that also included the urban population was the most challenging. The residents had a wide range of problems, from most congested living place, total lack of sanitation, lighting and ventilation in their cubicles. The problem of debts and time schedules for repayment also bothered the families and the adolescents were equally disturbed. It was rather difficult for the adolescents to concentrate in the study, the researcher had to spend more time, and wait until the participants coped with their mood.

Having explored the problems, the schools with maximum Arunthathiyar student population could have been explored, so that with the permission sought from officials, the study was conducted in the schools itself,

The SPSS (Sensitization to Problems and Seeking Solutions) the awareness programme was found very effective, however it was felt that the three days allocated for the programme was not sufficient and ideal. The programme needs to be conducted for at least three weeks, and in a more conducive environment.

A comparative study of rural and urban Arunthathiyar adolescents would have given a better understanding of their academic achievement, nutritional and mental health status and future research studies can explore the possibilities.

Recommendations

The study was explorative in nature and basically was undertaken to dig deeper into understanding the concept of 'low caste' of Arunthathiyars and its related influence on adolescents well being. This study has therefore surfaced several factors that could be of value to take to policy levels and also to carry out future research studies from micro to macro levels, and in the interest of both humanitarian aspect and also national development:

- The three aspects considered for the study – education, nutrition and mental health are all broad areas of study. Therefore in-depth study of each aspect can be individually undertaken in future research
- Considering the mental health aspect to be quite serious and debilitating factor for holistic development of adolescents, the schools in general and government schools in particular must consider and provide screening and counselling facilities
- Life skills training to adolescents could be part of the school curriculum both in government and private schools to help adolescents for their overall well being.
- The midday meal programme implemented by all government schools and aimed at providing supplementary nutrition, should be monitored by experts. The government department must also consider up gradation of knowledge and skills on nutrition and appropriate methods of preparation of food, to all the personnel in charge, in upholding the true purpose of the scheme
- The researcher recommends that the government should consider a permanent place for the slum dwellers. Build individual houses instead of multi storied buildings. In most places the multi storied buildings were not maintained either by the government nor by the occupants and thus it was dilapidated. Secondly, some extra place for the children to play would be possible in individual house. In villages, house sites should be allotted, as many of the families cannot afford to buy the land
- The laws pertaining to prevention and rehabilitation of manual scavengers should be strictly implemented to pave way for a better future to the community
- Considering the parents attitudes and unwillingness to send children outside and far away from villages for studies and also the socio - economic limitations, the researcher recommends that the central / state government establish residential schools and institutions at the Panchayat

and Block levels in good locale (in par with Navadoya schools). This will help the community to keep their children in schools.

Contribution of the study

As the adolescent age is a very important, sensitive and vibrant stage in the life cycle, the changes in their lifestyles and way of thinking will help the community to reshape. The findings and recommendations will be compiled and discussed with political leaders and bureaucracy to draw detailed plan for the well being of adolescents.

The findings will be taken to the community to reflect and plan future course of action.

Some of the NGOs working with Arunthathiyars will be approached to conduct intervention programmes similar to that carried out in the study. The exercise will bring about realization of the importance of good nutrition and mental health among the adolescents for their well being.

The help of government, national and international non - governmental organizations and the community will be taken to discuss and come out with concrete plans for the well being of adolescents.

The three main aspects of well-being considered in the study were education, personal life and nutrition. The major or key factor influencing was found to be economical constraints, among some of the others like parent's education, occupation, and adolescent's perceptions on their socio economic status. The SPSS intervention programme was beneficial in terms of making the adolescents critically analyse and explore possible alternatives to the problems. This was an attempt to build confidence in adolescents to face problems and seek solutions. Therefore such programmes along with intense life skills training would guide and support the adolescents to plan their future and wellbeing.