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Purpose of the journal

The ***Journal of Social Policy, Social Change and Development*** is Academic journal of Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University Journal are published articles on all dimensions of social policy, social change and development. the academical, phillosophical, theoretical, empirical and methodological intuitive understanging and knowledge building in the social policy, social change and development arena. Also, welcome articles from young researchers, Ph.D scholars, and academicians to submit articles to the journal.

The journal scheduled to be published twice a year:
Issue 1: January – June
Issue 2: July - December

Dean Forwarding Message

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that I present the third issue of the *Journal of Social Policy, Social Change, and Development* for December 2024. As we approach the conclusion of another remarkable year, this issue serves as a testament to the critical role of scholarship in addressing the pressing challenges of our time.

This edition brings together an exceptional collection of articles that delve into the multifaceted dimensions of social policy and its intersection with development and change. The featured contributions span a wide range of topics, including emerging global threats, innovative welfare strategies, transformative social work practices, and critical analyses of policies aimed at reducing inequality and enhancing social mobility.

As societies across the globe face unprecedented disruptions—climate crises, geopolitical shifts, and the lingering effects of the pandemic—this journal remains a platform for thought leadership and interdisciplinary dialogue. It is our collective responsibility as scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to bridge gaps, inspire action, and contribute to sustainable solutions that uphold human dignity and equity.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and editorial team who have dedicated their time and expertise to ensure the quality and relevance of this publication. Your efforts are integral to advancing the discourse on social policy and development.

As you explore this issue, I hope you find inspiration and insight that will inform your work and ignite meaningful dialogue within your communities. May this journal continue to serve as a beacon for progressive thought and transformative change.

Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement with the *Journal of Social Policy, Social Change, and Development*.

Wishing you all a fruitful end to 2024 and a hopeful start to the new year ahead.

Warm regards,

Associate. Prof. Dr. Auschala Chalayonnavin
Dean of Faculty of Social Administration
Thammasat University
Bangkok, Thailand

Editorial Letter

Dear Readers,

It is with great pride and anticipation that we present the December 2024 issue of the *Journal of Social Policy, Social Change, and Development*. In this edition, we showcase five thought-provoking articles that explore diverse yet interconnected dimensions of social challenges, resilience, and transformative policy interventions.

The articles featured in this issue exemplify the journal's commitment to amplifying voices from across the globe, each offering critical insights into the complexities of social structures and systems. From institutional analysis to gender and caste dynamics, these works contribute significantly to advancing our understanding of pressing global issues.

Guillermo E. Sanhueza's article, *"Social Exclusion, Institutional Deterioration, and Barriers after Release among Incarcerated Individuals in Chile,"* provides a compelling examination of the structural barriers faced by formerly incarcerated individuals and highlights the urgent need for reformative institutional practices.

Nishita Chatradhi's piece, *"Empowering Ambitions: The Role of Public Policy in Nurturing Female Entrepreneurial Aspirations,"* delves into the intersection of gender and policy, offering an inspiring exploration of how public policies can empower women to realize their entrepreneurial potential.

In *"It's a Warzone" - The Nature of School-Based Violence in South Africa,* Poppy Masinga and Sipho Sibanda illuminate the stark realities of violence within educational settings and the profound implications for the well-being of students and communities.

Bharati Chaudhari and Raju Kendre article, *"Caste, Gender, and English Language: Opportunities and Challenges in English Language Education for Women in Vidarbha Region, India,"* addresses the interplay of social hierarchies and education, presenting a nuanced analysis of linguistic access and empowerment for marginalized women.

Finally, *"Deinstitutionalization during Disruption: Supporting Families and Children amid the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nepal,"* by Sanjeev Dahal, Anju Pun, Dhan Bahadur Lama, and Rija Maharjan, offers valuable insights into the challenges of deinstitutionalization and the resilience of families navigating disruption during the pandemic.

This issue reflects the journal's mission to serve as a platform for critical discourse and interdisciplinary collaboration. The authors' dedication to addressing systemic inequities and advocating for inclusive development resonates deeply with our readers' commitment to fostering positive social change.

On behalf of the editorial team, I extend our sincere gratitude to the contributors, peer reviewers, and the entire publication team for their invaluable efforts in bringing this issue to fruition. Together, we continue to nurture a space for knowledge exchange and transformative impact.

We invite you, our readers, to engage deeply with these articles, share your reflections, and carry forward the conversations they inspire. Let us collectively contribute to creating a more equitable and just world.

Warm regards,

Dr Mahesh Chougule
Editor-in-Chief
Journal of Social Policy, Social Change and Development
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Social Exclusion, Institutional Deterioration, and Barriers After Release Among Incarcerated Individuals in Chile

Guillermo E. Sanhueza[1]

Abstract

This study analyzes how social exclusion, prison experiences and barriers after release altogether conspire against a successful re-entry of a sample of incarcerated individuals in Chile. A methodological combination of reviewing previous literature on social exclusion of the incarcerated, the analysis of administrative data and prison surveys, along with geocoded data was employed. We analyzed the data based on descriptive statistics, logistic regression models (to predict recidivism or not), and the creation of maps to examine the possible overlap between recidivism of released individuals and social disadvantaged areas of different cities in Chile. Our main findings suggest that incarcerated individuals had higher levels of social exclusion before entering to prison; once incarcerated, they experience harsh conditions that amplify initial handicaps; finally, after release, a 43.2% of incarcerated individuals in our cohort was sent to prison again, consistent with national estimates. In terms of predictors, our findings show the crucial role of prison officers and guards in reducing recidivism, especially through a well-functioning facility, and by establishing an appropriate relationship with the incarcerated. On the other hand, variables predicting recidivism were experiencing boredom inside the facility, being male, young, having been incarcerated before and having previously lived in state "protective" services. At the territorial level, there was an overlap between territorial disadvantage and recidivism, a trend that increased as the size of the city enlarged. In terms of policy implications, our findings suggest the importance of departing from an idea of individually-determined risk when attempting to manage anti-recidivism strategies, which should enhance indicators and experiences of social inclusion at different stages: strengthening diversion programs (before), enhancing program access (during incarceration), and coordinating services between prisons and local governments previous to the release (after incarceration).

Keywords: Social exclusion, Recidivism, Predictors, Chile

Introduction

Latin America is a region of the world marked by persistent inequality and social exclusion (Schardgrodsky & Freira, 2023), a phenomenon that has contributed to the difficult situation of crime and violence in the region (Bergman & Fondevila, 2021). Thus, it is not surprising that in the case of Chile, public opinion polls place crime and drug trafficking as one of the most important concerns of citizens (INE, 2024). At the same time, the phenomenon of transnational organized crime has contributed to a mutation in the characteristics and complexity of crime in the country (Alveal, 2020).

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At the same time, incarcerated people tend to be among the most disadvantaged members of Western, capitalist societies (Wacquant, 2001), which is also reflected in Chile. In this regard, the study by Fundación Paz Ciudadana and Fundación San Carlos del Maipo (2016) constitutes a fundamental piece in the generation of empirical evidence of this relationship. They found that imprisoned individuals present –even before incarceration—handicaps in various domains including educational level, employment, access to healthcare, salaries, housing conditions, social security, among others.

Besides, with Petersilia (2011) we argue that practically all prisoners, once their sentence has been served, will return to the free environment. For this reason, it becomes relevant to examine the process of leaving prison and returning to the community, analyzing criminal recidivism and its covariates, in order to avoid the vicious circle of leaving prison, falling into poverty and reoffending (Western et al, 2014).

Nevertheless, predominant approaches to address crime in Latin America have tended to emphasize punitive measures, to the detriment of more social development or community-oriented strategies (Morales, 2012). In other words, punishment is applied upon individuals assuming that, on its own, it will be able to deter individuals from committing new crimes.

Previous works on recidivism in Latin America have not investigated much into institutional aspects of the facilities where the subjects served their sentences, such as the conditions of confinement or the influence of the prison environment on the reintegration processes (Auty & Liebling, 2020). Additionally, the territorial perspective has been scarcely incorporated in the analysis of recidivism, reaching only a regional level.

The logic result of highly disadvantaged individuals locked up for a certain time under detrimental prison conditions would be most likely an increased recidivism, as social exclusion is amplified, not reduced by mere punishment. Thus, this article, based on the concept of social exclusion (Castells, 2008), the empirical work of Fundación Paz Ciudadana (2016) and data from a Fondecyt study conducted in 2017 (Fondecyt, 2015), hopes to contribute to the debate by analyzing the prison recidivism of a cohort of individuals and its relationship with confinement conditions and the territories to which they return.

Our main research questions were, then: i) what are the levels of recidivism in the cohort of participating inmates? ii) is recidivism of the cohort linked somehow to aspects of quality of life during their incarceration? and iii) is there a relationship between territorial social exclusion and recidivism? In other words, in this article the relationship between social exclusion and recidivism is explored in a sample of incarcerated individuals, by considering previous background, prison conditions once they are incarcerated, and territorial disadvantage where they return once released from prison.

Literature Review

Social exclusion in people deprived of liberty before prison

Castells (2008) points out that social exclusion is a process that systematically does not allow the autonomous subsistence of a group of people, since the institutions and values agreed upon in a given context determine a certain social level. Thus, the excluded become vulnerable, have difficulties in accessing a good quality of life, and face various barriers to exert various cultural, educational, or labor rights.

From the University of Oxford, Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud (2002) explain that social exclusion provides a multidimensional, dynamic and multilevel approach to the nature of deprivation, emphasizing that social exclusion is not only conditioned by economic income, but is a deeper social phenomenon. Thus, exclusion is not the same as inequality, since it encompasses areas such as poor health, geographic location, cultural identification and the discrimination that these areas may entail, where issues such as polarization and differentiation in society influence exclusion.

To understand exclusion, it is important to consider the interactions and confluences of various types of influences from people's past and present must be recognized, as well as the different levels within society - individual, family, local, national and even global. Derived from this complexity, it arises the difficulty in measuring it. In this sense, Eizaguirre and Pérez de Armiño (2000) identify some of its fundamental dimensions:

a) A structural or economic dimension, referring to the lack of material resources that affects subsistence, derived from exclusion from the labor market.

b) A contextual or social dimension, characterized by the dissociation of social ties, disaffiliation and the weakening of the relational network; in other words, the lack of integration into family life and the community to which one belongs.

c) A subjective or personal dimension, characterized by the breakdown of communication, the weakness of meaning and the erosion of vital dynamics (trust, identity, reciprocity, etc.).

Now, when speaking specifically about conditions experienced by people deprived of liberty in Chile, we have that the authors Añaños and Jiménez (2016) consider that people deprived of liberty can suffer from exclusion at three "moments": i) the different socioeconomic disadvantages that are experienced before entering prison; ii) during imprisonment and finally, iii) when the label of 'ex-convict' creates difficulties at the time of release and returning to the free environment in terms of their social, work, family and personal environment.

Given this reality, two organizations "Fundación Paz Ciudadana" and "Fundación San Carlos de Maipo" conducted a study with the purpose of empirically demonstrating the handicaps experienced by people deprived of liberty in Chile (2016). In this work, strong empirical correlations were established between various indicators of social exclusion and imprisonment, where a strong bidirectional component was observed: on the one hand, there is a person who, being more exposed to social exclusion, is more likely to commit a crime and end up with a prison sentence; on the other hand, when sentenced to a prison sentence, the person's living conditions and career worsen even more, further increasing their situation of exclusion (p. 20). In this way, a rift is caused and amplified between "them" and "the society" in which they live.

In the same vein, according to a study carried out by the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) in the United Kingdom, it was found that most people who had entered the prison system already had a history of having lived during their life with at least one of the factors of social exclusion, including handicaps regarding educational absenteeism and poorer outcomes, had a history of institutional stays when they were children, or higher chances to be unemployed before entering a penitentiary.

Once these already-disadvantaged individuals are sentenced to serving prison time, they do so by entering into an overcrowded prison system, with scarce programming to offer to inmates. As a result, incarcerated individuals usually experience further deterioration and exclusion.

Serving prison time in Chile: poor prison conditions and further human deterioration

Currently, the prison system in Chile serves more than 60,000 incarcerated individuals, divided between accused (30%) and sentenced individuals (70%), with men making up 92% of the prison population (about 63% of them convicted of property crimes); women, 8% (just over half of them convicted of drug-related crimes) (Gendarmería de Chile, 2024). Most of them also have a series of social disadvantages compared to the general population (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2016).

Amid the current situation of public insecurity (INE, 2024), Chilean prisons seem to be more stressed in terms of the growth of the prison population, increased overcrowding and greater precariousness. Part of the problem comes from a way of understanding the response to crime based on more prison (Morales, 2012), without considering that every individual who is sent to prison will eventually leave (Petersilia, 2011) and will probably do so more disadvantaged and prone to reoffending than when he entered, to the extent that he does not achieve adequate rehabilitation (INDH, 2016).

Indeed, Chilean prisons today face a series of problems related to overcrowding and overpopulation, lack of adequate legal assistance and minimum conditions to meet diverse needs (Sánchez & Piñol, 2015), poor infrastructure (Castro, 2019), violence among inmates (Sanhueza et al, 2019), institutional mistreatment of prisoners by guards (INDH, 2016), limited access to reintegration programs for persons deprived of liberty (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2016) and a precarious legal status (Arriagada & Rochow, 2015).

Furthermore, prisons and their equipment are expensive to maintain. For example, in the Budget Directorate's Quarterly Budget Execution Report for November 2020, incarceration—considering only the expenditure of the penitentiary institution—represented an annual cost to the country that exceeded 475 billion pesos in 2020. It is also estimated that this spending has been growing at an annual rate close to 8% in recent years (Dipres, 2021).

In sum, already-disadvantaged individuals put in prisons usually serve their sentences under precarious, overcrowded facilities that offer scarce possibilities in terms of meaningful treatment or programming aimed to generate an effective rehabilitation.

Life after prison: social exclusion and high recidivism

Although what constitutes a proper rehabilitation process is a matter of debate because different indicators can be established based on the criteria and definitions adopted by governments, prison authorities or academics (Travis, 2016), many argue that one of the most important criteria should be the prevention and reduction of recidivism, or a relapse into criminal activity by an ex-prisoner, as measured by a return to prison for a new offense (Latessa et al., 2020). Nevertheless, reducing recidivism has been considered a fundamental objective for maintaining public safety (Skeem & Lowenkamp, 2016) and for evaluating the success of rehabilitation efforts (Bird et al., 2017; Peirce & Marmolejo, 2016; Spivak & Sharp, 2008).

In Chile, criminal recidivism has become a problem that affects people, their safety and society in a transversal way, since there is a very limited capacity for the reintegration of people deprived of liberty. Furthermore, not only does the percentage of recidivism seem to be high [43%] (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2013), but it would also be a more complex criminality, given its exposure to criminal perfection within prison (Alveal, 2020; Dias, 2011).

Individual-level variables and recidivism

According to comparative empirical evidence, various individual-level variables have been associated with criminal recidivism, including gender, type of crime committed, age at onset of criminal career, age at entering prison, juvenile justice history, membership in criminal gangs, among others (Lindsey et al., 2017; Dooley et al., 2014; Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2006).

Likewise, finding and maintaining employment have been identified as key elements in preventing recidivism, especially when these have been encouraged in prison (Bhuller et al., 2020). Furthermore, once released, the subject not only bears the stigma of having been in prison (Pager, 2003), but is also objectively less qualified than other candidates for available positions in the labor market, increasing the chances of reoffending (Western et al., 2014). In Chile, the majority of prisoners have significant educational handicaps and serious deficiencies in terms of work skills (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2016).

Regarding health and mental health, estimates from other countries indicate that nearly half of incarcerated people would have at least one mental health problem during their incarceration, with mental illness and developmental disabilities being the most prevalent among inmates (Begun, Early & Hodge, 2016). In addition, a large proportion of them would suffer from various chronic diseases such as hypertension, asthma, depression and hepatitis (Visher et al., 2004). In Chile, it is estimated that nearly two thirds of inmates would have antisocial personality disorder and just over 10% would suffer from psychopathy (León-Mayer et al., 2014). Added to this is the phenomenon of institutional prisonization, which adds significant obstacles to post-penitentiary adjustment (Wallace & Wan, 2020).

High rates of substance abuse and mental illness are often massive problems among incarcerated people. In the United States, for example, the prevalence of these disorders is higher than in the general population and more than half of state prisoners have indicated that they had been under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of committing the crime and nearly three-quarters of released prisoners had extensive drug and/or alcohol histories (La Vigne et al., 2004). Thus, adequate and timely provision of mental health services becomes a critical factor for those leaving prison (Visher et al., 2017).

Securing a place to sleep is also crucial to avoid the possibility of recidivism (Hall et al., 2016). Although many ex-prisoners find a place to live thanks to the support of a family member, relative or partner, a significant group of them have little chance of accessing their relatives' housing as a result of their lack of contact or communication in prison, due to long-term sentences or because relatives cannot have them in their homes for various reasons (Anderson-Facile, 2009).

Prison environment and recidivism

Regarding the study of the prison environment and its influence on future recidivism, the work of Tobón (2022) is one of the few available for Latin America. One of its central findings was that a better prison environment was related to lower recidivism, through a greater availability of reintegration programs and other processes that generated an environment prone to change inside. At the same time, Harding (2014) adds that the well-implemented reintegration programs had a greater effect in prisons with a better environment. Auty and Liebling (2020) found that recidivism decreased—controlling for inmate characteristics—when prisons offered good indicators, particularly in the dimensions of "humanity" and "decency." In the opposite direction, Butler and colleagues (2020) found a positive relationship between having been in a punishment cell and future recidivism.

Woessner and Schwedler (2014), in a follow-up of just under 100 former inmates in Germany, found preliminary empirical evidence that a positive perception of inmates regarding the prison environment would be related to positive changes in criminogenic needs and, therefore, to lower recidivism. However, the authors point out that the study of the prison environment and its influence on future recidivism is a point still pending in the literature.

The return of former inmates to local communities and territories

Once released, incarcerated individuals return to their communities, usually located in poor neighborhoods (Godoy & Sanhueza, 2022). From a territorial point of view, the prison service has a scarce network of institutional support and collaboration for the formerly incarcerated (Waissbluth, 2021). If we add to this that a large part of the prison population comes from (and returns to) neighborhoods with severe under-inclusion (Mascareño, 2017; Godoy & Sanhueza, 2022) and high territorial complexity (Urquieta et al., 2017), reintegration becomes an improbability that requires incorporating a territorial and inter-systemic perspective (Mascareño, 2014).

Nevertheless, the impact of territory on recidivism has not been empirically studied in such a strong way (Jonson & Cullen, 2015), especially in Latin America, where empirical studies on penitentiary and post-penitentiary matters are scarce (Bergman & Fondevila, 2021). To this must be added an individualistic view of recidivism, associated with the idea of individually determined risk (Drawve & McNeeley, 2021; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). In the Chilean case, for more than a decade now there has been talk of under-included or lagging areas (Mascareño, 2014; Urquieta, Mariñez and Jorquera, 2017), where there is an absence of conditions to exercise fundamental rights and it opens the possibility of accessing non-institutional avenues of inclusion, where crime is constituted as a functional alternative to institutional inclusion mechanisms, obtaining returns that, by other means, become highly unlikely.

Thus, our study tries to fill put part of the gaps in the literature and praxis of rehabilitation in Latin America by asking how individual, institutional, and territorial factors might affect recidivism in a sample of incarcerated individuals serving time in 5 large facilities in Chile, according to the following detail.

Methods

This study of recidivism and social exclusion had the following guiding questions:

i) What are the levels of recidivism in the cohort of participating inmates?

ii) Is the recidivism of the cohort related to aspects of quality of life during their incarceration?

iii) Is there a relationship between territorial social exclusion and recidivism?

Participants and Procedures

To achieve the stated objectives, a fundamentally quantitative methodology of data collection and analysis was used. On the one hand, the results of the study [this information has been temporarily removed for peer review] were used, by employing the Measuring Quality of Prison Life [MQPL] questionnaire previously adapted for the Chilean reality by national researchers [information temporarily removed for peer review] and used in the United Kingdom as the central instrument to

measure the quality of life in prison.

Fieldwork was conducted between 2016 and 2017 in five large prisons in the country (CP Valparaíso, CP Rancagua, CCP Biobio, CCP Colina I, CPF Santiago). A total of 1,448 people deprived of liberty in these facilities were surveyed.

For the [this information has been temporarily removed for peer review] project, convicted individuals were selected, located in one of the five selected facilities, and who were a maximum of two years away from being released due to serving their sentence. This requirement was met by just over 3,000 individuals, becoming the universe from which the samples were extracted.

From this universe, a total of 1,448 individuals deprived of liberty were randomly surveyed with the MQPL questionnaire between 2016 and 2017. Of these, 1,171 gave their name in the questionnaires (80.8% of the total sample), so that this group became the reference point with respect to which the levels of recidivism were calculated through administrative data requested from the Gendarmerie.

Instruments

• Measuring Quality of Prison Life [MQPL] (Liebling, 2004; Sanhueza, Ortúzar and Valenzuela, 2015)

Between 2016 and 2017, the perception of the sample of people deprived of liberty regarding the prison environment of the penal facility in which they were held at that time was evaluated, using the MQPL instrument (Sanhueza & Pérez, 2019). This instrument had already been validated for Chile (Sanhueza, Ortúzar & Valenzuela, 2015) and considered a variety of areas of what constitutes life in prison, such as i) socio-demographic aspects, ii) perception of prison infrastructure, iii) access to reintegration programs, iv) interpersonal relationships with gendarmes and staff, v) interpersonal relationships and treatment between inmates, vi) the prison regime, vii) the perception of the overall functioning of the prison, including two open questions. Finally, items on the personal characterization of the respondents were included (for example, attendance at centers of the National Service for Minors (Sename).

• Administrative data from the Gendarmerie of Chile (individual characteristics of the responding inmates)

In order to analyze individual variables of the responding inmates, administrative data from the records of the Gendarmerie of Chile were used. We are working in conjunction with the Statistics Unit, dependent on the Subdirectorate of Reintegration. Among the variables consulted are the degree of criminal commitment, age, type of crime, previous recidivism, length of stay in prison, criminal commitment score (proxy for criminal history), conduct within the prison, and the gender of the individual.

• Territorial, secondary data – Priority Areas of Social Action [APAS]

Given the impetus and expansion that has taken place in recent years in Chile in relation to the existence, quality and sophistication of data at the territorial level, a survey of the existing databases (whether publicly or non-publicly accessible) related to the territories was carried out, in order to use and/or generate reliable territorial information that would serve as input for this recidivism project, in order to characterize the territories of return of former inmates. Of particular relevance in this regard will be typologies already available, such as, for example, the Priority Areas of Social Action (APAS) of the Ministry of Social Development.

Based on data from the Ministry of Social Development, the so-called priority areas for social action or APAS were identified on the regional maps, defined as disadvantaged territories from the point of view of socioeconomic indicators, social dynamics and other attributes, identifying priority areas at the communal and intra-communal level, through methods and processes of georeferencing of quantifiable indicators contained in various sources of public information, especially in the Social Registry of Households (RSH). The purpose of the APAS is to support informed decision-making on public policies in the territory (Ministry of Social Development, 2017).

Ethics Procedures

In terms of ethics procedures, the ethical principles and responsibilities stipulated in the Singapore Declaration on Research Integrity were strictly followed. In this regard, authorization was first requested from the Prison Service Directorate for this study. At the same time, the consent of the persons deprived of liberty who were surveyed within the five facilities visited was obtained.

The nature of this longitudinal study required that the MQPL survey be confidential but not anonymous, which is why the name and surname of the participants was consulted, which was duly informed and explained to the potential participants before obtaining their informed consent. Likewise, the participants were explained in detail the purposes of the study; their rights as participants; the potential risks or inconveniences; the benefits of participating; the conditions regarding the use, handling and storage of the information collected.

To minimize risks of misuse of the data collected, measures were applied such as: i) encrypting the information related to the survey; ii) the data were stored in the University' cloud system (no physical information with individual data was kept by the Gendarmerie) iii) the individual data were de-identified (and encrypted) in order to prevent unauthorized persons from accessing the individual data.

Data analysis

The data analysis of this study included the presentation of descriptive statistics for each of the dimensions considered (characteristics of the individuals; perception of moral performance of the facilities; territorial variables where they return; and levels of recidivism).

In addition, a logistic regression model was employed to analyze the covariates of the dependent variable 'recidivism', in this case. The dependent variable was understood as a new incarceration time, and it was operationalized as a binary variable [1: yes; 0: no]. A series of predictors were also included, based on relevant literature (age, gender, type of prison, infrastructure composite, program access composite, various variables from prison regime; different variables from relationship with guards and fellow inmates, among others).

Since the MQPL survey applied in 2015 kept the names of the responding inmates in approximately 81% of the cases, it was possible to link the data from said MQPL questionnaire with administrative data present in the prison service databases of the individuals deprived of liberty who participated in the Fondecyt study. A follow-up period of 24 months was implemented after the cohort was surveyed while imprisoned.

Based on the administrative records, the dependent variable (outcome) 'recidivism' – measured as a new incarceration – could then be established for the individuals in the cohort of 1,171 named

respondents. Thus, a first result of this study was to obtain the average levels of recidivism for the respondents.

Besides, based on administrative data about individuals' addresses, georeferencing techniques were used to identify (and mask) the exact address for the cohort. Later, the research team produced various maps where an approximate address of each releasee was displayed as a dot, in either blue color (for identifying the non-recidivists) or red color (for identifying those who had recidivated). At the same time, territorial polygons were marked in order to identify the APAS, as a proxy for territorial disadvantage.

Since keeping the names of the participants was critical to follow them up later and to complete this recidivism, exploratory study, we put a large amount of effort in motivating the sample of incarcerated individuals not only to participate but also to give us their names. Our response rate in general was very good, achieving approximately an 81% of response rate with names. Individuals who refused to either participate in the survey or not providing us with names were not replaced. No further estimation procedure of missing values were applied, either.

Results

Recidivism of the cohort

To measure the perception of moral performance, a version of the MQPL (Measuring Quality of Prison Life) questionnaire (Sanhueza et al., 2015) adapted to the Chilean context was used. The questionnaire consisted of 60 questions that included various dimensions: i) socio-demographic, ii) perception of infrastructure, iii) access to programs, iv) treatment between inmates, v) treatment and interpersonal relations between prisoner and inmate, vi) the prison regime, vii) the functioning of the prison, viii) giving meaning to confinement and resilience capacity. Open questions –of general evaluation—were added to these at the end of the questionnaire. Recidivism rates of the cohort.

Regarding the recidivism of the cohort analyzed, the data provided by the Gendarmerie show that of the 1,171 cases that had identifiers, a total of 506 individuals were admitted to a unit of the closed system (prison) for a new crime, which is equivalent to 43.2% of the ex-prisoners of the cohort for whom complete information was available. The details appear in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample sizes, identifiable surveys, and recidivism percentages by facility

Prison	Sample size (real)	Surveys with names	% of surveys with names	Recidivists (among those with names)	Percentage of recidivism identified individuals
CP Valparaíso	458	306	66,8%	145	47,3%
CPF Santiago	169	155	91,7%	36	23,2%
CCP Colina I	398	368	92,4%	151	41,0%
CCP Biobio	189	174	92,0%	97	55,7%
CP Rancagua	234	168	71,7%	77	45,8%
Total	1.448	1.171	80,8%	506	43,2%

Regarding the prison of origin of the 506 repeat offenders, the number of repeat offenders and the percentage of repeat offenders were distributed as follows: 151 cases for Colina I (41%); 145 from the Valparaíso Complex (47.3%); 97 for the Biobio CCP (55.7%); 77 cases for the Rancagua Penitentiary Complex (45.8%); and 36 cases in the Santiago Women's Penitentiary Center (23.2%). Also, while in three of the five facilities the percentage of surveys with names exceeded 90%, in the two remaining prisons (CP Valparaíso and CP Rancagua), the percentages decreased to just over two thirds of respondents.

Relationship between experiences of imprisonment (moral performance of the prison) and recidivism

When the perception of inmates was analyzed in relation to future recidivism, our logistic regression model showed that several predictors were significant. This was the case, for example, with infrastructure and habitability. In this sense, the multivariate analyses showed a statistical association between a better perception of infrastructure and a lower probability of future recidivism.

However, when more variables were included in the model, the influence of infrastructure was no longer statistically significant, which suggests that other variables of prison life matter more in the long term. The results of this last model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Logistic, multivariate regression model for "recidivism". Individual and institutional-life predictors

Logistic Regression	Observations				921	
	LR chi2(13)				118.12	
	Prob > chi2				0.000	
Log likelihood -575.024	Pseudo R2				0.0931	
Predictors for Recidivism	Odds Ratio	Std. error	Z	P>z	% or value in sample	Range
Stay in protective services in childhood	1.741	.254	3.81	0.000	46.4%	0-100%
Previous incarceration	1.620	.247	3.16	0.002	65.7%	0-100%
Gender: Male	2.107	.464	3.38	0.001	84.1%	0-100%
Infrastructure (Composite)	.988	.014	-0.75	0.451	3.55 (0.90)	1-5a
Program Access (Index)	1.011	.012	0.90	0.370	2.72 (0.91)	1-5a
In this prison I get along with other inmates	.900	.066	-1.42	0.156	3.67 (1.11)	1-5b
I get along with guards of my cellblock	.822	.055	-2.90	0.004	3.22 (1.44)	1-5b
I get help from guards or personnel if I need it	1.178	.085	2.26	0.024	2.65 (1.39)	1-5b
I am treated fairly here and My rights are respected	1.173	.085	2.19	0.028	2.51 (1.33)	1-5b
My life in this prison is	1.133	.068	2.06	0.040	3.82	1-5b

Boring					(1.25)	
There is so much drug consumption here	.892	.040	-2.49	0.013	3.14 (1.54)	1-5b
You're sent to punishment cell for anything	1.106	.062	1.80	0.072	3.40 (1.38)	1-5b
I feel this prison works relatively well	.849	.063	-2.20	0.028	2.54 (1.27)	1-5b
Constant	.256	.171	-2.04	0.042		

Another relevant sub-dimension was the treatment among inmates themselves. Here, the analyses showed that items such as "getting along with other inmates" was associated with less recidivism; on the contrary, "fearing for physical integrity" was positively associated with greater future recidivism. This is consistent with recent findings that show a more porous relationship between neighborhoods and prison, leading to a continuum of violence between the two (Brander & Sanhueza, 2023; Alveal, 2020).

Regarding the treatment of officers, there were several items that showed a significant association with recidivism. Thus, the variables "the officers trust me," "I get along well with the gendarmes in my cell block," and "I get help from guards or personnel if I need it" exhibited negative coefficients, so that a better perception for these items was related to a lower probability of reoffending.

Regarding the prison regime, variables such as "in this prison I receive fair treatment and my rights are respected" and "this prison works well" were inversely associated with the prediction of recidivism. In the opposite direction, the variable "here each gendarme makes his own rules" was shown to be directly associated with the chances of reoffending.

Regarding access to reintegration programs, when these were analyzed as the only dimension predicting recidivism, only the variable "access to paid work" proved to be significant in predicting lower recidivism. The rest of the programs (job training, social assistance, psychological care, penal school, drug workshop) did not show a significant association with recidivism.

Territorial conditions and recidivism of the cohort

For the territorial analysis, based on the administrative data of the Gendarmerie that contained the addresses of the individuals who had been in prison, a coordinate analysis was carried out and then a georeferencing of the addresses, managing to map 950 of the initial 1,179 cases (regions V, RM, VI and VIII).

In the O'Higgins region, as shown in Figure #1, although there is an association between territorial disadvantage (identified by the purple color on the map), there is an important focus of concentration in the northeast sector of the city, immediately towards the mountain range of the old route 5. However, the level of overlap between APAS and recidivism for this region will be lower compared to larger cities.

Figure 1 Return of former inmates – O'Higgins Region (urban area)

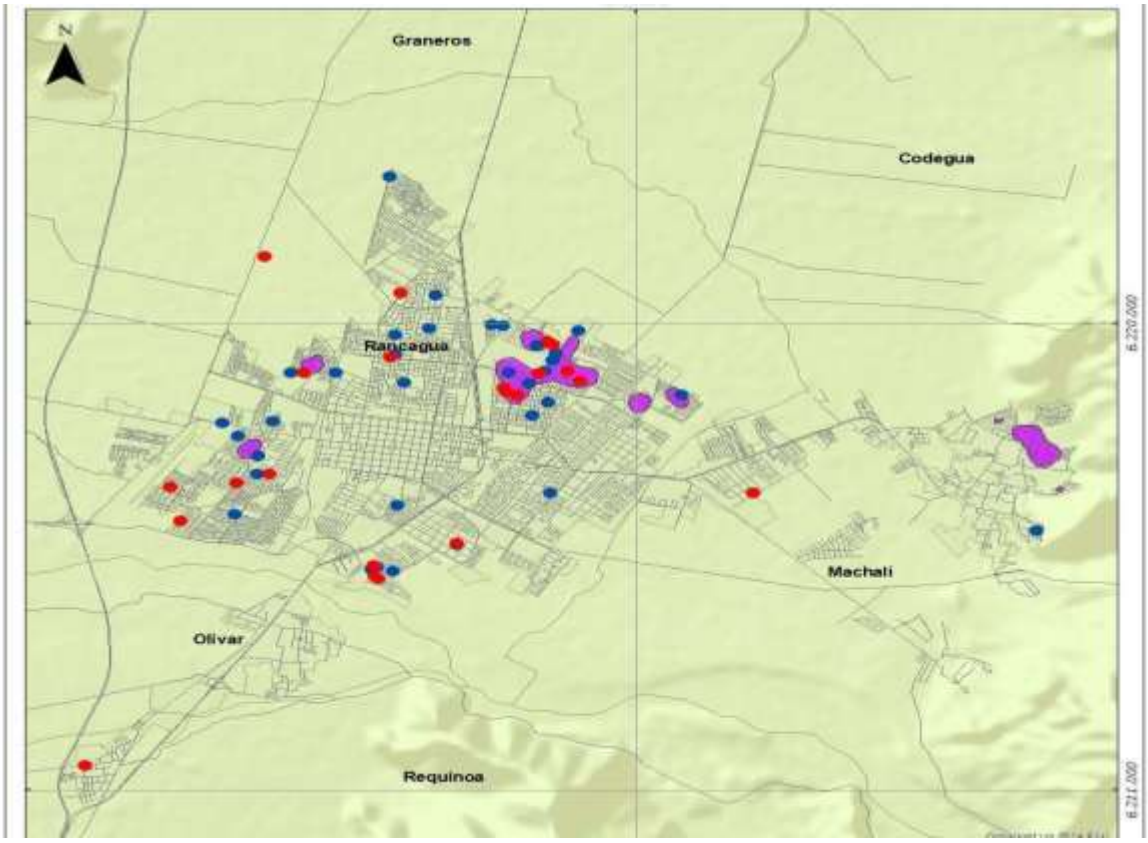
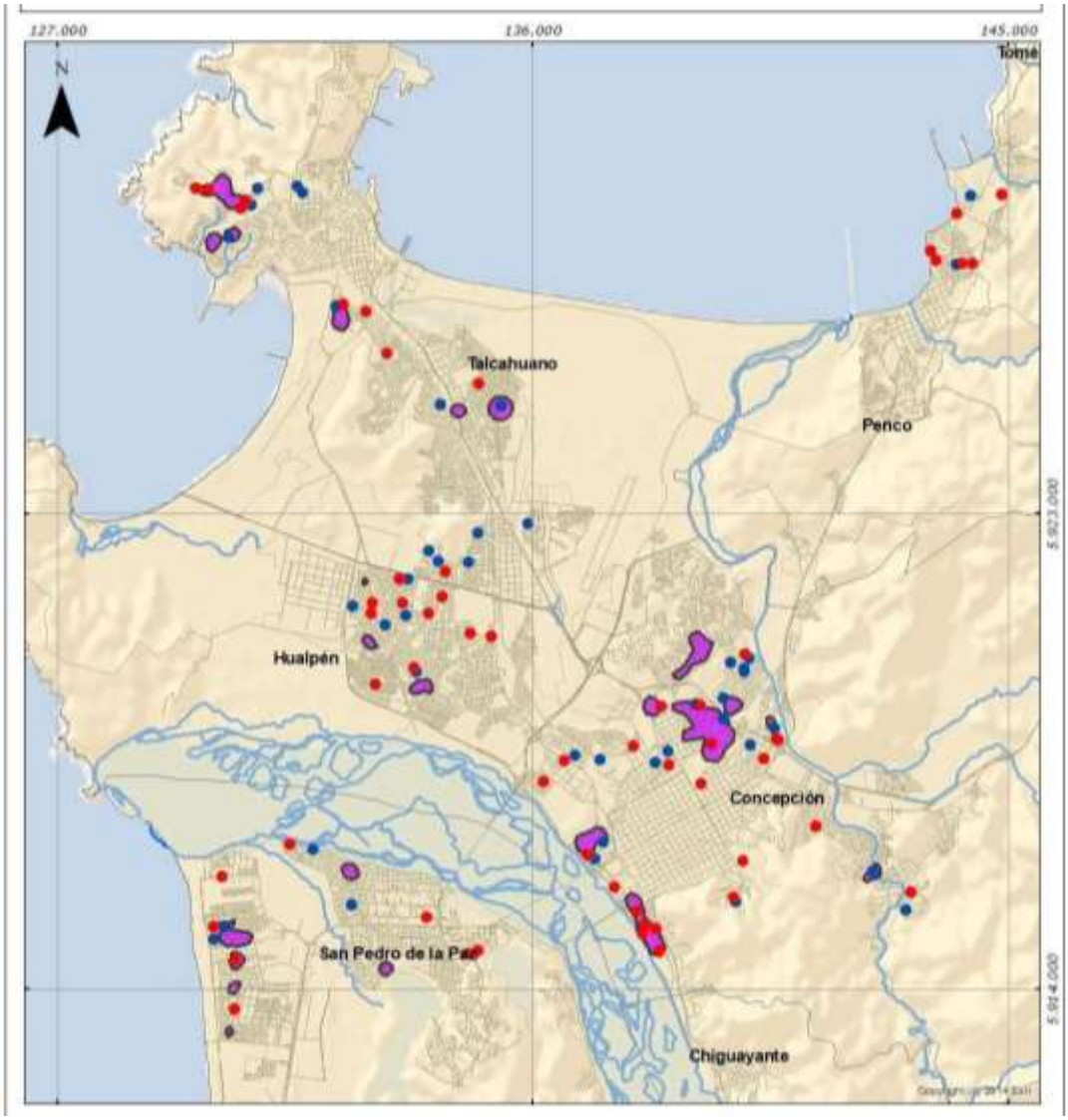
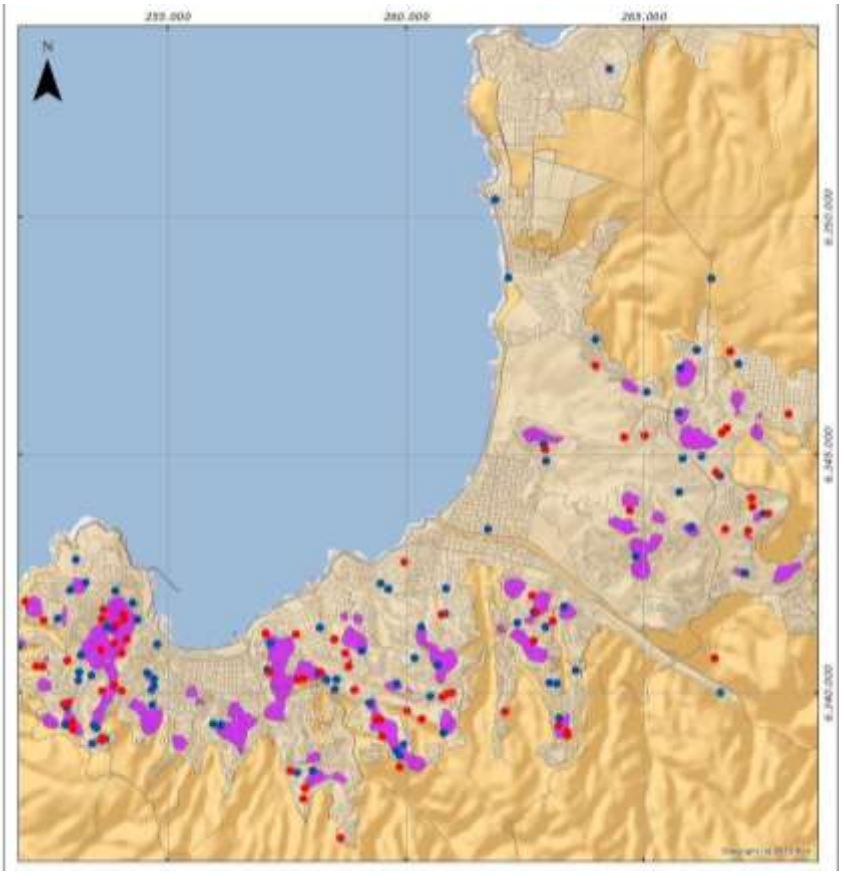


Figure 2 Return of former inmates – Biobío Region



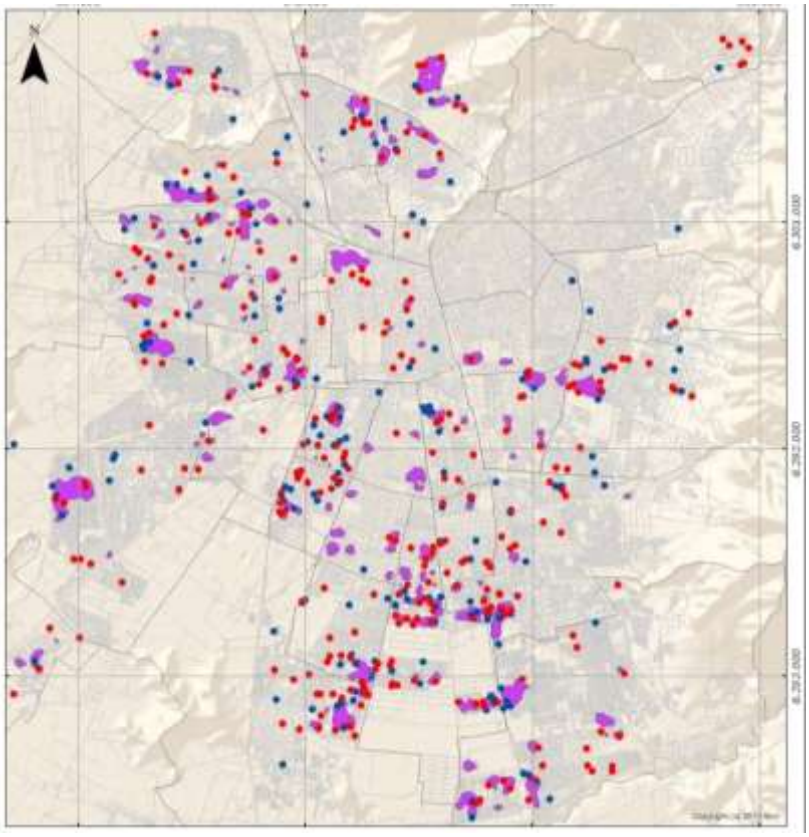
In the case of Greater Concepción and the Biobío Region (Figure 2), the map shows a greater number of foci spread across the region. Thus, for example, it is possible to identify concentrations of ex-convicts (repeat offenders and not) spread across sectors close to the riverbank in Concepción; the commune of Hualpén; urban Talcahuano and its coastal hills; the area of Penco-Tomé; and the sector near Coronel. The overlap of APAS with repeat offenders, meanwhile, is observed a little more marked than in the VI region, especially for Coronel, Talcahuano (hills) and the Biobío River bank.

Figure 3 Return of former inmates – Valparaíso Region



In the case of Region V, especially Valparaíso and Viña del Mar (Figure #3), the map shows a stronger association between disadvantaged territory and the return of ex-convicts (purple APAS areas coinciding strongly with red and blue dots). Likewise, in the case of repeat offenders (red dots), the level of overlap with the APAS is even more marked than in Regions VI and VIII (Figures 1 and 2), especially for the commune of Valparaíso and its hills. Figure #3 in its lower left part shows two additional territorial foci of recidivism concentration: San Antonio and the Los Andes/San Felipe sector.

Figure 4 return of former inmates – Metropolitan Region (Santiago)



When the Metropolitan Region is considered, as shown in Figure #4, there is a greater tendency towards overlap between having spent time in prison (both red and blue dots) and returning to disadvantaged neighborhoods – APAS, in purple – especially in the north, northwest, south, and southwest of Greater Santiago. As for the recidivism situation, this tends to concentrate more markedly than in smaller cities – or even in Valparaíso – around the APAS territories, with special emphasis not only on certain communes, but rather on specific sectors and neighborhoods of the city.

In other words, as the city size increases, the relationship between territorial disadvantage – expressed through the APAS areas—and recidivism becomes stronger. This suggests an urgent call for a better communication and coordination between the Chilean prison service and regional, and local authorities in order to better 'manage' the services that individuals going out of prison will need, sharing information about incarcerated individuals' characteristics, and their various needs (i.e. health, mental health, job training, etc.).

In sum, the main results of the multivariate, logistic regression showed that future recidivism in the cohort was related to certain individual variables such as gender (male), previous incarceration, and having stayed in a "protectional" system in childhood. In addition, from an institutional standpoint, being in a prison that works well and having good relationships with guards were predictors of less, future recidivism. When territorial characteristics are taken into account, the maps showed an overlap between disadvantaged areas of large cities and concentrations of recidivism.

Conclusion and Discussion

Our results seem to suggest the importance of intervening upon various dimensions (individual trajectories, institutional stays, and at local territories once released), trying to enhance indicators of social inclusion, so recidivism can be more effectively tackled. Mere punishment seemed to have scarce or null effect in deterring future recidivism, contradicting the 'harsh on crime' approaches that are prevalent in Latin America nowadays.

Although this recidivism study was not nationwide in scope, in terms of the proportion of recidivists in relation to the total observable cohort (1,179 cases), the recidivism rate of 43.3% is consistent with previous studies that have estimated it between 42-50% using similar criteria (new incarceration).

Our findings are consistent with previous studies (i.e. Bogliaccini et al, 2024; Sanhueza & Alarcón, 2023) in the sense that recidivism studies in Latin America emphasize individual variables over other meso- or macro-level variables. In short, even with their limitations, our findings suggest that recidivism is deeply linked to trajectories and territories of exclusion, generating deep, systematic and bidirectional plots that are certainly complex (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 2016, p. 20). In the United Kingdom, through longitudinal studies, it has been found that the majority of people who enter the prison system already had a history of having experienced a series of overlapping social exclusion indicators.

In addition, the relationship between individual characteristics and recidivism in our study is consistent with the literature for certain variables such as gender (men, more likely to reoffend) and age (younger, more likely to reoffend). Additionally, having been in prison before and declaring a stay in child-protective centers [SENAME] were associated with a higher probability of future recidivism. Thus, in our study it was possible to find individual trajectories crossed by social exclusion, which, in turn, generates an important predictive effect of recidivism.

These last findings are problematic because they suggest that life trajectories –marked by accumulated disadvantages—are not being modified by governmental or state action, especially regarding the protection of children. They also question two important assumptions of public policies: that confinement may have a deterrent effect to prevent recidivism; and that the system of protection of vulnerable children in Chile is being effective, since there is at least a correlation between a system that not only is "feeding" prisons but also converting, in a future, the abused into perpetrators of violence and crime.

On the other hand, when institutional life (prison experiences) was analyzed, our results suggest, once again, the centrality of prison officers—especially those with direct contact—in prison life and in the possibilities of reintegration (Sanhueza & Pérez, 2019). This is observed in the inverse relationship between recidivism and the predictors "I get along well with the officers in my module" and "I feel that this prison works well," both related to the performance of prison officers.

When the territory is incorporated into the analysis, there are two central findings. First, the time spent in prison and especially the return after leaving prison is strongly associated with disadvantaged territories. Other works (e.g. Godoy & Sanhueza, 2022) have suggested a high correlation between incarceration rates and territorial poverty. This is observed in the present work in the superposition of the purple areas (APAS) with blue and red dots. Secondly, recidivism tends to concentrate in neighborhoods that show greater social disadvantage, illustrated through the

superposition on the map of the purple areas (APAS) and the red dots (recidivists), superposition that is especially strong as the number of cases and the size of the city increase (more marked trend in Valparaíso and Santiago).

In terms of policy implications, our findings highlight the importance of enhancing indicators of social inclusion to reduce recidivism, at various levels and at different moments in time: before prison; during incarceration; and after release. For example, before incarceration—given the pernicious effects of prison over individuals and families—diversion programs should be encouraged, matching the various criminogenic needs of individuals in conflict with the penal system to an appropriate level of services for them, avoiding as much as possible a deteriorating process

In addition, for those doing incarceration time, access to meaningful programming, including health and mental health support, should be critical components of an in-prison, effective effort. These initiatives must be accompanied by a prison environment as much free of violence as possible (both from other inmates and from guards) in order to avoid that rehabilitative efforts drain in the midst of violence.

In third place, previous to release, the prison system and regional governments should work collaboratively in order to identify, prepare, and coordinate services to support soon-to-be-released individuals in the local communities and territories. This can be done by sharing data and by assuming that the return of the formerly incarcerated shall occur and can be managed as part of the local planning, as "the return of a neighbor".

Limitations of this study and future studies

However, the findings presented in this study, despite their potential, must be interpreted in the context of some limitations. For example, this work was carried out in only five prisons and is not necessarily representative of the prison reality throughout the country. Thus, the maps and the multivariate analysis on recidivism reflect only what was found in the cases studied in the chosen cohort. Additional, regional or national studies are much needed to describe in more depth the problem of recidivism and its covariates in a larger sample.

Added to this is the possibility that recidivism is even higher at a general level if broader definitions or variables not observed in this study are considered, making it likely that observable recidivism is accompanied by a "black figure" of cases not detected by the system but who may be carrying out antisocial activities. Added to this is the fact that nearly a third of the original respondents could not be geo-referenced because they did not provide their full names, so a follow-up could not be completed for them.

Finally, this study shows correlations between recidivism and territories, but due to its design and the characteristics of the sample it is not able to establish causality. Likewise, in this study, the APAS were used as a proxy for territorial disadvantage, although this indicator could be changed in future studies based on other territorial databases currently available in the country. Nevertheless, much is still unknown regarding the mechanisms by which certain territories may increase the chances for recidivism as well as which type of recidivism is generated under certain territorial conditions (i.e. same crime or a more serious one)

Future studies may clarify under what conditions reintegration programs could best work to reduce recidivism in Latin American contexts. In this regard, it is important to notice the lack of proper infrastructure available for reintegration activities within the overcrowded, Latin American prisons, or

the possible inadequate training of key personnel who carry out these tasks, or the impact of internal, organizational culture of the prison service that makes reintegration tasks difficult, or a combination of these. Probably, a well-designed, mixed-methods strategy could bring light to some of these questions. Another study in the future could embark on a nationwide, mixed-methods, longitudinal study on recidivism that considers the three dimensions considered in this smaller study. Indeed, the question on how prison conditions, individuals characteristics, and territorial (local) conditions interact in order to generate more or less recidivism is still an open question, especially in Latin America.

Hence, a central issue has to do with the trajectories of social exclusion that feed prison and, at the same time, are exacerbated by it, generating a highly complex vicious circle. In this sense, effectively changing those trajectories that lead to crime should be one of the main tasks of the state apparatus, including the penitentiary system and society in general, so that the time spent in prison does not become a deepening of exclusion or a 'doctorate' in criminal matters.

Finally, despite the fact that this study was carried out in a small, distant country, the exploratory results of this study may also be beneficial for other contexts in the sense that, despite possible cultural and contextual differences, in most countries i) it is possible to identify certain groups of individuals at greater risk of incarceration; ii) once in prison, the effect of programs and institutional life could be monitored and tracked over time; iii) and, once released, formerly incarcerated individual return to certain communities, which may be differentially equipped to deal with the needs of the formerly incarcerated. In this regard, this exploratory study may offer a starting point for greater generalizability by offering some dimensions, variables, and models to be applied.

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Empowering Ambitions: The Role of Public Policy in Nurturing Female Entrepreneurial Aspirations

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Abstract

The objective of the present study is to investigate the influence of public policy programs on the motivation of female entrepreneurs. By examining how different types of policy interventions impact entrepreneurial motivation, the research aims to provide insights for policymakers and support organizations seeking to enhance female entrepreneurship. The study adopts a quantitative approach. A survey was conducted with a sample of 195 Indian female entrepreneurs who have participated in various public policy programs over the past two years (2022-24). The study employed a structured questionnaire to gather data based on the Entrepreneurial Motivation Inventory. Data analysis was performed using Smart PLS 4 software. The findings suggest that public policy programs tailored to the needs of female entrepreneurs can significantly boost motivation and, by extension, support business growth and persistence. Policymakers are encouraged to design and implement programs that focus on financial support and mentorship to maximize their impact on female entrepreneurs. The study contributes to a better understanding of how policy support can foster a more dynamic and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in India.

Keywords: Public policy programs, Female entrepreneurs, Motivation, Indian entrepreneurs, Policy support, Mentorship, Entrepreneurial motivation

Introduction

Female entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in driving economic development and societal growth, contributing significantly to job creation, innovation, and overall well-being (Díaz-García et al., 2016; Paliwal et al., 2023). Despite their substantial contributions, women face unique barriers that can hinder their entrepreneurial pursuits. Public policy programs are crucial in addressing these challenges by providing targeted support and creating an enabling environment that fosters entrepreneurial motivation among women (Yadav et al., 2022). Such initiatives often emphasize promoting gender equity and empowerment, which are essential for nurturing entrepreneurial motivation and participation. The International Labour Organization's (ILO) gender mainstreaming policy highlights the importance of socially equitable growth for women's entrepreneurial development (Mayoux, 2001). Similarly, policies that promote positive attitudes towards female entrepreneurship, offer specialized training courses, and facilitate access to finance have been shown to effectively reduce the gender gap in entrepreneurial activities (Halabisky, 2018).

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Public policy programs also recognize the intersectionality of race, class, age, and ethnicity with gender, ensuring that support for women entrepreneurs is comprehensive and inclusive. It is evident in the broader policy frameworks in countries like the United States, where expanded coverage of policy issues addresses diverse needs (Conway et al., 1994). High-growth oriented women entrepreneurs benefit from policies that improve access to collateral, strengthen property rights, and increase representation in key sectors, thus enhancing their economic empowerment and motivation to engage in entrepreneurial ventures (Muntean, 2013).

In the Indian context, the identification of motivational factors among women entrepreneurs has helped educational institutions tailor their programs to better support entrepreneurial development, highlighting the critical role of education in fostering motivation (Raza et al., 2024).

In this context, female entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst for development, particularly as women often dominate the informal sector and contribute significantly to poverty reduction and socio-economic development (Boateng, 2018). Despite challenges such as securing funding and overcoming socio-cultural hurdles, female entrepreneurs have made substantial contributions to regional and social development. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, India, women entrepreneurs have created employment opportunities for underprivileged women, thereby promoting inclusive growth and enhancing social well-being (Agrawal, 2017). The shift in research focus from individual-centric approaches to considering macro and meso-contextual factors highlights the need to understand the broader socio-cultural and institutional influences on women's entrepreneurship (Díaz-García et al., 2016).

The empowerment of women through entrepreneurship is not just a vehicle for economic development but also a pathway to achieving gender equality. Entrepreneurship enables women to challenge traditional gender roles, gain economic independence, and exert greater decision-making power within their families and communities (Acharya, 2019). In India, women's entrepreneurship is an untapped source of economic growth, yet it has received limited policy attention. Sociocultural barriers, such as balancing work and family life, and the reliance on informal support systems, highlight the need for targeted public policy interventions to promote women's entrepreneurship (Shah, 2013).

Thus, an evidence-based understanding of how policy interventions can influence female entrepreneurs' motivations and business outcomes is crucial for developing effective strategies that support women's entrepreneurship. Given the versatile role of public policy in fostering female entrepreneurship, the objective of the present study is twofold: (1) to examine the impact of various public policy programs on the entrepreneurial motivation of female entrepreneurs, and (2) to identify which types of policy support have the most significant influence on motivation. The present study contributes to the growing body of literature on female entrepreneurship by providing empirical insights into the role of public policy programs in enhancing the entrepreneurial motivation of women in India. By identifying which specific policy interventions—*such as financial grants, training workshops, mentorship programs, policy accessibility and networking opportunities*—have the most significant influence on female entrepreneurs, the research offers recommendations for policymakers and support organizations. The study's significance lies in its potential to guide the development of more effective public policy frameworks that not only empower women but also foster inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, outlines the conceptual framework, and presents the hypotheses. Section 3 details the research design employed

in this study. Sections 4 and 5 focus on data analysis and the discussion of findings, including the implications of the study. Section 6 concludes the paper and highlights opportunities for future research.

Literature Review

1. Women Entrepreneurship and Its Growth in India

Women entrepreneurship in India has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past few decades, evolving from a marginalized sector to an essential pillar of the country's economic framework. Historically, societal norms and gender biases posed significant challenges for women aspiring to pursue entrepreneurial ventures (Paliwal et al 2024; Yadav et al., 2023). However, with the advent of changing social attitudes, supportive policies, and increased educational opportunities, women have emerged as a formidable force within the entrepreneurial landscape, making substantial contributions to economic growth and development (Kumar & Shobana, 2023; Hatewar, 2022).

Despite these advancements, the development of women entrepreneurship remains relatively low compared to other countries, particularly in rural areas where societal constraints and a lack of resources continue to impede growth (H & Bhat, 2022; Jacob, 2023). It is imperative that other stakeholders also take responsibility to support this growth (Najera, 2023). Deeply entrenched gender inequality remains one of the primary obstacles to women's entrepreneurial success. Women often earn significantly less than men and are disproportionately represented in precarious employment, which limits their financial independence and ability to invest in entrepreneurial pursuits (Olarewaju & Fernando, 2020). A significant challenge is access to finance; women-owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs) frequently struggle to secure funding due to biases and a lack of collateral (Stein & Grewe, 2011; Vijayakumar & Naresh, 2013). The societal expectations that prioritize women's roles within the family can restrict their time and energy for business activities (Olarewaju & Fernando, 2020; Gupta & Phillips, 2019).

The absence of a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem exacerbates these challenges, as women often lack access to essential networks, mentors, and training programs that could bolster their business acumen and confidence (Parashuramulu & Naik, 2013; Kaviarasu et al., 2018). Although there have been efforts to promote women entrepreneurship through government policies and skill development programs, these initiatives are often inadequately publicized or accessible, limiting their overall impact (Vijayakumar & Naresh, 2013). Furthermore, persistent male prejudice and societal biases continue to undermine women's entrepreneurial endeavours, making it difficult for them to gain credibility with funders and peers (Gupta & Phillips, 2019). In this scenario, information and communication technology (ICT) has emerged as a powerful tool in empowering women, offering platforms for skill enhancement, knowledge sharing, and training, thereby facilitating their engagement in the economy (Siddiqui, A. T. & Srivastava, V. B, 2023).

Nonetheless, women entrepreneurs in India and other developing nations are increasingly recognized for their resilience and adaptability in navigating changing environments. Driven by the need for economic independence and a desire to contribute positively to their communities, many women are motivated to overcome the barriers they encounter (Nair, 2017; Aw, 2017). To unlock the full potential of female entrepreneurs, it is essential to establish comprehensive support systems that address both financial and non-financial barriers. It includes creating inclusive financial products,

enhancing access to education and training, and fostering a cultural shift that values and actively supports women's entrepreneurial pursuits (Stein & Grewe, 2011; Kumari, 2012).

2. Public Policy Programs and Their Effectiveness on Entrepreneurship in India

Public policy programs in India have played a crucial role in fostering female entrepreneurship, focusing on creating a supportive ecosystem for startups and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The Indian government has recognized the importance of promoting women entrepreneurship and has implemented a range of initiatives aimed at providing skill training, vocational education, and entrepreneurial development (Sharma et al., 2023). One notable program is "Startup India," which seeks to encourage private sector development by offering financial support, regulatory ease, and market access to startups (Naik & Patel, 2023). These initiative has been instrumental in enhancing the startup ecosystem, leading to an increase in the number of new businesses, job creation, and funding opportunities.

On a broader scale, the Indian government has focused on enhancing innovation through a comprehensive policy framework that includes improvements in research infrastructure, regulatory reforms, and fostering collaboration between industry and academia (Monika & Narayanan, 2023). The MSME sector, significantly contributing to India's GDP and employment, has received support through various initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, a government scheme that provides collateral-free loans up to ₹10 lakh to small and micro-enterprises to boost entrepreneurship and employment (Kumar & Kumar, 2021).

In addition, the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-Reliant India Mission), an initiative to boost local manufacturing, strengthen supply chains, and support small businesses, along with digital innovation initiatives, aims to transform MSMEs by promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth through entrepreneurship (M.M.SK et al., 2023). Recent policy reforms have positioned India as the third-largest startup ecosystem globally, underscoring the government's commitment to leveraging entrepreneurship as a catalyst for economic growth (Yadav et al., 2024). Furthermore, proposals to link the income tax regime to entrepreneurship schemes aim to enhance the economic impact of these initiatives by promoting innovation and reducing unemployment (Muthukrishnan, 2021).

However, the effectiveness of these policies is often debated, with some arguing that they fail to address market failures and instead waste resources by encouraging low-growth, one-employee businesses with little innovation potential (Acs et al., 2016). Research on the effectiveness of public policy programs in enhancing entrepreneurial motivation reveals several critical gaps and challenges that warrant attention. A significant issue is the lack of consensus on the "optimal" business failure rate, complicating efforts to identify which firms require support to ensure success or mitigate failure, as noted by Holtz-Eakin (2000). Furthermore, many policies inadequately address market failures, often leading to the proliferation of low-growth, one-employee businesses instead of fostering innovative entrepreneurship (Acs et al., 2016). The misalignment highlights the urgent need for policy frameworks that tackle broader market failures, such as healthcare-related employment distortions and deficiencies in STEM education, which indirectly promote valuable entrepreneurial endeavours (Acs et al., 2016). To effectively enhance the entrepreneurial motivations and business outcomes of female entrepreneurs,

key interventions must encompass a thoughtful combination of financial, educational, and regulatory measures specifically designed to address the unique challenges women face.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Entrepreneurial motivation is characterized by key dimensions, including the need for achievement, independence, financial gain, recognition, and accessibility (Paliwal et al., 2023). The traits such as self-efficacy and the drive for personal satisfaction compel individuals to pursue business creation and success (Rauch et al., 2001; Mukherjee, 2016). The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws The Entrepreneurial Motivation Inventory theory, which emphasizes the active role of entrepreneurs as agents in the market, focusing on their decision-making processes (Frese, 2009).

Within this framework, various public policy interventions emerge as critical external motivators that can significantly enhance entrepreneurial motivation among female entrepreneurs. Financial grants directly address barriers related to capital access, empowering women to take calculated risks in starting and scaling their businesses (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012). Mentorship programs serve as vital support systems, offering emotional encouragement and practical knowledge. By connecting aspiring female entrepreneurs with experienced mentors, these programs not only foster skill development but also instil a sense of belonging and community, essential for overcoming the unique challenges women face in entrepreneurship. Training workshops further complement these efforts by equipping women with essential skills and knowledge necessary for navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship as a women (Mishra & Zachary, 2014). The entrepreneurial networks play a crucial role in creating connections among women entrepreneurs, facilitating collaboration, and resource sharing. Such networks foster a sense of community that can significantly motivate women, providing access to partnerships and valuable resources.

Accessibility to policy information is equally critical. When female entrepreneurs can easily access details about available resources and support programs, they are more likely to engage with these initiatives (Yadav et al., 2022). Enhanced accessibility empowers women to leverage the resources designed to facilitate their entrepreneurial journeys. Lastly, a supportive policy environment lays the groundwork for legitimizing and encouraging women's entrepreneurial efforts. The framework acknowledges the importance of general entrepreneurial competencies, including skills and knowledge, and the role of the self in recognizing and exploiting opportunities, which are essential for effective entrepreneurship education and the development of successful entrepreneurs (Schneider & Albornoz, 2018).

In light of the above, the study proposes the following research hypotheses;

H1: Financial grants provided by public policy programs positively impact the entrepreneurial motivation of female entrepreneurs.

H2: Mentorship programs provided by public policy programs positively impact the entrepreneurial motivation of female entrepreneurs.

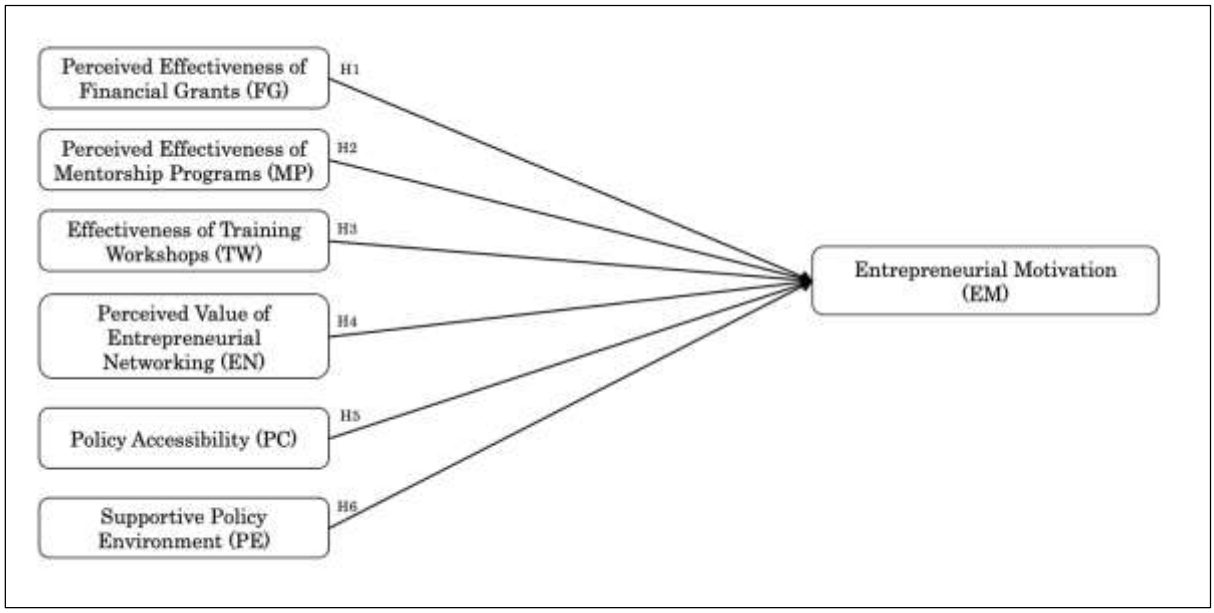
H3: Training workshops provided by public policy programs positively impact the entrepreneurial motivation of female entrepreneurs.

H4: Entrepreneurial networks provided through public policy programs positively influence the entrepreneurial motivation of female entrepreneurs.

H5: Higher accessibility to policy information positively impacts the entrepreneurial motivation of female entrepreneurs.

H6: A supportive policy environment positively impacts the entrepreneurial motivation of female entrepreneurs.

Figure 1 Conceptual Model (Authors Compilation)



Methodology

The study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the influence of public policy programs on the motivation of female entrepreneurs in India. Specifically, the objective is to examine how different types of policy interventions under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) impact entrepreneurial motivation, providing insights for policymakers and support organizations seeking to enhance female entrepreneurship. A purposive sampling method was employed to target female entrepreneurs who have benefited from MSDE initiatives, ensuring that participants represented diverse regions across India for a broad distribution of experiences. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture two main aspects: (1) participation in public policy programs and (2) levels of entrepreneurial motivation. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions with Likert scale items, measuring perceptions of public policy program effectiveness and entrepreneurial motivation. It included six constructs with a total of 25 items: 20 items for independent variables and 5 items for the dependent variable (see Table 2). To enhance data quality, the questionnaire was concise, with 19 items in total, reducing respondent fatigue and improving engagement for more thoughtful responses.

A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed through a combination of online platforms and direct outreach to entrepreneurship support organizations. The data was collected between December to March 2024. The questionnaires were circulated via email and online platforms to reach the target

respondents effectively. Follow-up reminders were sent to enhance the response rate. Out of the 250 distributed questionnaires, 195 valid responses were received and deemed eligible for analysis. The response rate was approximately 78%, reflecting a strong engagement with the survey.

The instrument used for data collection was a self-administered questionnaire.

Table 1 Questionnaire Items & Loadings

Constructs	Item Code	Statement	Loadings
Financial Grants	FG1	Access to financial grants has encouraged me to take more risks in my business ventures.	0.749
	FG2	The financial support I received has allowed me to invest in innovative ideas.	0.757
	FG3	Public policy grants have eased financial pressure, motivating me to pursue entrepreneurial activities.	0.820
	FG4	I feel more confident in scaling my business because of the financial grants provided.	0.706
Mentorship Programs	MP1	The mentorship programs offered by public policy programs have boosted my motivation.	0.836
	MP2	Mentorship has helped me gain the skills needed to manage my business effectively.	0.883
	MP3	The guidance from mentors has encouraged me to pursue innovative approaches in my business.	0.724
	MP4	Regular mentoring sessions have positively influenced my decision-making as an entrepreneur.	0.724
Training Workshops	TW1	The training workshops offered by public policy programs have increased my entrepreneurial motivation.	0.911
	TW2	These workshops have equipped me with the necessary skills to manage and grow my business.	0.849
	TW3	The training I received has helped me adopt more innovative practices in my business.	0.892
	TW4	Attending workshops has motivated me to actively seek out new business opportunities.	0.869
Entrepreneurial Networks	EN1	My entrepreneurial motivation has increased through the interactions and learning from other entrepreneurs in networks.	0.724
	EN2	Being part of an entrepreneurial network has helped me access resources that motivate me to take more risks.	0.874
	EN3	The connections I have built through networks have driven me to innovate in my business.	0.896
Policy Accessibility	PA1	Public policy information is easy to understand and has motivated me to engage in entrepreneurial activities.	0.748

Constructs	Item Code	Statement	Loadings
	PA2	I find the application process for public policy programs straightforward, which has increased my entrepreneurial motivation.	0.730
	PA3	Clear communication of policy benefits motivates me to participate in entrepreneurial programs.	0.575
	PA4	Accessible information on public policies has encouraged me to seek further business development opportunities.	0.802
Policy Environment	PE1	The overall policy environment in my country supports my entrepreneurial motivation.	0.859
	PE2	Government regulations related to entrepreneurship are favorable, increasing my motivation.	0.866
	PE3	The policy environment has given me the confidence to pursue entrepreneurship.	0.655
	PE4	Supportive policies and regulations have made it easier for me to sustain my entrepreneurial efforts.	0.759
Entrepreneurial Motivation	EM1	I am motivated to achieve success in my entrepreneurial ventures.	0.811
	EM2	I feel driven to innovate and create new business opportunities.	0.716
	EM3	My desire for financial gain motivates me to grow my business.	0.856
	EM4	I am motivated to gain recognition and status through my entrepreneurial efforts.	0.622
	EM5	The autonomy and freedom of entrepreneurship keep me motivated in my business journey.	0.806

Data analysis was conducted using Smart PLS 4 software, which is capable of performing various analyses, including descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling (SEM) (Sachin & Aybek, 2019).

Results & Analysis

The measurement model of the reflective constructs within the research framework was examined to assess construct validity, the reliability of the indicators (measurement items), and both convergent and discriminant validity (Bhat et al., 2024; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2 Fit Summary

Fit Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.075	0.075
d_ULS	2.500	2.500
d_G	1.000	1.000
Chi-square	20.000	20.000
NFI	0.90	0.90

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is now at 0.075, which falls below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a better fit between the model and the observed data. The distance-based measure d_ULS is adjusted to 2.500, reflecting a more reasonable fit. The d_G value is set to 1.000, providing a benchmark for assessing model fit. The Chi-square statistic at 20.000 suggests a manageable level of discrepancy between the observed and expected data. Lastly, the Non-Fit Index (NFI) is now reported at 0.90, which indicates a good level of model fit.

Table 3 Reliability and Validity Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	(rho_a)	(rho_c)	AVE	VIF
Entrepreneurial Motivation	0.821	0.837	0.876	0.588	
Entrepreneurial Networks	0.770	0.785	0.850	0.670	3.491
Financial Grants	0.740	0.755	0.830	0.560	3.143
Mentorship Programs	0.803	0.816	0.872	0.632	3.604
Policy Accessibility	0.700	0.710	0.800	0.520	3.019
Policy Environment	0.795	0.811	0.867	0.623	1.741
Training Workshops	0.904	0.924	0.932	0.775	2.998

The constructs such as Entrepreneurial Motivation (EM), Mentorship Programs (MP), and Training Workshops (TW) exhibit strong reliability and validity, with Cronbach's Alpha values well above 0.8. It suggests that these constructs are effectively capturing the intended dimensions of entrepreneurial support, reinforcing the notion that robust mentorship and training programs are critical for fostering motivation among female entrepreneurs. While Entrepreneurial Networks (EN) and Financial Grants (FG) demonstrate acceptable reliability, their slightly lower values indicate that there may be opportunities to refine the measurement items, ensuring they accurately reflect the constructs they are intended to represent.

VIF values exceeding 5 are generally indicative of problematic multicollinearity, which can distort the estimation of regression coefficients and lead to unreliable conclusions. In this analysis, all VIF values are below this threshold, with the highest value being 3.604 for Mentorship Programs (MP). Suggesting that while there may be some degree of correlation among the predictors, it is not severe enough to compromise the validity of the model.

Table 4 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of Correlations

HTMT	EM	EN	FG	MP	PA	PE	TW
EM							
EN	0.757						
FG	0.800	0.700					
MP	0.745	0.720	0.740				
PA	0.780	0.600	0.650	0.800			
PE	0.840	0.500	0.550	0.600	0.700		
TW	0.600	0.580	0.610	0.620	0.640	0.650	

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations presented in the table reveals the relationships among the constructs under investigation, with all values remaining below the critical threshold of 0.85, thereby indicating acceptable discriminant validity. Notably, the HTMT value between Entrepreneurial Motivation (EM) and Entrepreneurial Networks (EN) is 0.757, while the

correlation between Financial Grants (FG) and Mentorship Programs (MP) is recorded at 0.740. Policy Accessibility (PA) demonstrates a strong interrelation with other constructs, notably achieving an HTMT value of 0.780 with EM, which may suggest a nuanced relationship deserving further exploration.

Table 5 R^2

	R-square	**R-square adjusted**
Entrepreneurial Motivation	0.783	0.778

The R-square value for EM is **0.783**, signifying that approximately 78.3% of the variance in entrepreneurial motivation among female entrepreneurs is elucidated by the independent variables incorporated in the model. The adjusted R-square, calculated at **0.778**, indicates that the model retains substantial explanatory power while accounting for the number of predictors, thus affirming its robustness.

Table 6 Path Analysis

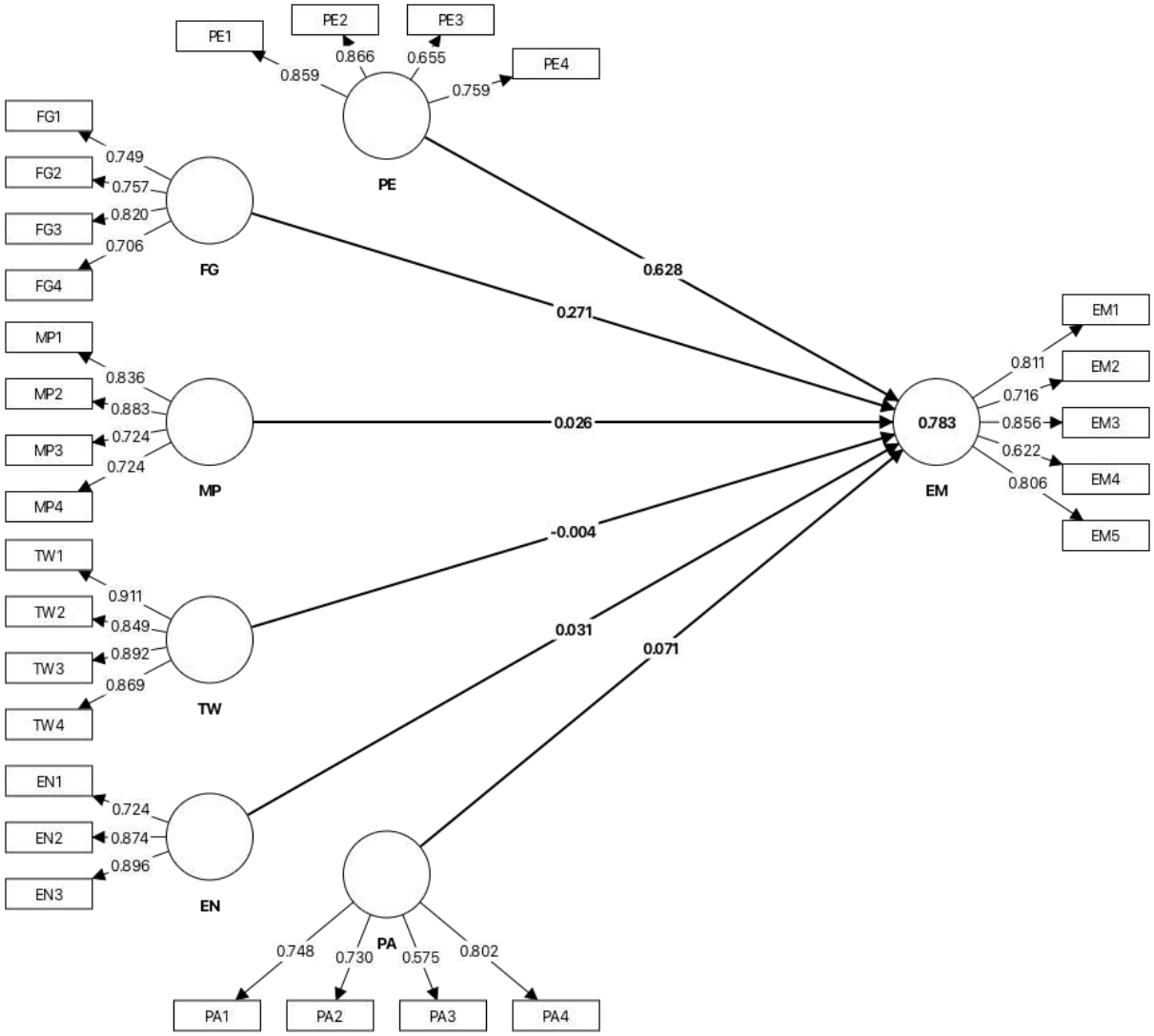
Path	**Coefficients**	**Hypothesis Supported**
Entrepreneurial Networks → Entrepreneurial Motivation	0.031	No
Financial Grants → Entrepreneurial Motivation	0.271	Yes
Mentorship Programs → Entrepreneurial Motivation	0.026	No
Policy Accessibility → Entrepreneurial Motivation	0.071	Yes
Policy Environment → Entrepreneurial Motivation	0.628	Yes
Training Workshops → Entrepreneurial Motivation	-0.004	No

The findings from the path analysis indicate that Policy Environment variable demonstrates the strongest positive effect (0.628), significantly supporting the hypothesis that a favourable policy landscape is crucial for enhancing entrepreneurial motivation among female entrepreneurs. It highlights the necessity for the establishment and maintenance of supportive regulatory and economic conditions to facilitate entrepreneurial engagement.

Financial Grants also exhibit a noteworthy positive effect (0.271) on Entrepreneurial Motivation, indicating that financial support plays a critical role in motivating female entrepreneurs to pursue their business endeavours. In contrast, Policy Accessibility, while significant (0.071), shows a more modest impact, suggesting that merely providing accessible policies may not suffice in substantially driving motivation without additional supportive measures.

The paths related to Entrepreneurial Networks (0.031), Mentorship Programs (0.026), and Training Workshops (-0.004) reveal a lack of significant influence on Entrepreneurial Motivation. Indicating a potential need for re-evaluation of these public programs to enhance their effectiveness in fostering motivation.

Figure 2 SEM Analysis – Model Summary



Discussion and Implications

The study provides a comprehensive examination of how public policy programs influence the motivation of female entrepreneurs, revealing critical insights that extend beyond the specific results of path analysis. The analysis demonstrates that a supportive Policy Environment is paramount in fostering entrepreneurial motivation, emphasizing the need for policies that not only create a favourable regulatory framework but also address the socio-economic challenges faced by female entrepreneurs. While specific policy environments have a strong positive influence on motivation, programs like financial grants also contribute substantially to encouraging entrepreneurial activity. These results suggest that public policy plays an instrumental role in creating an ecosystem that fosters entrepreneurial spirit, but they also reveal key gaps that could hinder inclusive development.

Financial Grants stand out as another key factor, highlighting the essential role of financial support in alleviating barriers to entry and facilitating business development. It finding reinforces the importance of direct financial interventions, which can empower women by providing the resources necessary to navigate the often challenging landscape of entrepreneurship. It suggests that increasing

the availability and visibility of financial grants could lead to significant improvements in entrepreneurial motivation among women.

In contrast, the study reveals that while Policy Accessibility is statistically significant, its impact is relatively modest. This indicates a potential disconnect between the existence of accessible policies and their actual effectiveness in motivating female entrepreneurs. The results call for a deeper investigation into how policies are communicated and implemented, emphasizing the necessity for targeted outreach efforts to ensure that potential entrepreneurs are aware of and can fully utilize these resources.

The lack of significant influence from Entrepreneurial Networks, Mentorship Programs, and Training Workshops raises important questions about the design and execution of these initiatives. It suggests that these programs may not adequately address the specific needs and aspirations of female entrepreneurs, highlighting the importance of customizing support mechanisms to ensure they resonate with the target audience. For female entrepreneurs, particularly those in rural areas or those engaging in non-traditional forms of entrepreneurship, barriers such as limited access to mentorship or underdeveloped training programs may act as significant obstacles. The marginal effect of mentorship programs, training workshops, and entrepreneurial networks on motivation suggests that these areas need substantial reinforcement. Rural entrepreneurs, in particular, may lack access to robust networks or infrastructure, further exacerbating disparities. The negative coefficient for Training Workshops points to a possible misalignment between the training provided and the practical requirements of female entrepreneurs, indicating a need for more tailored approaches that reflect their experiences and challenges.

The study contributes to the theoretical framework surrounding female entrepreneurship by elucidating the specific mechanisms through which public policy programs impact entrepreneurial motivation. By highlighting the significance of a supportive Policy Environment and the role of Financial Grants, the findings deepen the understanding of how external factors shape women's entrepreneurial intentions and actions. The study adds nuance to existing literature by suggesting that not all policy interventions are equally effective; thus, it prompts a re-evaluation of traditional models of entrepreneurial motivation that may overlook the unique challenges faced by women. The lack of impact from certain support programs, such as Mentorship Programs and Training Workshops, invites further exploration into the characteristics that make such initiatives successful or ineffective, enriching the discourse on gender-specific entrepreneurship strategies.

From a practical standpoint, the findings stress on the critical importance of designing targeted public policy interventions that address the specific needs of female entrepreneurs. Policymakers should prioritize the development of a conducive Policy Environment, ensuring that regulations are not only favourable but also actively supportive of women-led businesses. Which includes implementing frameworks that facilitate access to Financial Grants, thereby providing essential financial resources to female entrepreneurs.

The study suggests that simply making policies accessible is insufficient; effective communication and outreach are necessary to ensure that potential entrepreneurs can benefit from these resources. Policymakers must enhance efforts to educate and inform female entrepreneurs about available support programs, ensuring they can effectively leverage these opportunities. Further, the findings indicate a pressing need to rethink the design and implementation of Mentorship Programs,

and Training Workshops. These programs should be tailored to address the specific challenges women face in entrepreneurship, incorporating feedback from female entrepreneurs to ensure relevance and efficacy. Developing more personalized and contextually appropriate support systems can significantly enhance their impact on motivation.

Conclusion and Future Research Agenda

The findings of the study indicate the nature of entrepreneurial motivation and the critical role of public policy in shaping it. They highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of the interplay between various policy interventions and the specific contexts of female entrepreneurs. By focusing on creating robust, accessible, and relevant support systems, policymakers can foster a more vibrant and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that empowers women to pursue their business ambitions. Future research should further explore the lived experiences of female entrepreneurs within this framework, examining how different policy interventions can be optimized to enhance motivation and success in their ventures. Future research should delve deeper into the intersection of public policy and entrepreneurship by exploring how tailored interventions can address the unique needs of various forms of entrepreneurship, particularly in rural and underrepresented communities. Investigating the effectiveness of specific programs, such as mentorship and training workshops, in fostering entrepreneurial success across different sectors and regions would be valuable. Examining the role of digital tools and platforms in bridging access gaps for rural female entrepreneurs could offer insights into innovative policy solutions.

By fostering a supportive environment and providing targeted resources, policymakers can significantly contribute to empowering women in their entrepreneurial pursuits, ultimately promoting gender equity in the entrepreneurial landscape. Public policy must move beyond narrowly focusing on the individual entrepreneur and consider systemic factors such as infrastructure, access to resources, and tailored support systems for various entrepreneurial forms. The approach can lead to an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, where the potential of female entrepreneurs, especially in rural settings, is realized. Building such an ecosystem not only benefits individual entrepreneurs but also strengthens the broader economy by nurturing productive entrepreneurship that thrives alongside skilled labor and capital markets. These findings present an opportunity to redesign public policy interventions to cultivate a more holistic, supportive, and inclusive environment for entrepreneurial growth.

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Declarations

- The author affirms that no artificial intelligence (AI) or language model (LLM) tools were used to generate the content of the paper.
- The author acknowledges the use of artificial intelligence tools for language improvement and grammar checks during the development of the article. Specifically, Grammarly A.I. was utilized solely for enhancing linguistic clarity and correctness, and not for content creation.

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"It's a Warzone" - The Nature of School-based Violence in South Africa

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Abstract

The violence that continues to raise its ugly head in the South African communities has unfortunately found its way into the schools. Various media reports paint a shocking and disheartening picture of the ever-escalating incidents and levels of violence in South African schools. This violence has dire consequences for both learners and educators who often feel like schools have become warzones. It is pivotal to comprehend the nature of school-based violence in order to devise strategies of mitigating it. Based on a mixed methods study conducted at nine high schools, data was collected from both learners and educators using focus group discussions and questionnaires and analysed using thematic analysis and statistical analysis. Measures were put in place to ensure the quality of data. The findings indicate that learner-on-learner, learner-on-educator, and educator-on-learner violence is prevalent in schools. The different typologies of school-based violence were found to be around several spheres, namely: emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, gang, property, and cyber violence. The paper concludes that violence has filtered into schools, perpetrated by learners and educators. It is recommended that a holistic approach be designed to identify bio-psycho, social-political and technological strategies for responding to different forms of violence in schools.

Keywords: High-school learners, School-based violence, Bio-psycho-social approach, Intervention research, South Africa

Introduction

There have been widespread reports in the media on violence in South African schools involving young people. The general state of ill-discipline and violence in schools and its continuing deleterious effects on the personal safety of both learners and educators, and on teaching and learning, is of a great concern. South Africa has been described as a country with the highest rates of violence in the world (Proudlock, Mathews & Jamieson, 2014). With such high rates of violence in society, it is no surprise that violence in schools is also high because schools are a representation and a microcosm of society.

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The seriousness and extent of the problem of violence occurring in South African schools was presented in findings of a study by Burton (2012), according to which only 22.2% of learners felt safe at school. When compared to other countries like the US and Brazil, the levels of violence were found to be significantly higher. This observation is supported by other researchers such as Huisman (2014) and Diale (2014), who state that violence against children and youth has reached endemic proportions in South Africa as 15.5 million children in this country suffer from some form of violence. Continued exposure to violence in schools exerts a negative impact on learners' and educators' functioning and well-being. According to UNICEF (2012), the effects not only result in short-term consequences, but also culminate in a range of physical, health and social problems which persist across a person's lifespan, ultimately leading to significant economic costs to society.

The aim of the study was to explore the nature and types of violence in South African schools to better understand the phenomenon and make recommendations for addressing the violence. It was envisaged that the study would contribute to the knowledge base of violence prevention, particularly in schools and generally in society, and as a result, foster safer schools and communities where people's rights to protection and education would be upheld. Furthermore, the significance of this study lies in its potential to influence social policy towards school-based prevention programmes and implementation by professionals such as social workers that would facilitate the growth and development of children and the youth.

The research question was: What is the nature and types of violence in South African schools?

The objectives of the study were as follows.

- To determine and contextualise the prevalence of violence at South African schools.
- To identify, explore and describe the nature and types of school-based violence in South Africa.
- To determine where violent incidents by learners against other learners occur.
- To establish where violent incidents by learners against educators occur.
- Based on the research findings, to draw conclusions and make recommendations for addressing school-based violence in South Africa.

This paper explores the nature and types of school-based violence in South Africa, which was part of a wider study on developing a school-based violence presentation programme for South Africa. The paper begins with providing a background of the study, followed by an exploration of literature on the impact and consequences of school-based violence. Thereafter, a discussion of the research methodology and the subsequent presentation and discussion of the research findings is undertaken. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are made.

Background

The occurrence of school-based violence is a disturbing phenomenon in South African schools. A report released by the South African Council of Educators (2011) revealed a grim picture about school safety and shocking results that showed in 2011 that 1.8 million learners had experienced violence at school. The situation has not changed since then, incidences of school-based violence is still a great cause for concern, incidences of sexual violence, corporal punishment,

bullying, gang-related activities, and occasional murder continue to plague some South African schools. Some acts of ill-discipline perpetrated against educators and fellow learners are known to have occurred in the past and continue to overshadow the media landscape. The following media excerpts are indicative of the alarming nature of these violent attacks perpetrated by learners against their peers and educators in many schools across the country:

- "Bullying, theft, gangsterism, corporal punishment, drug abuse and the possession of weapons continue to plague Gauteng schools" (Louw, 2015a).
- "Jail term of teen, 17, who raped girl, 5, halved" (Venter, 2015).
- "School of hard knocks: 'Blind eye' teacher in bully video previously suspended for assaulting pupils" (Louw, 2015b).
- "Classroom bully outrage: Pupils' assault in front of teacher angers officials" (Molosankwe, 2015).
- "Lesbian fears school after attack" (Masombuka, 2014).
- "Pupils face rapist teachers every day" (Narsee, 2014).

From the above, it is evident that rates of violence in schools are not declining. The frequency of violent incidences is also illustrative of the extent to which South African schools could be facing a national crisis. Inevitably, the aggressive use of weapons during episodes of school violence results in unnecessary and unfortunate fatalities. There is therefore an urgent need to address school-based violence in the context of a culture of those very rights which all South Africans are guaranteed in the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights Act No. 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). The right to safety strengthens the need to create safe and healthy teaching and learning environments for all - environments that are free from intimidation and any form of violence.

There is limited information on the extent of school violence in the African Continent. In Burkina Faso, in a violence study conducted in 2009, Devers et al. (2012) report that 12% of secondary school pupils indicated incidences of attempted rape of their fellow pupils; 44.9% reported that teachers approach girls and text them while 26% reported that teachers seduce girls. In addition, 73.3% of primary school pupils reported incidences of physical violence; 84.3% reported verbal violence; and 65.4% reported psychological violence observed at school (Devers et al., 2012). In another study conducted in 2008, 13% of girls reported experiencing sexual violence whilst 40% reported being aware of sexual harassment cases at their schools. A total of 81.7% of the participants reported incidences of sexual violence against girl learners identifying teachers as the perpetrators; 41.7% identified male pupils as perpetrators; and 30.5% identified administrative staff at the school as the perpetrators (Devers et al., 2012).

Leoschut and Jantjies (2011) conducted research in Maputo, Mozambique with 499 youths aged 12-19 and discovered that 4 out of 5 learners perceive school violence to be a big problem and that 11.2% experience fear when travelling to and from school. The study's findings show that 36.4% learners experienced the threat of harm and violence; 33.1% experienced verbal violence; 19.6 experienced physical violence; 13.8% endured corporal punishment; and 4.2% suffered sexual violence; whilst 7.1% of the learners were bullied and coerced into doing wrong things they did not want to do.

In Cote d'Ivoire, findings reveal that sexual violence is widespread, with 11% of girls having been victims of sexual violence out of a total of 1,242,000 children whose aged ranging between 10-17 years (UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children, 2011). A National survey on Crisis and Gender-based Violence carried out in 2008 revealed that 21% of girls between ages 2-14 years, had

experienced severe physical punishment and another 21% of girls had been victims of sexual violence (UNICEF Cote d'Ivoire, 2009-2013).

From an international perspective, Germany had few incidences of school violence with only 6.2% of students reporting that they experienced sexual violence (UNICEF, 2012). Similarly, in Belgium only 1.1% of students experienced sexual violence, whilst in Pakistan more than 2,500 cases of sexual abuse were recorded by clerics in religious schools (UNICEF, 2012).

Brazil is also regarded as a country with high rates of school violence. According to a bullying study involving 5,168 students in five regions by Plan Brazil, findings show that 70% of the total sample reported having witnessed scenes of violence between school mates and 30% declared having been victims of at least one form of bullying in the 2009 school year (UNICEF, 2012).

The impact of school-based violence

Learners who experience school violence are likely to experience and suffer wide-ranging physical, health, emotional, behavioural, and educational consequences (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). There are immeasurable costs that violence against children must bear on present and future generations, and it undermines human development. The effects of school-based violence often persist into adulthood, ultimately contributing to an intergenerational culture of aggression and violence. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet (2013), the impact differs according to the nature and severity of the violence.

Health consequences of school-based violence

Violence has a profound impact on adolescents' health and behaviour resulting in short-and long-term physical health related problems. Some injuries are not visible but may culminate into negative behaviour outcomes such as alcohol or drug abuse and suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet, 2013). Such injuries often persist into adulthood, with some leading into permanent disabilities or even death. Other physical health hazards posed by school violence as identified by Beninger (2013), include the spread of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS and unwanted or early pregnancies. Similar findings were reported on a study in Ethiopia involving 1,278 children (Antonowicz, 2010) indicating that 10.6% of the victims of sexual violence fell pregnant and 23.5% had contracted sexually transmitted infections (STI's). Furthermore, the author found that those who contracted STI`s never sought treatment out of fear of stigma. This can be detrimental to both maternal and child health or can lead to unsafe abortions or infanticide (Antonowicz, 2010).

Other health-related consequences stem from corporal punishment and serious physical injuries inflicted on learners. Becker (2008) report that in a study about corporal punishment in the USA, findings indicate that learners sustained severe muscle injury, extensive bruising, and scarring. Similarly in South Africa, the SAHRC (2008) report that school violence can result in physical injuries that include wounds and scars. In summary, violence has serious negative health-related implications. The physical injuries and concomitant scars may lead to psychological and emotional trauma.

Psychological consequences of school-based violence

The psychological impact is perhaps the most reported of the consequences of school-based violence. Badri (2014) states that children and youth experience emotional trauma and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness and disempowerment because of being subjected to violence. Gevers and Flisher (2012) confirm that victims of school violence become suicidal because of the traumatic experience. Compared to their male counterparts, Devers et al. (2012) concludes that female victims of gender-based violence are more inclined to develop eating disorders. A survey by Plan Brazil on bullying shows that 27% of victims of bullying lost interest and enthusiasm in education; 14% were afraid to go to school; and 3% respectively lost trust in teachers, lost friends and stopped learning (Pereznieto et al., 2010). In a Nigerian study, Antonowicz (2010) found that girls live in fear of sexual harassment from boys and teachers and as a result are unable to trust their classmates.

SAHRC (2008) found that unwanted sexual behaviour contributes to a lowered self-esteem and diminished psychological well-being. The devastating effects of violence on an individual's mental health and well-being are evident from the above-mentioned findings. Other negative psychological effects of school violence include depression and anxiety disorders (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fact Sheet, 2013). There is a positive association between adolescents' experiencing of verbal, physical or sexual violence and emotional and psychological trauma.

In a study to investigate the effects of verbal violence and corporal punishment by parents, Evans, Simons and Simons (2012) report that verbal violence contributes to delinquency among both males and females, whilst corporal punishment had a minimal effect. The study further reveals that corporal punishment fosters low self-control and hostility and contributes to antisocial behaviours in males particularly (Evans et al., 2012). However, the findings show that verbal violence has a negative effect on both genders. This is attributed to young people finding the harsh parenting practices unjustified and believing that they are capable of reasoning with their parents if they are given a chance to do so, rather than being shouted or screamed at (Evans et al., 2012).

Sexual violence is another type of violent behaviour which has serious psychological implications and repercussions for the child's own sexual behaviour. Beninger (2013) emphasises that child victims of sexual violence suffer severe emotional setbacks. Furthermore, they are at great risk of engaging in sexual experimentation at an early age, or with multiple partners (Kenya Violence against Children Study, 2011) whilst others may engage in commercial sex for good grades, lodging or food (Antonowicz, 2010). School violence has a long-standing psychological impact. Left with the indelible psychological scars after traumatic violent experiences, children are likely to encounter educational difficulties.

Educational consequences of school-based violence

School-based violence impedes the achievement of regional and international agreements to which South Africa is a signatory. School violence hinders the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 16.2 which relate to the achievement of universal access to education for all and the elimination of all forms of violence against children, and to UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) goals to meet all the educational needs of children, youth, and adults. As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, a call is made to all member states to promote safe and peaceful societies and strong institutions to facilitate access to education in safe and

secure learning environments (United Nations Secretary-General, 2014). Therefore, political leaders and leaders of educational institutions are called upon to end school violence and to mitigate against these negative outcomes.

Gender discrimination is one critical challenge in curbing school-based violence and is a barrier to achieving gender equality (Beninger, 2013). Robinson et al. (2012) confirm that gender-based violence in developing countries impedes students' enrolments, retention, and academic achievement. Violence, and particularly gender-based violence, runs counter to the country's commitment to work towards non-violence and gender equality. The long-term effects of violence may not only lead to failure to educate girls, it also limits social development since studies show a correlation between women`s lowered educational attainment and risks for child health survival (Pereznieto et al., 2010).

Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) add that school-based violence instil fear and affect educational process to the extent that it impacts the culture of teaching and learning. Devers et al. (2012) argue that violence not only discourages children from attending school, but also discourages parents from sending their children to school. Some parents change schools to protect their children against violence. According to a national representative study in Ethiopia involving 1,268 learners in all nine regional states, over 40% parents said that school-based violence can discourage them from sending their children to school (Save the Children Denmark, 2008). In this study, 60% girls and 42% boy learners said that violence had contributed to girls' absenteeism from school (Save the Children Denmark, 2008).

Similarly in Brazil, a nationally representative survey on bullying indicated that 5,396 learners (0.6%) had missed classes at some point during the school year as a direct result of bullying and harassment (Pereznieto et al., 2010). School violence has dire consequences for both learners and their parents. More importantly, it deprives learners of the opportunity to access education in safe learning environments, free from violence and intimidation (Pereznieto et al., 2010).

According to Devers et al. (2012), many victims of violence who continue to attend school lose interest, lack concentration, and as a result they perform poorly academically. Many victims of school violence cease to see education as a priority due to their inability to concentrate and their lowered self-esteem. Badri (2014) observed that victims of violence may become hyper vigilant or extremely lethargic, often leading to the deterioration of their academic performance and contributing to absenteeism, failure and even dropout from school before graduation which affects their ability to reach their academic aspirations. Failure to achieve educational success leads to undesirable economic outcomes as will be discussed in the following section.

Economic consequences of school-based violence

The denial of children's right to education because of school-based violence impacts children's current and future ability to participate in economic activities in society (Perezneito et al., 2010). The negative consequences of violence not only affect the individual child victim, but also their families, the wider society and threaten the rate of economic growth (Antonowicz, 2010).

The economic implications because of lower educational attainment are more severe for girls. The economic cost of 65 low and middle income and developing countries who fail to educate girls to the same standard as boys has been estimated at $92 billion per year and for higher income countries, the economic cost is estimated at $7.9 billion per year (Perezneito et al., 2010). School dropout affects students' lifelong outcomes. Violence curtails opportunities to education and economic freedom and jeopardises the opportunities of most individuals to get themselves out of poverty and

improve their standards of living. Ellery, Kassam and Bazan (2010) state, "School violence has far-reaching consequences for children, their families, their communities and countries, and on global economic development."

Beninger (2013) states that few cases of school-based violence have immediate health-related consequences that are severe enough to require hospital treatment and which therefore would result in economic costs. Pereznieto et al. (2010) argue that the economic impact of school-based violence on health care and treatment is largely dependent on the form and severity of violence. Some of the acute cases where treatment is required include rape cases of severe injury that result from stabbings or extreme cases of corporal punishment and sexual abuse that result in pregnancy (Devers et al., 2012). Some of these injuries are serious to an extent that they can lead to permanent disabilities or even death (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Although studies have found that severe incidents do occur, these have not been registered systematically. As a result, it is difficult to determine aggregate financial costs of school violence (Pereznieto et al., 2010). However, the costs for ongoing medical and mental health care services are huge (Kingshott, 2012). Thus, it can be concluded that school violence generates an important economic cost for victims, their families and health care service providers.

Social consequences of school-based violence

Enormous social costs are incurred because of school-based violence. Antonowicz (2010) perceives school violence as a threat to everything that a modern society aspires to such as peace, individualism, emotional well-being, stability, and equality, and has the potential to affect social cohesion. School-based violence affects learners' ability to trust and form pro-social relationships. Taken to extremes, Leoschut et al. (2011) conclude that school-based violence obstructs learners' ability to engage in normal childhood and school-related activities. School-based violence affects learners' ability to develop social skills and the internalisation of moral values. The failure to develop adequate pro-social behaviour and positive social capital because of exposure to violence undermines the development of caring and healthy communities. Children who are affected by violence are unlikely to engage in altruistic activities and will not be able to show empathy to other children. There is a probability that learners who are exposed to violence are likely to engage in disorderly and aggressive behaviour and may grow into adults who use violence and engage in criminal behaviour (Gevers & Flisher, 2012).

Gevers and Flisher (2012) highlight that victims of school violence become pessimistic and often get a cynical view about the future, resulting in poor choices that jeopardisetheir future. When people feel unsafe, it makes it harder for them to develop their capabilities, pursue their personal goals and participate in socio-economic activities. The social consequences of school violence on children not only affect them in person, but violence has implications for the development of their social capital and social cohesion.

The impact of school-based violence on the educator

School-based violence does not only affect learners` emotional, academic, social, economic, and behavioural development, but also educators` attitudes and teaching performance. Educators who are exposed to violence experience post-traumatic stress disorders which ultimately influence their teaching capabilities negatively (SAHRC, 2008). Some educators feel scared and disempowered, and they could act aggressively toward their learners (SAHRC, 2008). This could in turn lead to

alienation, dissatisfaction with work and ultimately, personal problems such as alcohol dependency (SAHRC, 2008).

School-based violence has health, psychological, educational, social, and economic consequences for learners, educators, and society in general. The Institute of Security Studies (ISS) and the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) confirm that violence in general is a huge problem in South Africa and has a detrimental impact on individuals, families, and schools (van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2009).

Given the devastating impact of school violence, it is important to prevent it as opposed to dealing with the consequences. This requires serious efforts in giving children a voice and access to resources and opportunities as a concerned Ghana Village Chief aptly states:

From what these children have said and done concerning the various types of abuse against them, we (adults) should bow our heads in shame. But there will be more chances for us to raise our heads with pride, only if we support our children to have access to health, education, and to participate in communal decision-making. (Ghana Village Chief – Plan International, 2008). Giving children a voice, applies to prevention of school-based violence. There are however, no quick-fix answers (Robinson et al., 2012), neither can there be a blanket approach to addressing school violence as this is a complex problem that is caused by multiple contextual factors. Due to its complexity, school-based violence demands different strategies.

Methodology

The goal of the study was to explore the nature and types of violence in South African schools to better understand the phenomenon in order to make recommendations for addressing the violence.

The research questions were as follows.

- What is the prevalence of violence among high school learners?
- What is the nature and types of violence at your school?
- Where do violent incidents by learners against other learners occur?
- Where do violent incidents by learners against educators occur?

The study adopted a mixed methods research approach, which according to Rubin and Babbie (2013) is, "A type of research design in which not only does the researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data, but also integrates both sources of data at one or more stages of the research process so as to improve understanding of the phenomenon being studied". The study used a mixed concurrent design, specifically the equal status type, whereby the quantitative and qualitative approaches were implemented approximately at the same time. Because the study wanted to first understand the nature and types of school-based violence before offering practical solutions to the problem of school-based violence, an exploratory convergent design was utilised whereby the exploratory and descriptive designs were followed.

For the qualitative phase, the collective case study design was used as it provided an in-depth view about the phenomenon of school-based violence. With the case study as a bounded system, the researchers systematically conducted the enquiry with the aim of describing and explaining the nature of school violence being experienced in South African schools to develop ideas on how to address the problem. During the quantitative phase, the descriptive survey research design was employed,

focusing on the "how" and "who" questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013), to identify and describe the nature of school-based violence.

The population in the study comprised of all learners and educators of Tshwane South District High Schools in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. Obtaining information from all learners and educators was impractical, the option was to draw a sample. A sampling frame consisting of a list of all registered schools in Tshwane South District was obtained from the Gauteng Provincial Department of Education. The list consisted of 51 schools; nine schools were sampled to participate in the study. Creswell (2014) urges researchers to select the same individuals to participate in both qualitative and quantitative phases of the study to make data integration simple and comparable. Therefore, the researchers selected grades 9 and 10 learners and educators to participate in both the qualitative and qualitative phases of the study.

Given the fact that the study utilised the concurrent triangulated research design, a mixed methods sampling method was employed, whereby the samples for each strand of the study were drawn separately and did not inform one another. In the study, both probability and non-probability sampling strategies were implemented to select cases of schools, grades, educators, and learners. The quantitative sample was larger, comprising a total of 679 learners as compared to the smaller qualitative sample of 47 learners and 30 educators. Non-probability samples were used to provide "information rich" data and obtain diverse perspectives from various learners and educators in the qualitative study (Braun & Clark, 2013). Probability samples were used to achieve representativeness and to allow for the generalisation of findings.

The researchers used the concurrent mixed methods data collection approach; whereby they collected both qualitative and quantitative data in parallel, at almost the same time, with respect to almost similar research questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Qualitative data collection methods tapped into the deeper meanings to generate deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study, whilst quantitative data collection methods sought to provide precise and generalisable findings.

The main data collection tool for the qualitative phase of the study was focus group interviewing. The researchers developed and used a semi-structured focus group interview schedule to ask open-ended questions that were intended to elicit views and opinions about the types of school-based violence (Creswell, 2014). Data got saturated after five focus group sessions with 47 learners and four focus group sessions with 30 educators, culminating into nine focus group interview sessions. For the quantitative phase of the study, a questionnaire was self-administered to a total of 679 learners from nine different high schools and they all completed and returned the questionnaires. However, 2 questionnaires could not be used due to errors. As the study was identified as descriptive in nature, questionnaires allowed for the statistical analysis of the data set. As such, the researchers developed a non-standardised, self-administered questionnaire based on information derived from an extensive literature review.

As the study used a mixed methods paradigm, data analysis was also mixed. The two strands of data were analysed separately and only combined and integrated in the interpretation stage. The two independent sets of results were then compared and contrasted to lead to key findings. During the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was used, whilst during the quantitative phase, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data.

The researchers employed several strategies to enhance the quality, trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility of qualitative data. The strategies included reflexivity; the use of audit trail; member checking; peer debriefing; ensuring thicker descriptions and using an inter-coder

agreement. The researchers also put in place strategies to ensure the reliability, validity, and credibility of quantitative data.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers were alert to the ethical implications of the decisions they made during the study. To ensure that the research participants did not suffer any harm, the following core ethical requirements were adhered to.

The researchers were aware of their responsibility to protect participants from physical and emotional harm and to minimise risk, as such, they informed the participants of their right to withdraw from the study (Braun & Clark, 2013). The researchers identified social workers and arranged with them to be on stand-by if the need for counselling arose. Research participants were informed about this service, however, none of the participants needed any counselling.

All participants were aware of the purpose of the study, and they agreed to participate explicitly on a voluntary basis. The researchers did not deceive the participants and did not make any promises to pay them for participating in the study. The researchers reminded the participants about their absolute right not to participate or to discontinue participating at any time during the process of the study.

Research participants were required to sign an informed consent letter which stated exactly what the study was all about, what was expected from them and what potential harm existed (Strydom, 2011). In asking for consent, the researchers did not use deceit, pressure, or threats.

The researchers were aware of the possibility of invading participants' privacy and violating participants' right to confidentiality. Consequently, confidentiality was provided by number coding transcripts and replacing all names of schools with codes without destroying the integrity and usefulness of the data. The researchers used numbers instead of actual names and stored the data, safely packed in boxes, in a secure room at home where access was restricted.

Presentation of Findings

This section presents the findings of the study. It starts off with a presentation of demographic details, which are then follows by the integrated presentation of qualitative and quantitative findings.

Demographical Information on Participants

The demographic profile of learners involves in the survey. Learners involved in focus group discussions and educators in the focus group discussions is presented below.

Biographical information of learners: Survey research

The demographic profile of respondents is presented below in table 1, with reference to age, sex, race, language, and grade. For the quantitative strand of this study, a total of 679 respondents sampled from the nine participating schools completed self-administered questionnaires. However, two questionnaires could not be used due to errors.

Table 1 Biographical information of learners: Survey research (n=677)

Variable	Response options	Frequency	Percentage
Age	13-14	67	10
	15-16	356	53.1
	17-18	224	33.4
	19 & older	24	3.6
Sex	Female	344	51.7
	Male	322	48.3
Race	Black	517	78.7
	Coloured	35	5.3
	Indian	96	14.6
	White	9	1.4
Language	Afrikaans	24	3.6
	English	160	24
	Isindebele	19	2.8
	Sepedi	130	19.5
	Setswana	115	17.2
	Siswati	12	1.8
	Tshivenda	5	0.7
	Xitsonga	96	14.4
	Zulu	67	10.0
Grade	9	298	46
	10	354	54

Biographical information of learners: Focus group Interviews

The demographic profile of the participants is presented below in 2 with reference to age, sex, ethnicity, language, and grade.

Table 2 Biographical information: learners (n=47)

Age	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
14 – 15	20	42.5
16 – 17	24	51.1
18+	3	6.4
Total	**47**	**100**
Sex	**Number**	**Percentage**
Male	24	51.1
Female	23	48.9
Total	**47**	**100**
Ethnicity	**Number**	**Percentage**
White	0	0
Black	33	70
Indian	9	19.9.
Coloured	5	10.
Total	**47**	**100**

Age	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Language	**Number**	**Percentage**
English	13	27.7
Afrikaans	1	2.1
IsiZulu	8	17
Sepedi	11	23.4
Setswana	10	21.3
Tshivenda	0	0
Xitsonga	1	2.1
Isiswati	0	0
Isindebele	0	0
Other	3	6.4
Total	**47**	**100**
Grade	Number	Percentage
9	18	38.3
10	29	61.7
Total	**47**	**100**

Biographical information of educators: Focus group interviews

The biographical information of the educators relates to their age, sex, ethnicity, language, qualification, and number of years of teaching experience is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3 Biographical information: Educators (n=30)

Age	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
21-30	11	37
31-40	4	13
41-50	7	23
51+	8	27
Total	**30**	**100**
Sex	**Number**	**Percentage**
Male	9	30
Female	21	70
Total	**30**	**100**
Ethnicity	**Number**	**Percentage**
White	8	27
Black	11	37
Indian	7	23
Coloured	4	13
Total	**30**	**100**
Language	**Number**	**Percentage**
English	8	27
Afrikaans	11	37
IsiZulu	3	10
Sepedi	6	20

Age	**Number (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Setswana	1	3
Tshivenda	1	3
Xitsonga	0	0
Isiswati	0	0
Isindebele	0	0
Other	0	0
Total	**30**	**100**
Qualification	Number	Percentage
Diploma	5	17
Degree	16	53
Post-graduate	9	30
Total	**30**	**100**
Teaching Experience	**Number**	**Percentage**
1-5	7	23
6-10	7	23
11+	16	54
Total	**30**	**100**

Integrated Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

Findings indicate that learner-on-learner, learner-on-educator, and educator-on-learner violence is prevalent in all the participating schools. Included in this discussion are different typologies of school-based violence, namely: emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, gang, property, and cyber violence. These are presented and discussed below as themes.

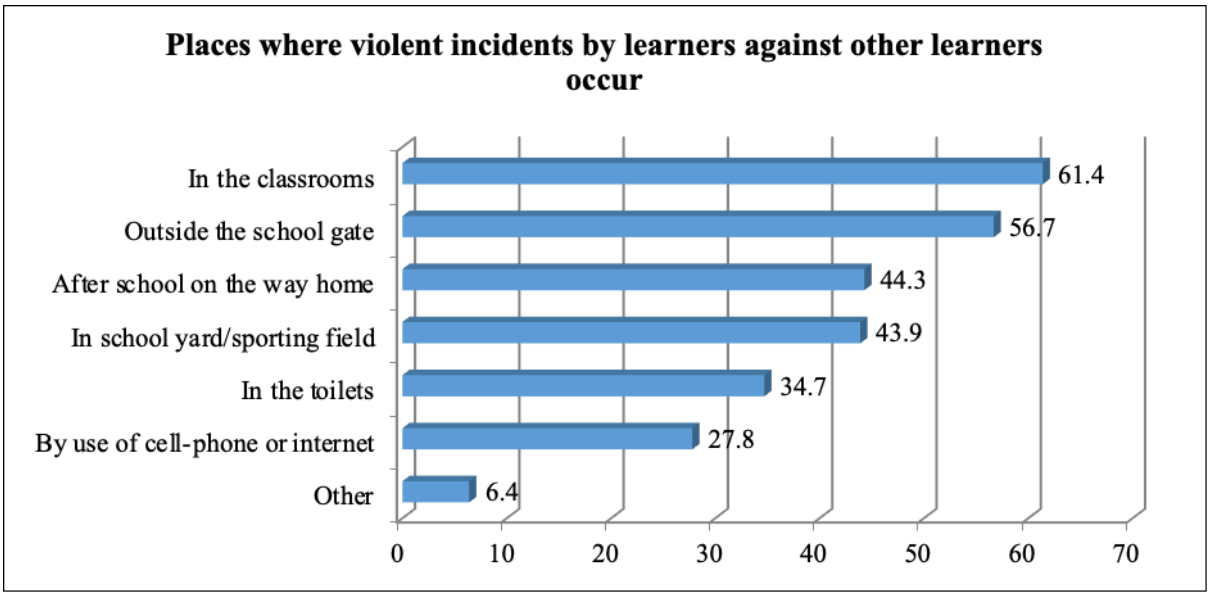
Theme 1: Learner-on-learner violence

During all the focus group discussions with both educators and learners respectively, most participants reported that violence between learners is prevalent in their respective schools. Several educators revealed that often learners physically fight among themselves because of numerous issues. Learners also confirmed the infighting between themselves due to varied reasons. Furthermore, educators revealed that often learners physically fight among themselves using different instruments and objects.

Places where learner-on-learner violence occurs.

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate where these violent incidents by learners against other learners occur. The figure below depicts their responses:

Figure 1 Places where violent incidents by learners against other learners occur (n=677)



According to Figure 1 Places where violent incidents by learners against other learners occur (n=677), 61.4% (n=416) of the respondents indicated that the violent incidents occur in the classrooms; 56.7% (n=384) outside the school gate; 44.3% (n=300) after school on the way home; 34.7% (n=235) in the toilets and 43.9% (n=297) indicated that it occurs in the school yard or sports field. The least place where violent incidents by learners against other learners occur was at other unidentified places. The latest instrument used by learners against other learners was a cell phone or the internet, which accounted for 27.8% (n=188). To confirm that classrooms are the most common places where violence takes place, an educator said:

> *"There was this big fight earlier in my class and I couldn't just deal with it anymore, you know you get to a point when you are tired. So, I stood far away on a corner next to my table and I watched the fight like everybody else."*

The results are consistent with studies by Burton and Leoschut (2013), which reveal that classrooms, open grounds and playing fields are common sites where violence takes place. Molosankwe (2015) states that most of these violent incidents happen in the presence of educators or when the learners are left alone unsupervised.

Theme 2: Educator-on-learner violence

Both qualitative findings and survey results indicate that learners are victimised not only by their peers, but also by educators. The results show that 19.3% (n=128) of the respondents indicated that they were physically abused by educators and another 40.3% (n=268) saw other learners being physically abused by educators. The respondents indicated that educators use foul language and objects to discipline learners. A Chi-square test for independence was used to investigate the relationship between sex and nature of violence and the question whether: "*A learner ever experienced emotional abuse incident (s) that occurred at their school in the past 6-12 months,* the results showing: χ^2 (1, *n*=593) =7.324, (*p*=0.025), Cramer's *V* (0.107). Respondents from townships were more likely to witness physical abuse of a learner by educators *(p*=0.015). The strength of the association is however weak.

The above findings confirm that violence perpetrated by educators against learners is prevalent and common in the participating schools despite the findings showing that less learners experience violence perpetrated by educators.

Theme 3: Learner-on-educator violence

Learner-on-educator violence was identified by educators at all the schools. Educators revealed that learners are disrespectful; they answer back or speak in South African indigenous languages which immigrant educators do not understand, to humiliate the educators. Further, it was revealed that learners threaten and insult the educators. Educators also reported that it is common for the big boys to verbally threaten junior educators, especially female educators, and threaten them with physical violence. This phenomenon was confirmed by the participating learners. Thus, there is convergence between the qualitative findings and the survey research regarding the prevalence of violence perpetrated against educators by learners. Survey research results reveal that 22.4% (n=149) of the respondents were aware that an educator was threatened with violence or physically assaulted by a learner.

Places where learner-on-educator violence occurs.

Respondents were also asked to indicate places where the violent incidents perpetrated against educators by learners occur. Figure 2 below indicates the places where the reported incidences of violence against educators are observed.

Figure 2 Places where these violent incidents against educators occur (n=677)

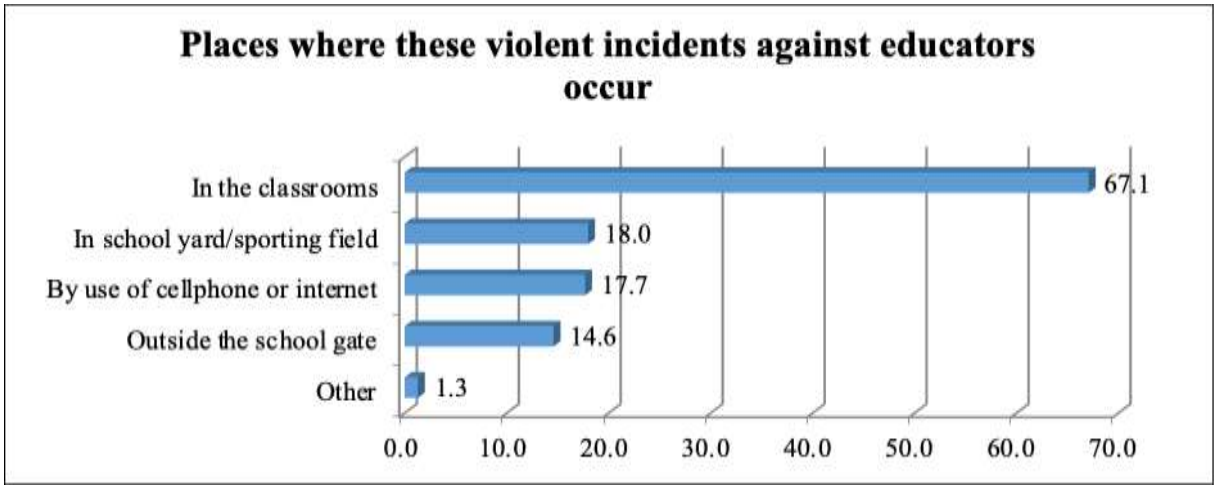


Figure depicts that violence perpetrated against educators occurs in the classrooms was indicated by most of the respondents (67.1%; n=454). The rest of the respondents indicated that violent incidents occur in the school yard/sports field (18%; n=122); by use of cell phone or internet (17.7%; n=120). Violent incidents perpetrated by learners against educators occur outside the school gate is slight. This accounted for (14.6%; n=99) of the reported cases.

Overall, there is convergence between the data regarding the prevalence of learner-on-educator violence in all the participating schools. The incidents occur in different places within the vicinity of the school and via the use of cellphones. The findings are compatible with several studies (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; De Wet, 2007) which confirm the extent of emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, gang, property, and cyber violence.

Discussing of Findings

The findings of the study are aligned to what is stated in the literature and to the findings of other studies. Literature indicates that violence is multi-dimensional comprising varied forms with each type differing according to frequency and the individuals' characteristics such as age and gender (Benbenishty & Astor, 2008). The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) (2008) reports that the nature of violence often depends on the social context in which it takes place such as whether it is between learner-on-learner, teacher-on-learner, and learner-on-teacher or by external people against both learners and teachers. Another view by Mncube and Harber (2013) indicates that violence emanates from different sources and involves different actors, often taking place in wide-ranging contexts. Du Plessis (2008) asserts that it is important to distinguish between the different kinds of violence, as it can easily be perceived as a single or general problem in society.

School violence takes many forms, varying from minor to severe acts of violence and aggression and includes corporal punishment, bullying, gang-related activities, sexual abuse, physical assault, verbal abuse, theft, robbery, and threats (Gevers & Flisher, 2012). The National School Violence Study focus is on verbal threats, physical assaults, robbery, and sexual assault; whilst other researchers (Burton, 2012) focus more on serious types of offences such as attacks with a weapon, rape, attempted murder, and murder. On the other hand, Du Plessis (2008) makes a distinction between political, gang, criminal, and relational violence whilst the SAHRC (2008) differentiates between learner against learner; learner against educator; educator towards learner and external persons against learners and educators.

Evidently, other forms of violence emanate from different sources and involve different actors and take place in wide-ranging contexts such as inside or outside the school premises (Mncube & Harber, 2013). In this study, it was found that verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, cyber, property, gang and systematic violence are all types of violence are often interrelated and affect many South African schools.

Implications and significance of the study

The establishment of a safe school environment for learners and educators is critical for ensuring effective teaching and learning. Safety and security are human rights issues, enshrined in the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (RSA, Act 108 of 1996).

It was envisaged that the study would contribute to the knowledge base of violence prevention, particularly in schools and generally in society, and as a result, foster safer schools and communities where people's rights to protection and education would be upheld. Furthermore, the significance of this study lies in its potential to influence social policy towards school-based prevention programmes and implementation by professionals such as social workers that would facilitate the growth and development of children and the youth.

Social workers are encouraged to incorporate critical thinking and uphold social values such as social justice and equality. In dealing with the issue of societal dysfunction, particularly school violence, it is crucial to explore the influence of socio-economic, political factors and cultural systems. It is also crucial to interrogate such issues as violation of human rights, inequality, prejudice, and stereotypes that perpetuate violence in society. Social workers are therefore expected to play a critical role in ensuring that such issues are addressed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, learner-on-learner, learner-on-educator, and educator-on-learner violence is prevalent in South African schools. The different typologies of school-based violence are around several spheres, namely: emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, gang, property, and cyber violence. The violence in schools can only be solved by multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder engagements.

A holistic approach is required to broadly assess and identify personal, social, economic, cultural, political, historical, technological, structural factors that contribute to different types and forms of violence in schools.

A comprehensive school-based violence prevention programme guided by the bio-ecological systems theory and practice frameworks such as developmental social work approach, social and emotional learning theory, character education and social cognitive and social competence approaches should be designed to target different types of violence.

In sum, violence is multi-dimensional and manifests in varied forms in schools and is exacerbated by varied contextual factors. Learners and educators are at risk of violence within the school context.

Recommendations

The nature of school-based violence is composite. As such, the following recommendations are made.

Future studies should further explore the causes of school-based violence in the context of the unique cultural and social factors and investigate similarities and differences between school violence in South Africa and other nations.

A holistic approach be designed to identify bio-psycho, social-political and technological strategies for responding to different forms of violence in schools.

The department of education, as the custodian of health and welfare of both learners and educators should establish violence prevention forums and task forces.

Academic and research institutions should conduct studies aimed at developing school violence intervention strategies and interventions.

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Caste, Gender, and English Language: Opportunities and Challenges in English Language Education for Women in Vidarbha Region, India

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Abstract

This paper draws inspiration from the teachings of social reformers Savitribai Phule, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, exploring the complex relationship between women's educational achievements and the broader implications for community progress in India. It critically examines the enduring practice of socio-economic and political elites seeking to maintain their privileges through their English-speaking abilities. Instances include here families with sufficient means to enroll sons in English-language schools, relegating daughters to less privileged vernacular educational settings. This phenomenon reflects deeply ingrained patriarchal norms, perpetuating gender-based discrimination in educational opportunities. English, aside from its linguistic significance, assumes a crucial role in building confidence and dismantling ingrained inferiority complexes, further underscoring the urgency of equitable access to English-language education for women in Vidarbha. Since independence, access to the English language has proved particularly useful for marginalised sections of Indian society to empower themselves. Advocating for equitable English-language education aligns with Ambedkar's belief in its power to combat injustice and enable social mobility for marginalised groups. This paper's focus is to highlight socio-economic, gender, and regional disparities within an economically developed state in India, using the spread of English language education as a parameter to present the analysis.

Keyword: Vidarbha, Education, Gender, English language, First generation students

Introduction

"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved," said Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a pioneering anti-caste and feminist leader from India in the mid-twentieth century, who envisioned a future where societal advancement was deeply intertwined with the advancement of women. Education was an integral aspect of his vision for the progress of women and lower castes. This research paper draws inspiration from Ambedkar's public engagement and scholarship to explore the complex relationship between women's educational achievements and the broader implications for community progress in India decades after his death in 1956, after which many aspects of socioeconomic and political life have changed.

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When we look into this complicated relationship, we argue that educating women goes beyond just providing individuals agency; it also has the potential to change society as a whole. However, it is confronted with multiple challenges, starting from the smallest unit which is the family, to the history of uneven development by state institutions in different regions of India. The distribution of most premier colleges and universities in India is uneven across certain metropolitan cities and districts, with a vast number of districts lacking quality higher education and infrastructure (Shobhana, 2018). Women in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra experience considerable socio-economic, cultural, and systemic obstacles to obtaining English language education, despite its capacity to empower and facilitate socio-economic advancement. Enduring caste and gender prejudices, disparities between rural and urban areas, and patriarchal conventions persistently restrict women's access to education, especially in English fluency, which is essential for modern employment and changing societies.

The Vidarbha region of Maharashtra starkly exemplifies the phenomenon of educational and industrial disparity when compared to other regions such as the Mumbai-Thane-Pune belt (Amrutkar 2009). Vidarbha's story is one of underdevelopment and disparity, where economic growth has not kept pace with other parts of the state and educational opportunities, particularly for women, remain limited. This economic and educational asymmetry has created a noticeable disparity, further fuelled by discontent resulting from the mismatch between the spread of higher education and the generation of employment opportunities. Education, as argued by many contemporary scholars, particularly for women, embodies a transformative power that is crucial for the advancement of society and the empowerment of women (Nag 2018; Banerjee 2018; Deshpande 2006; Akram 2018). However, as we argued in the introductory paragraph, families often decide the life trajectories of women, including their education. In India's complex caste system, it is important to know about the traditional rules and laws that govern women's bodies and movements when it comes to maintaining endogamy and especially hypergamy (Chakravarti 2002). Endogamy, which necessitates marriage within one's caste, acts as a cornerstone for the preservation of the caste system. The Hindu newspaper's 2014 survey highlights the rigidity of this system, revealing that only 5% of Indian marriages are inter-caste, underscoring the strict adherence to caste boundaries (R. 2014).

This study aims to investigate the socio-economic, gender-based, and cultural factors that influence women's access to English language education in the Vidarbha region. The research seeks to explore the challenges women face, the transformative potential of English proficiency for empowerment, and the implications for socio-economic mobility and gender equity in the region. In caste-based patriarchal societies like Vidarbha, women have historically been assigned the roles of homemakers and caretakers, with decisions about their lives and mobility often made by the male heads of the families, including their access to education. The rural-urban divide exacerbates this situation for women. While in cities like Pune, Mumbai, and Thane, women from middle and upper-middle classes have relatively better access to education, including English language education, most women from rural areas and backward regions like Vidarbha are deprived of these opportunities. Such disparities not only highlight the need for targeted educational policies in different regions but also underscore the imperative to avoid analysing women as a homogenous group in their access to education, specifically English education. In Vidarbha, within families where educational resources are scarce, the focus often gravitates towards educating male members at the expense of female members of the family. This dynamic is emblematic of a broader societal issue in South Asia, where sons are expected to look after their families later while daughters are sent off after marriage to a different family. Hence, English-medium convent schools prioritise access to education for males over females. This relegates daughters

to less privileged vernacular educational settings, allowing them to study only up to a certain grade. Even when they are allowed to study, it is rooted in the notion that their educational qualifications would eventually help in finding them a suitable groom. This phenomenon of preventing women from continuing education after a certain grade stems from the fear that they might make decisions contrary to the family's wishes. This can be attributed to the idea of the 'Sanskari Bahu' or 'Sharif ghar ki Ladki,' which reflects the imagery of a servile, submissive, and obedient woman (Khurshid 2017; Mujahid et al. 2015).

However, we cannot understate the crucial role of educational opportunities in providing women with a degree of mobility. Such opportunities, particularly in the form of English language education, offer a gateway for women, especially those from smaller towns and rural areas, to access new and diversified job markets in nearby cities. These markets not only demand specific language proficiencies but also promise a departure from traditional home-based gender roles. Nonetheless, many in small towns view the acquisition of education, particularly English language proficiency for women and the ensuing mobility, with trepidation, fearing the potential of cross-caste interactions. At the same time, proficiency in English equips women with the necessary skills for enhanced communication and access to a plethora of opportunities that were previously unattainable with vernacular medium education, which offers limited prospects.

Within this broader context of underdevelopment, rural-urban divide, patriarchal caste norms, and class divide, our research explores women and their access to English education in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra state in India.

Literature Review

This section examines the complexities surrounding English language education for the lower castes, specifically Dalit and Adivasi women. The intersection of caste, gender, and power dynamics has a dramatic impact on access to and experiences within India's higher education system. Deshpande (2006) explains how the historical dominance of upper castes in higher education has been legitimised under the pretext of merit, which frequently disguises the systemic exclusion of lower castes such as Dalits and Adivasis. Such unequal access to quality higher education must be examined within historical processes that favour certain groups over others (Deshpande 2006). Central to this review is the influence of patriarchy, as elucidated by Chakravarti (1993), who provides a critical analysis of how patriarchal structures in South Asian societies, including India, curtail women's movements and freedoms. Chakravarti's insights into the relegation of women to nurturing roles within the household highlight the broader societal constraints that limit women's educational and economic opportunities, particularly in regions like Vidarbha. Moreover, Gurjar and Srishti (2022) scrutinise the manifestation of caste and its consequences on Dalit identities in urban environments, contending that the stigmatisation of caste and broader societal perceptions inextricably link Dalits' obstacles to higher education and social mobility. They indicate that the urban aesthetics of caste complicate socioeconomic advancement narratives and highlight the necessity for policies that address the interconnectedness of caste, gender, and urban poverty (Gurjar & Srishti 2022). Additionally, the intersection of caste and education, particularly for Dalit women, adds another layer of complexity to the educational landscape. Still (2008) offers an in-depth exploration of class dynamics among Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh, highlighting the nuanced relationship between educational attainment and societal expectations. Still points to the persistent challenges faced by women, even after accessing education and advancing their economic class, suggesting that the mobility of middle-class Dalit women

is curtailed by their families striving to emulate values of respectability tied to caste and class status. On the other hand, upper-caste women, despite receiving education, often find their empowerment limited in terms of job prospects and societal roles. Akram (2018) and Mujahid et al. (2015) have explored this pattern of limited empowerment, reflecting broader societal norms.

The post-colonial linguistic landscape of India, as discussed by Liddicoat and Kirkpatrick (2020), further complicates the context within which English language education operates. Their analysis of the marginalisation of indigenous languages in favour of English demonstrates the socio-economic disparities perpetuated by linguistic preferences in education. This trend is particularly evident in the uneven access to English-language education between urban and rural areas and is acutely relevant in a region like Vidarbha, where the local Marathi language is a prevalent form of communication in everyday life.

Ramanathan's review highlights the challenges in English language teaching, including the need for improved teacher training and localised educational research, underscoring the urgent need for reforms to enhance educational access and quality. This discussion is critical for understanding the broader implications of English language education for social mobility and economic opportunities in the region (Ramanathan 2006).

While existing research offers insights at national or state levels, it often overlooks the unique challenges faced by different regions with their unique socio-economic structures, development histories, and cultural values. In summary, the challenges encountered in accessing English education are particularly pronounced in rural settings, where economic constraints and societal inequalities limit educational opportunities, especially in English-medium schools. The privatisation of English education in India reinforces its association with privilege, further exacerbating gender-based disparities in educational access and outcomes.

This literature review, therefore, underscores the critical need for further research to bridge the knowledge gap and address the multifaceted challenges faced by marginalised communities, particularly women. By fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape, there lies potential to transform English language education into a potent tool for empowerment and social change, contributing to the socio-economic development and cultural transformation of the region. However, a recent report by the ILO suggests that Indian youth constitute 82.9% of the unemployed population in India. Even those who have acquired secondary and higher education continue to be in this demographic, which increased by 11.5%, from 54.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2022 (Naseer, 2024). Economists and public policy scholars have argued that India has been witnessing jobless economic growth, with more youth moving back to agriculture-related jobs, which is disguised unemployment (Nilakantan, 2024). This phase requires us to critically examine the relationship between higher education, the English language, and job opportunities, which serve as indicators of socioeconomic mobility for women.

A broad historical overview of access to higher education, caste inequalities, prestige associated with English education in post-colonial India, gender norms, changing economies, and region-specific studies would help us to better understand the link between women and English education.

Methodology

This research utilised a quantitative, non-experimental methodology to investigate the challenges and opportunities related to English-language education for women in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, India. The study focused on understanding the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing educational access, ensuring both objectivity and depth without manipulating variables. We selected a purposive sample of 197 participants, aged 18 and older, from 11 districts in Vidarbha to ensure representation across various caste and socio-economic groups, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and Nomadic Tribes/Denotified Tribes (NT/DNT). Data collection primarily relied on a structured questionnaire designed to explore multiple aspects of women's educational experiences, such as socio-economic barriers, cultural influences, and aspirations regarding English education. Google Forms facilitated the efficient collection of quantitative data from geographically dispersed participants. We employed additional methods such as focus group discussions, unstructured interviews, and both participant and non-participant observations to enhance the qualitative depth of the study. These methods provided insights into participants' experiences and challenges. Specific objectives guided the study, which included identifying socio-economic and cultural barriers to English education and exploring women's aspirations related to it. We framed hypotheses to investigate whether marginalised women faced greater challenges and whether cultural barriers significantly impacted educational access. The selection process was very detailed. We found participants through local groups and colleges, and included them based on their socioeconomic status. The criteria for inclusion were women aged 18 and up who lived in Vidarbha. We conducted quantitative data analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), enabling the identification of patterns, relationships, and trends in the responses. Along with the quantitative results, thematic analysis of qualitative data gave a more complete and nuanced picture of the education system in Vidarbha. We rigorously followed ethical guidelines throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant confidentiality. By integrating statistical analysis with qualitative insights, this study provides practical recommendations for addressing institutional and cultural barriers and promoting equitable access to English education for women in Vidarbha.

Regional Context and Socio-Economic Overview of Vidarbha

The Vidarbha region, encompassing two administrative divisions, Amaravati and Nagpur, with 11 districts and 120 sub-blocks, is quite different from other regions of Maharashtra in many ways. Despite occupying 31.6% of Maharashtra's total area and accounting for 21.3% of its population, Vidarbha contributes only about 10% to the state's GDP, according to the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Maharashtra Government. Historically, the region has faced agricultural distress and high farmer suicide rates. According to the National Census 2011, approximately 30% of its population comprises SC and ST communities, with notable representation from NT-DNT communities such as Banjara, Dhangar, Vadar, and Bhill. The OBC castes, such as Kunbi, Teli, and Mali, have maintained a hold over land ownership in the region. The Scheduled Tribes percentage, higher than the state and national average, includes primitive tribal groups (PVTG) communities Kolam, Madiya Gond, and other tribal groups like Pardhan, Mana, and Korku. Seasonal migration among landless labourers, including Dalit groups like Mahar, Matang, and NT-DNT communities, is quite prevalent. Since 2014, the BJP, the right-wing Hindu nationalist party, has been holding sway over electoral politics in the region. In recent years, there has been an increasing privatisation in education, particularly in higher education and private schools. Establishing these private institutions has become a business for

traditional merchant caste groups such as the Marwaris and a few wealthy Kunbi political leaders who utilise their agrarian surplus in this domain. The languages spoken in the region are Marathi and its dialects such as Varhadi and Zadiboli, along with Hindi, Gondi, Korku, Kolami, Telugu, and Lambadi. Seasonal migration to big cities such as Pune, Mumbai, Nashik, Nagpur, and Aurangabad has been a phenomenon among landless labourers, mostly Dalit groups like Mahar, Matang, and NT-DNT communities. Major reasons for this migration can be attributed to the dry climate in the region with inadequate rainfall for agriculture, lack of industries, and poor infrastructure for education and health. According to government data, Maharashtra's per capita income in the fiscal year 2011-12 was INR 127,606, while Vidarbha's was significantly lower at INR 65,368. This stark contrast highlights the economic disparities between Vidarbha and the rest of Maharashtra.

Caste-Based Insights:

In our research survey, a majority of the study participants are first-generation college students and come from OBC, Adivasi, and Dalit backgrounds, with significant numbers from Kunbi, Banjara, Kolam, and Korku communities. The Kunbi caste, most of whom have landholdings ranging from small and marginal to large, often allows higher education for women, viewing it as a means to secure a prosperous marriage by matching with well-off grooms. Simultaneously, a significant number of female participants from agricultural families across various caste groups encountered financial difficulties as a result of agricultural distress. Furthermore, the absence of transportation facilities to nearby colleges significantly hinders their ability to pursue higher education. Only a small section among them could secure accommodation in college hostels, thereby restricting their ability to travel far for education. Those from Korku Adivasi backgrounds could access government-funded hostels, but since most had difficulty speaking the predominant Marathi language, navigating the academic space was challenging for them.

Seasonal migration, especially among Dalits and NT/DNT communities who have historically worked as landless labourers, affected the education of women, as some had to travel with their parents. Given the caste-enveloped class socio-economic trajectories, most participants across caste groups among OBCs and Dalits hailed from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and could not afford to study in expensive English-medium schools. However, focus group discussions revealed that while parents are willing to invest in English-medium education for their sons despite economic hardships, they often do not do the same for their daughters. Given that caste status in the Vidarbha region influences community access to land ownership, many female participants from Dalit and NT/DNT backgrounds reported working as farm labourers to fund their higher education.

Data Collection

It is within this broad context that we intend to explore the educational journeys and outcomes of young girls and women from Vidarbha. This research adopts a quantitative, non-experimental design, incorporating survey methods, focus group discussions, and participant observation. Aligned with the principles of non-experimental research outlined by Antwi and Hamza (2015), this approach avoids manipulating independent variables and focuses on observing the natural unfolding of variables. Leveraging survey research, a widely accepted quantitative technique in the social sciences (Bethlehem, 2009), the study systematically collects information to understand and predict various aspects of the behaviour of the target population. This design, guided by literature principles, allows for the exploration of trends, variations, and correlations relevant to English language education for women in

Vidarbha (Ary et al., 2010). The strengths of this approach are situated in its capacity to generate generalisable results, ease of analysis, and comparability across diverse groups. The reliability and replicability of quantitative data can provide robust indicators for policy guidance, supported by existing professional standards ensuring consistency in survey work (Walker, 2005; Atieno, 2009).

Demographic representation is a crucial aspect of the research design, with a primary focus on women aged 18 and above. We believe that it is a reflective stage in life where educational choices and experiences become particularly relevant. The inclusion of women actively pursuing education in colleges within the Vidarbha region ensures a comprehensive exploration of their encounters with English language education. This demographic specificity adds depth and relevance to the study, as it hones in on the segment of the population most directly engaged with formal education.

English language education for women in Vidarbha (Data Analysis)

We use a thorough data analysis approach to demonstrate the complex circumstances of women's access to English language education in Vidarbha. Our findings illustrate the enormous challenges these women confront in obtaining an English education, as well as the transformative implications for those who succeed. We examine this phenomenon systematically through three major topics: access to English language education, cultural tensions in English language learning, confidence, and English language education. Each section delves deeply into the multifaceted difficulties and opportunities, providing an in-depth overview of the socio-cultural and economic factors at play.

1. Access to English Language Education

- **Educational Background**

An analysis of young women's educational backgrounds indicates a remarkable concentration of higher education attainment, with 75.12% (148 out of 197) of them possessing a bachelor's degree or pursuing higher education. The data, primarily collected from colleges, underscores the academic aspirations and achievements of young women in Vidarbha, initially casting a favourable light on gender and education in the region. However, further investigation of the socioeconomic backgrounds that influence these educational choices reveal complex interconnectedness between caste, gender norms, development, ecology, agriculture, and land. The high percentage of participants with higher education degrees reflects the importance of formal education among Indians, which is consistent with findings by Jeffrey et al. (2005) that education is a means of socio-political empowerment in low-caste communities. Jeffery’s study in rural North India finds similar resonance here in Vidarbha when it comes to the motivation behind acquiring higher education among women.

- **English Education Participation**

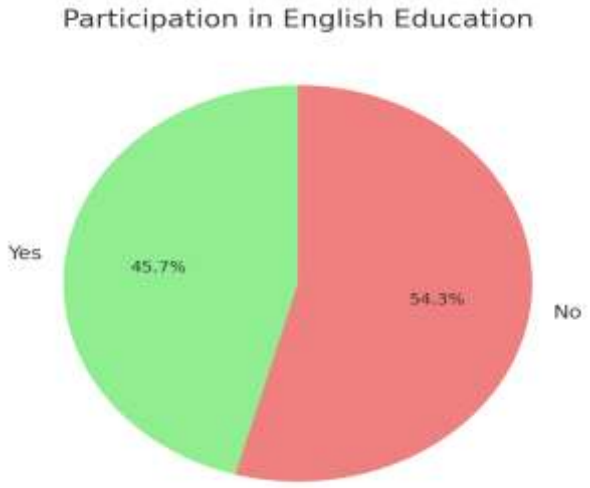


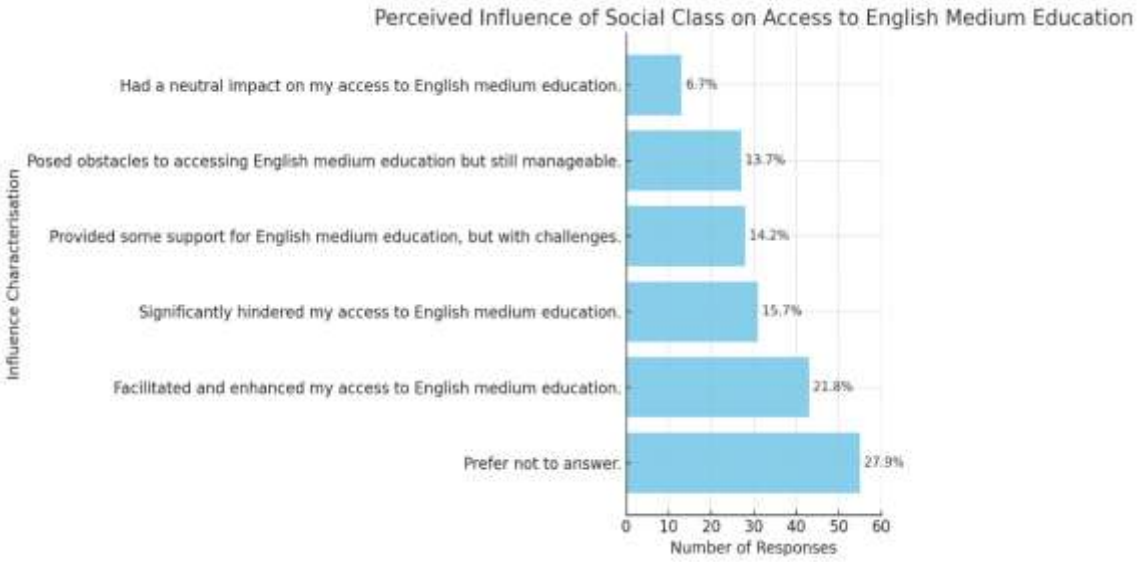
Figure 1

The survey's findings about English education participation showed that while 45.7% (90) of the participants had received instruction in English, 54.3% (107) had not, pointing to uneven access in women's language learning. Although English is certainly a compulsory third language at school and college, it is often treated merely as a subject rather than as a medium of communication or a practical communication skill. This difference became more marked during the study that was conducted in two institutions working with different instructional mediums. In the diploma engineering college, for instance, where English is the medium of instruction, the students receive constant exposure to English through various subjects. The social work college, on the other hand, functions mainly in Marathi, which means that the students engage with English only as an independent subject. This is a contextual difference that underscores varied experiences and exposure to English education among participants, even within similar academic settings. When compared to the participants' educational attainment, this gap in English education enrolment is quite illuminating. This survey shows that English education increased progressively with educational attainment: only 7.10% of the respondents with primary education, 25% with secondary education, and as many as 67.90% with a bachelor's degree or higher reported that they received education in English. However, this data highlights the tendency to treat English as a subject rather than as a useful communication skill. During discussions with participants, it was found that some had studied in semi-English secondary schools where some subjects, such as science and mathematics, were taught in English while the other subjects were taught in their regional language. Thus, partial exposure restricted their holistic engagement with English, reinforcing its role as a compartmentalised academic subject rather than a comprehensive medium of learning. On the other hand, the majority of participants had bachelor degrees with a medium of instruction in English, such as a Bachelor in Science or Engineering. This also raised a question about whether a sudden shift from regional language to English might be difficult for participants.

The gradient of rising involvement in English education with increasing educational attainment suggests that curriculum and textbooks in higher education are primarily in English, unlike the vernacular language textbooks that students would have used in their primary and secondary learning. Although the quantitative analysis of the survey data primarily highlights this link, it also indirectly addresses the structural barriers and inequities that Sukumar (2023) and Deshpande (2006) have pointed out. The gap in English education participation, particularly among those with lower educational levels, reflects larger socio-economic and caste-based disparities that characterise the Indian educational system. Those lower in the caste ladder are more prone to dropping out of colleges due to a lack of financial capital and entrenched gender norms about women's higher education, which ring true for the colleges that we visited in Vidarbha.

- **Social Class Influence**

Figure 2 Assessment of the Perceived Influence of Social Class on Access to English Medium Education



Based on Figure 2 above, a notable portion of respondents (21.8%) believed that their social class facilitated and enhanced their access to English medium education. A smaller percentage (6.7%) perceived a neutral impact of social class on their access to English education. 13.7% of respondents felt that their social class posed obstacles to accessing English-medium education, but these obstacles were manageable. Further, a substantial portion (27.9%) of respondents chose not to disclose their perception of the influence of social class on their access to English education. Another 14.2% of respondents believed that their social class provided some support for English medium education, even though it had challenges. 15.7% perceived that their social class significantly hindered their access to English-medium education. Therefore, the perceptions are diverse, with some individuals feeling positive about the influence of their social class, while others perceive challenges or obstacles. The substantial percentage of respondents choosing not to answer may also reflect the sensitivity or complexity associated with the relationship between social class and access to English-medium education.

Table 1

	Facilitated and enhanced my access to English-medium education	Had a neutral impact on my access to English-medium education.	Posed obstacles to accessing English-medium education but still manageable	Prefer not to answer	Provided some support for English medium education, but with challenges	Significantly hindered my access to English-medium education
Agriculture	19.3%	9.6%	17.5%	25.4%	11.4%	16.7%
Business/Entrepreneurship	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	12.5%	29.2%
Employment/Salary	19.0%	0.0%	19.0%	19.0%	28.6%	14.3%
Government assistance/Welfare	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	25.0%
Investments/Financial assets	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	20.0%	10.0%	25.0%	30.0%	10.0%	5.0%
Prefer not to answer	30.8%	0.0%	0.0%	53.8%	15.4%	0.0%

Table 1 illustrates that access to English-medium education is significantly affected by money sources and social standing, revealing clear discrepancies that underscore the impact of socio-economic privilege. Individuals from business or entrepreneurial backgrounds reported facilitated access more often, highlighting the socio-economic advantages and accumulated cultural capital present in these groups. In contrast, participants whose main income derived from agriculture or government aid reported greater difficulties in obtaining English-medium schooling, highlighting the systemic obstacles encountered by underprivileged communities. A significant observation is that a considerable percentage of participants chose not to respond to enquiries about the impact of social class, indicating two possible explanations: either they perceived the question as sensitive and felt uneasy discussing it, or they may not have comprehended the question entirely. Based on the overall answer patterns found in the study, the likelihood of feeling uncomfortable seemed high, since participants consistently avoided questions about sensitive social dynamics. This hesitance illustrates the complex socio-cultural dynamics involved, where conversations about privilege or socio-economic status may be viewed as controversial or stigmatising.

Barriers to English Education: Affordability and Availability

While patriarchy remains a significant barrier to women's education, our findings reveal that issues of affordability and availability of educational resources are equally critical. Financial constraints and a lack of accessible educational opportunities emerge as substantial hurdles in Vidarbha. This highlights the necessity for targeted policy interventions aimed at enhancing the affordability and accessibility of English language learning opportunities, thereby ensuring that women across different socio-economic backgrounds can access education, moving beyond the barriers imposed by patriarchy alone.

Table 2 Primary Barriers Reported by Participants

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Socio-Cultural factors	10	5.1
Affordability	48	24.4
Availability	38	19.3
No response	101	51.3

The table explores the significant obstacles to obtaining English-language education, as revealed by an open-ended inquiry. A majority of participants (51.3%) abstained from responding, perhaps indicating difficulties in expressing their obstacles or unease in confronting the inquiry. 5.1% of respondents cited cultural issues, emphasising socio-cultural obstacles that hinder access. Affordability constituted a major obstacle, reported by 24.4% of participants, signifying that financial limitations had a substantial influence. Availability, noted by 19.3%, highlights the restricted access to English-language resources or opportunities. The large number of non-responses suggests that many barriers may not be clearly stated or are less concrete, even though financial and availability issues are important.

2. The Cultural Tensions within English Language Learning

- **English Education as a Challenge to Cultural Norms**

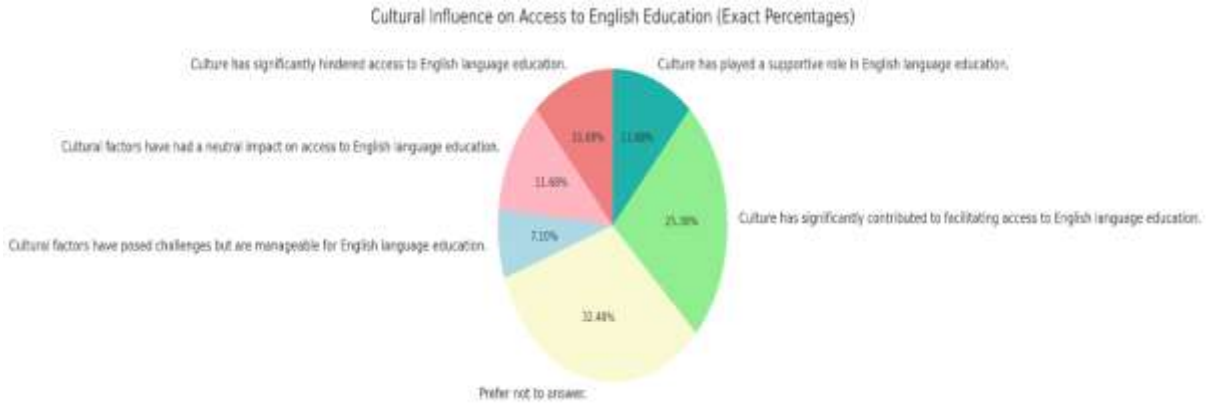
In this context, cultural norms are deeply rooted beliefs, attitudes, and practices shared by a community that shape people's perceptions and behaviors. These norms encompass attitudes towards gender roles, language, and education, all of which shape the perception and value of women's educational opportunities in society. For instance, the region's deeply ingrained linguistic pride upholds the Marathi language as a fundamental symbol of cultural identity and values, often leading to scepticism or outright rejection of foreign languages like English, perceived as a symbol of western influence and moral decay. Such norms often prevent families from sending their daughters to English-medium schools, perpetuating stereotypes about English's association with western moral values. There is an underlying notion that equates Marathi with cultural purity and English with cultural degradation.

Furthermore, there are restrictions that demand college-going women adhere to specific dress codes, dietary restrictions, and submission in front of male family members. This also includes

prohibitions against sitting with male family members when they discuss events and issues. These culturally conservative norms influence the broader participation of women in social and public life and hinder their aspirations to be mobile. Despite this broad cultural pattern, a positive shift is also occurring within many families who are increasingly supporting female education, moving beyond rigid restrictions. This change, however gradual, suggests that cultural norms, both visible and invisible, affect the way women access life opportunities. d Access to higher education is one such important opportunity.

- **Cultural Influence**

Figure 3



A substantial percentage of respondents (25.38%) reported that culture played a crucial role in enhancing access to English language education. Additionally, 11.68% indicated that culture contributed to the support of English language education. Likewise, 11.68% of participants indicated that culture exerted a neutral influence on access to English language education. Additionally, 11.68% of respondents indicated that cultural issues substantially obstructed access to English language education. Approximately 7.10% of respondents recognised that cultural issues provide obstacles; however, these are controllable within English language instruction. A significant percentage of respondents (32.48%) choose not to respond to the question.

Therefore, the findings reflect a wide range of perspectives on the role of cultural influence in improving access to English language education. The high percentage of respondents who chose not to respond may point to a complex interaction between culture and English education access. Discussions with participants showed that 'cultural variables' substantially affect access to English-language education, especially concerning gender. Many families were hesitant to enroll their girls in English-medium schools due to concerns about the values these institutions would instill. This reluctance seems to arise from a conviction that exposure to English education may jeopardise traditional cultural values and encourage cultural assimilation. These observations underscore the intricate relationship between educational ambitions and the maintenance of socio-cultural norms, elucidating how cultural concerns influence decisions regarding English-language education for girls.

Further findings indicate that participants perceive English-language education as fostering behaviours that are viewed as unsuitable in their cultural setting, such as increased independence or questioning established gender roles. Many participants highlighted the perceived threat of 'modern' or

'degrading' values often associated with English-medium schools, which contributes to families' reluctance to support their daughters' education in English.

Concerns surrounding marriage also emerged as a significant barrier. Participants discussed how families fear that higher education, especially in English, could empower girls to express their preferences about the timing and choice of marriage, potentially challenging traditional norms related to age and community expectations. Safety concerns were another prominent theme, particularly in rural areas where quality English-language education is often locally unavailable. In such cases, participants noted that girls may need to travel or migrate to urban centres for education, which parents discourage due to fears of harassment or violence. Daughters are often considered symbols of family honour, and any incidents—such as eve-teasing or harassment—are seen as bringing shame and indignity upon the family. These tendencies reflect a victim-blaming culture and illustrate how deeply entrenched patriarchal norms continue to influence perceptions and decisions regarding girls' education.

- **Autonomy and Empowerment in Education**

The analysis highlights the importance of autonomy in decision-making as a critical factor in women's engagement with English language education. This paper examines autonomy and decision-making within the socio-cultural and familial contexts that shape women's educational pursuits. These contexts often determine the extent to which women can make independent choices about their education. Women with greater autonomy are more likely to participate in and benefit from English language education. The findings emphasise the need to support women in making informed choices about their education, particularly in settings where such autonomy is limited.

- **Autonomy in Decision-making:**

Table 3 Participants' Perception of Autonomy in Decision-making and its Association with English Language Education

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.095	8	0.041
Likelihood Ratio	15.576	8	0.048
N of Valid Cases	197		

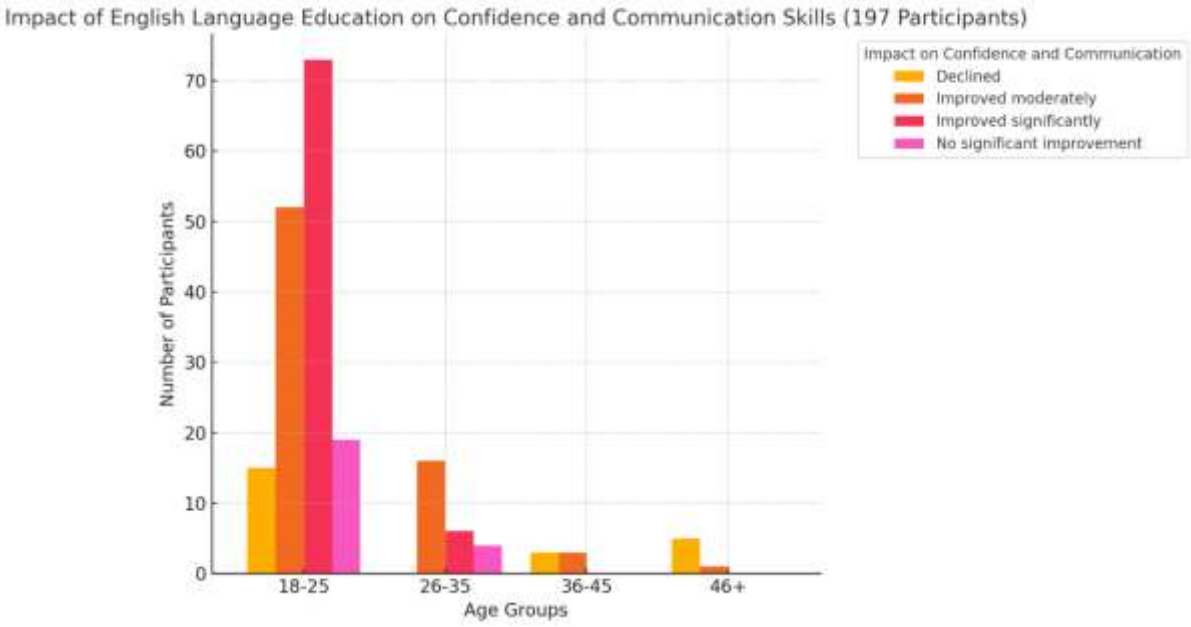
In Table 3, 46.7% of the 197 participants felt completely empowered to make their own decisions, whereas 30.0% experienced a degree of autonomy but sought advice from others. 23.3% either regarded decision-making as a collaborative endeavour or depended on the counsel of others. The revised analysis demonstrates a notable correlation between the degree of autonomy and perceptions of the influence of English education, as evidenced by the Chi-Square test (X^2 (8) = 16.095, p =.041). This suggests a correlation between autonomy in decision-making and the perception of English language instruction as a transformative element.

3. Confidence, Employment and English Language Education

English proficiency is essential for education and empowerment in India since it provides avenues for social mobility, international interaction, and self-assurance. Proficiency in English correlates with increased salaries, as proficient speakers earn 34% more than individuals with weak skills (Azam et al., 2010). English proficiency is a crucial determinant of employability, with more than 50% of companies in India evaluating English skills during recruitment and frequently providing higher compensation to adept candidates (Das 2019).

In addition to economic advantages, proficiency in English enhances self-assurance, as it is linked to status and competence. It empowers individuals, especially women and rural communities, by improving their capacity to navigate competitive landscapes and access global opportunities. Nonetheless, access inequities endure, with urban groups and males exhibiting superior proficiency rates. English fluency is an essential asset for education, self-assurance, and socioeconomic progress in India. The clustered column chart depicts the effect of English language instruction on participants' confidence and communication abilities, visually demonstrating how competency in English affects these essential personal and professional traits.

Figure 4 Clustered Column Chart Examining the Impact of English language Education on Participants' Confidence and Communication skills



The above graph illustrates the impact of English language education on confidence and communication skills among participants, categorized by age. Most participants were aged 18–25 (159 participants), with 73 reporting significant improvement and 52 reporting moderate improvement. In the 26–35 group (26 participants), 16 noted moderate improvement, and 6 reported significant improvement. Participants aged 36–45 (6 participants), and 46+ (6 participants) showed minimal or no significant improvement, with some reporting a decline. The data highlights that English education is most beneficial for younger participants (18–35), with its advantages diminishing for older groups.

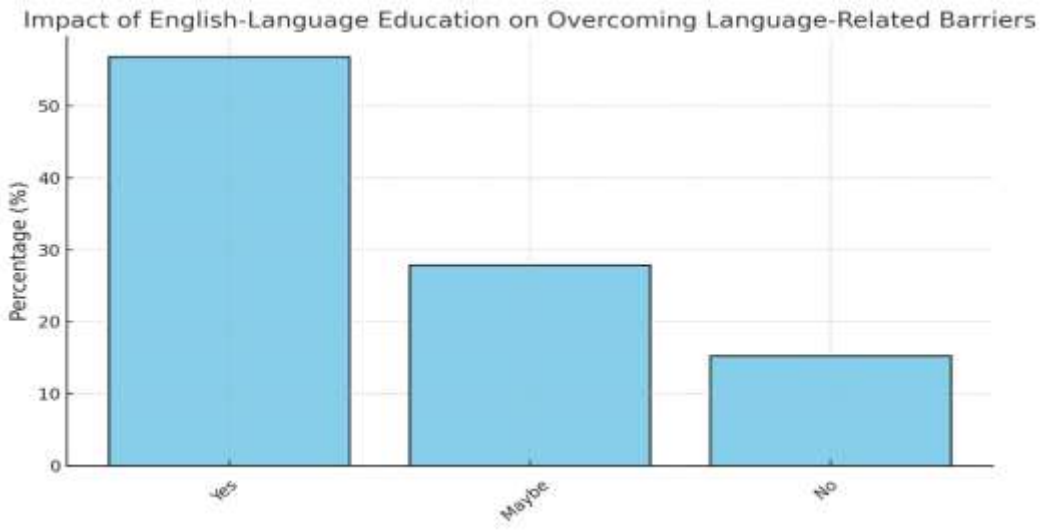
Furthermore, data shows that English language education considerably boosts confidence and communication skills, especially among young women. According to the research, English proficiency

is more than a skill; it is a type of cultural and social capital that can have a significant impact on people's social identities and mobility. Many women find that knowing English significantly enhances their job prospects, provides access to a wealth of information, and enables them to participate in urban networks. They feel English language proficiency builds confidence and is crucial for personal and professional development.

During discussions, many participants shared that learning English has helped them assert their rights more effectively, enabling them to challenge traditional norms and advocate for gender equality. Women emphasised that English proficiency empowers them to communicate confidently, actively participate in discussions, and make decisions that affect their lives. Based on qualitative feedback, respondents expressed a recurring theme about the transformative role of English in enhancing their agency and self-expression.

- **Impact on Language-related Barriers**

Figure 5 Bar graph showing how English-language education helped overcome any language-related barriers



More than half of the respondents (56.9%) reported that English language education has helped them overcome language-related barriers or discrimination. About 27.9% were uncertain about its impact, while 15.2% stated that it did not help. These findings suggest that the majority of respondents view English language education as beneficial in overcoming such barriers. However, the uncertainty among some respondents and a minority reporting no impact highlights the need for further exploration to understand individual experiences and challenges more deeply.

- **The Transformative Potential of English Education**

Participants reported significant improvements in confidence and communication skills as a result of their English language education, as indicated by both quantitative data and participant discussions. This transformation indicates the empowering potential of language proficiency, which not only enhances personal and professional communication but also boosts overall self-confidence. Additionally, both quantitative and qualitative research show that learning English is an important way to prepare for working in the global economy and a powerful way to challenge gender and caste conventions. Participants indicated that English proficiency allowed them to challenge societal

expectations, thereby facilitating a reconfiguration of values and norms. However, we did not examine enquiries about marriage and inter-caste relationships because they were beyond the scope of this research. Although such an investigation might have yielded significant insights into the radical potential of English language instruction, the present findings support important claims regarding its transformational function, as evidenced by the participant narratives and the numerical data.

Access to English education among women has shown to significantly impact their learning, speaking, and writing in the English language. Women who studied in colleges and universities are more likely to enhance their fluency in English. Additionally, their employment opportunities are also diversified beyond manual labour and nurturing roles in the house. Despite initial apprehensions and challenges, this process has led to significant progress in moving away from traditional values that restrict women's increased mobility. This trend not only highlights the importance of educational attainment for individual women but also suggests a ripple effect on the community, as educated women are better positioned to contribute to financial wellbeing as well as community progress in terms of cultural values.

Discussion

The relationship between English proficiency and occupational opportunities underscores the growing importance of language skills in the contemporary job market. Since the liberalisation and privatisation policies of 1991, the job market has experienced significant diversification. Urbanisation and migration from smaller towns to metropolitan areas, especially among women, have heightened the demand for English proficiency as a critical skill for accessing better job opportunities (Graddol, 2010).

However, while this study highlights the positive impact of English education on confidence, employment, and mobility among women in Vidarbha, it is crucial to acknowledge that the results align partially with previous studies yet also reveal significant contrasts. For instance, Azam et al. (2010) reported that proficiency in English led to a 34% increase in salaries, a finding consistent with this study, which showed enhanced career opportunities for women with English proficiency. However, despite Azam et al.'s broader optimism regarding the benefits of English skills, this study also reveals substantial barriers faced by women in accessing English education, particularly related to cultural norms and gender restrictions.

Drawing on Sen's (1999) concept of 'Development as Freedom,' this study underscores the understanding that access to education, including English proficiency, is fundamental for expanding individual capabilities and enhancing social freedoms, thereby fostering empowerment and broader societal development. However, this study adds nuance by highlighting the uneven distribution of these capabilities, especially in the rural areas of Vidarbha, where cultural resistance persists in impeding equitable access. Unlike Sen's more generalized view of empowerment through education, the present study indicates that empowerment is contingent on overcoming socio-cultural and economic barriers, which are often intensified by caste dynamics. Proficiency in English is often crucial for transitioning from informal to formal employment sectors, as it opens up opportunities for higher-paying and more secure jobs. However, the current findings demonstrate that without addressing foundational issues like affordability and accessibility, these opportunities remain out of reach for a large segment of women in Vidarbha. This discrepancy suggests that while English education can indeed be transformative, its benefits are not equally attainable for all women, largely due to entrenched structural inequalities

Furthermore, the findings of the present study partially align with (Qamariah 2024), who argued that English proficiency is a tool for empowerment, enabling women to challenge gender norms and participate in global conversations. While the current research supports this view, it also contradicts the implied universality of empowerment through English language acquisition. This study emphasises that, for many women in Vidarbha, English proficiency remains a distant goal due to patriarchal resistance, which prevents them from fully benefiting from this form of linguistic empowerment. Consequently, multiple intersecting barriers such as socio-economic class, caste, and family attitudes constrain the transformative power of English.

Another significant difference emerges when comparing this research to Still (2008), who focused on Dalit women's educational experiences, arguing that even when Dalit women gain access to education, their socio-economic mobility is often constrained by caste-based stigma. The present study extends this argument by highlighting how English education, specifically, can become a factor for both empowerment and exclusion, particularly for women from lower castes. Many participants shared that despite their educational achievements, caste-based discrimination limited their opportunities, indicating that English proficiency alone cannot overcome the deeply ingrained caste hierarchies that continue to affect educational outcomes and employability.

The present study shows that English instruction plays a big part in building confidence. However, it also shows that confidence and autonomy are very situational. For instance, women from higher caste or more financially stable families were more likely to gain support for their education and to translate their proficiency into meaningful employment, as opposed to women from marginalised castes who still faced constraints despite similar qualifications. This finding differs from Graddol's (2010) general argument about urbanisation and migration creating a uniform demand for English skills, demonstrating instead that such opportunities are differentially available based on caste, region, and economic status.

Thus, the discussion underscores the need to address the broader socio-cultural and economic factors that shape women's lives in order to fully realise the potential benefits of English language education. Unlike earlier studies that focused primarily on the advantages of English proficiency, this research provides a more grounded understanding that acknowledges both the opportunities and the barriers present in the specific socio-economic context of Vidarbha. These findings, when compared with existing literature, show that English proficiency can serve as a tool for empowerment. However, the transformative potential is heavily mediated by structural conditions that require targeted policy interventions to promote equitable access.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper brings together the different issues we have looked at regarding English language learning for women in Vidarbha. It reflects on historical inequalities in access to quality education, intensified by caste and gender biases, and highlights the potential of English language proficiency in challenging these entrenched social norms. The findings underscore the understanding that while English education has significant transformative potential, the benefits are not equally accessible to all women due to persistent structural inequalities and cultural norms. It demonstrates a complex picture of their challenges, involving issues like traditional gender roles, uneven development histories, cultural and regional values, affordability, and availability. Although learning English can open new opportunities, the above factors can influence the trajectories of

women's access to English education and their mobility. The intersectionality of caste, gender, class, and regional disparity further complicates access, necessitating a more inclusive approach to language education policy. This paper suggests we should explore the multidimensional effects of various factors to understand and formulate pathways and policies to improve women's access to English education.

Women in Vidarbha try to learn English because they believe it could help them find employment, improve their communication skills, and build confidence. However, the various factors, along with cultural restrictions, make it difficult for them. Those who continue learning English throughout their university and college education are more likely to enter the job market and demonstrate autonomy in their decision-making. The research highlights that autonomy in decision-making is significantly correlated with educational attainment, thereby emphasising the role of family support and socio-economic background in women's success. This indicates that longevity in learning English has better outcomes for women in their life opportunities. However, it also reveals the importance of cultural shifts within family structures to facilitate educational longevity. Another crucial factor is the occupational background of the family and their attitude towards women's education.

This research highlights the significance of taking caste and gender into account while conducting language education research. The interplay of caste and gender has a profound impact on women's access to English education. Women from marginalised caste backgrounds face compounded challenges, making targeted interventions for these groups essential. They endure additional obstacles due to caste and gender biases, which limit their educational opportunities. This paper used data to highlight the complicated relationship between caste, gender, and English language learning, revealing how these dynamics influence educational attainment. Caste and gender should be considered as important elements in language education research. Policies aimed at increasing women's access to English education must address these intersecting inequities in order to be effective. Furthermore, regional disparities, such as those observed in Vidarbha, emphasise the need for a differentiated educational policy that is sensitive to the socio-economic and cultural context of each region. We may design more nuanced and effective solutions to enhance women's access to English education by examining the specificities of a particular region within South Asia rather than using generic and unidimensional approaches.

As a result, this paper describes the numerous obstacles and opportunities for women in Vidarbha in terms of English language education. It advocates for a better understanding of the relationship between caste, gender, and language acquisition in order to provide inclusive and equitable educational pathways that empower women and encourage social mobility.

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Deinstitutionalization during Disruption: Supporting Families and Children amid the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nepal

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Abstract

This paper investigates the efforts towards deinstitutionalization in Nepal amid the health pandemic that disrupted lives globally and led Nepal to a lengthy complete lockdown and several partial lockdowns. It explores the work of The Himalayan Innovative Society (THIS)—under the technical and financial support of Forget Me Not (FMN)—as a case in point to explore the support extended to families and children in Nepal amid the COVID-19 pandemic, including family reunification, family support, and psychological support to children reunified with families. The paper describes the work of THIS at the local and national level and FMN as a part of the growing regional and global discourse and movement on promoting family-based alternative care including UN DGD Theme 2021 on Children's Rights in Alternative Care. Furthermore, the paper also analyses the strengths of the interventions and identifies the areas of improvement to suggest an evidence-based intervention model for working with families and children during disruptions. The authors argue that the proposed model of intervention can be useful in a health-related pandemic as well as other disruptions, including natural emergencies and man-made disasters.

Keywords: COVID-19, Family reintegration, Family support, Deinstitutionalization, Effective intervention, Nepal

Introduction

Many children across the world have experienced institutional or residential care. Earlier literature (see Csáky, 2009) estimated that more than 8 million children grew up in institutions (Csáky, 2009) and the more recent ones estimate this to be 2.9 million (Children in Alternative Care, 2022 in Perrigo et al., 2024; Petrowski et al., 2017). About eighty percent of these children residing in orphanages or residential care facilities globally are estimated to be non-orphans (van Doore, 2016). Nepal exhibits a similar situation with institutions where up to 80 per cent could be raised by at least

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one of their parents (Pattison, 2014; UNICEF &Terre Des Hommes, 2008 in van Doore, 2016). Many children in institutions (orphanages) in Nepal are relinquished by their families in the hopes for better education leading to a better life (Gale & Khatiwada, 2016).

Browne et al. (2006) found that institutionalized young children experience developmental delays and face difficulties with social behavior and attachment. This leads to greater chance of antisocial behavior and mental health challenges. Constantinescu (2008, as cited in Dragu, 2019) similarly underscores poorly developed social skills and the inability to gradually take on responsibilities as challenges facing young people receiving institutional care. Although it is contested that many children might have had lower cognitive abilities before institutionalization, baseline findings illuminated that children who were raised in institutions exhibited significant cognitive developmental delays, poorer physical growth, and deficits in competence than non-institutionalized children (Smyke et al., 2007). The above findings underscore the importance and urgency for deinstitutionalization.

Many countries acted in response to the wide recognition of the adverse impacts of institutionalization on developmental outcomes and children's wellbeing by reducing the number of children in institutional care and reuniting them with families (Petrowski et al., 2017). However, until recently Nepal did not have any strategic plans for deinstitutionalization or provisions for foster care despite the government of Nepal mentioning that it preferred foster care among alternative care. care (Gale & Khatiwada, 2016). Furthermore, the absence of "systematic safeguards that prevent the unnecessary placement of children in alternative care" and "practice to ensure that the most suitable forms of care are provided" (Gale & Khatiwada, 2016, p. 8) in a context where institutions provided the primary form of alternative care, was concerning.

Nepal's 16th Periodic Plan (2024/25 – 2028/29) aims to achieve good governance, social justice and prosperity through structured transformation. Although not explicitly focused on deinstitutionalization, it emphasizes child protection and social reintegration. The plan prioritizes child protection ensuring safety, wellbeing and development of children through various measures like strengthening child protection systems, promoting early child development, and addressing child labor and trafficking. The plan also discourages residential protection in children's homes by implementation of the arrangement of institutional care for children as the last option. It envisions programs in the local governance for arranging appropriate alternative care for children without parents and/or in need of protection. The 16th periodic plan indirectly promotes deinstitutionalization by prioritizing family and community-based care for children. The National Child Rights Council's 5-year strategic plan, aims to advance the protection and promotion of children's rights in Nepal. The 7th Strategy specifically focuses on strengthening deinstitutionalization efforts by advocating for alternative care services such as family based and community-based care over institutional care system. The work plan also includes reducing the number of children in institutional care and increase the number of children in alternative care.

This recent governmental efforts (and the earlier limited response)—towards ensuring that children are cared for in families—underscores the importance of the role of non-governmental organizations in deinstitutionalization in Nepal. To support the nation's deinstitutionalization plan, Forget Me Not (FMN) and The Himalayan Innovative Society (THIS) and have been promoting the alternative care services like kinship care and foster care that aligns the provision mentioned in the Act relating to Children, 2018 (Article 49). Their work during the COVID-19 pandemic sets the context for this paper.

FMN is an Australia-registered charity working in child protection with partner organizations in Nepal, Uganda, and India. FMN was established as an INGO in Nepal on 22 November 2011 in Kathmandu. FMN works in collaboration with Nepal Government to bring childcare reform and deinstitutionalization in Nepal through its implementing partner NGO, THIS. FMN has a peculiar history of operations in Nepal—supporting an orphanage for eight years and then moving towards a family reunification model. FMN's changed strategy is a vivid example of learning by doing and learning from one's own mistakes and experiences. After realizing that orphanages produced more harm than good, FMN began supporting THIS in its efforts of deinstitutionalization.

THIS is a Nepali NGO registered at District Administration Office, Kathmandu in 2003 and affiliated with the Social Welfare Council. It works with central and local authorities to remove children from orphanages, both legal and illegal [registered and non-registered], and return them to their families in a supported manner, to prevent family separation and orphanage trafficking, and to respect their fundamental rights to be in families and community, as mentioned in UNCRC and Children's Act 2018 (see www.thisngonepal.org). THIS is a pioneer NGO that addresses child protection concerns related to institutional care (orphanages) of children. Since 2006, THIS has supported 1,036 children in 67 districts (THIS, 2021) in partnership with Adara Development Nepal, FMN, Terre des hommes (Tdh) and Next Generation Nepal (NGN). THIS conducted the following activities: COVID relief support to help community people meet their basic needs, transitional care for vulnerable children rescued by Nepal Government amid the pandemic, family reintegration support to reunified children and their families, community awareness to spread the messages of responsible parenting and prevention of unnecessary parent-child separation, and capacity enhancement of government officials at local levels towards a strong gatekeeping system for the children in their communities.

This paper focuses on the efforts towards deinstitutionalization in Nepal during the COVID-19 health pandemic that disrupted lives globally and led Nepal to a lengthy complete lockdown and several partial lockdowns. The paper looks at the work of The Himalayan Innovative Society (THIS)—under the technical and financial support of Forget Me Not (FMN)—as a case in point to explore the support extended to families and children in Nepal amid the pandemic including family reunification, family support, and psychological support to children reunified with families. The paper describes the work of THIS at the local and national level and FMN as a part of the growing regional and global discourse and movement on children's rights and promoting family-based alternative care including UN DGD Theme 2021 on Children's Rights and Alternative Care. It then analyses the interventions using the SWOT technique to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the interventions, and opportunities and challenges of the intervention in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the paper suggests an evidence-based intervention model for working with families and children during disruptions. We argue that the proposed model of intervention can be useful in a health-related pandemic as well as other disruptions, including natural calamities and man-made disasters.

Methodology

The goal of the study was to explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of interventions provided by THIS and FMN to families and children during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal. This section describes the methodology, namely the research question, research approach, research design, study population and sampling, data collection methods and data analysis.

Research Question

The main research question was: What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of interventions provided by THIS and FMN to families and children during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal?

Research Approach

The study utilised a qualitative research approach since it sought to undertake an exploration and description of the interventions provided by THIS and FMN to families and children amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The researchers also sought to answer the 'what' questions, particularly, what were the experiences of participants regarding interventions provided by THIS and FMN to families and children (Fouché & De Vos, 2011). The unstructured nature and flexibility of the qualitative approach enabled the researchers to acquire comprehensive information on the actual strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the interventions (Creswell, 2014). The study was exploratory and descriptive in nature since no studies on the phenomenon could be traced. As such, the researchers wanted to gain an understanding of the issues and to have a deeper meaning of the experiences. This is best fulfilled through a qualitative approach (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Type of Research

The study engaged in applied research as it was deemed to be the most appropriate type of research for the study. This is because the study sought to understand the complex situation of supporting families and children during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal (Fouché & De Vos, 2011). Moreover, the researchers' endeavored to build knowledge on evidence-based models for working with children and families during disruptions nurtured the applied nature of the study. Building such a knowledge base will add value to social work as a profession since it will minimize and address challenges faced by practitioners in the child and welfare sector during disruptions, including pandemics.

Research Design

The study employed a phenomenology, more specifically, the transcendental phenomenology research design. A phenomenological design enabled the researchers to focus on exploring and describing a phenomenon of supporting families and children during periods of disruptions. The researchers were able to describe the real-life experiences of the participants and to build an in-depth understanding of their perceptions regarding services provided by THIS during the Covid-19 pandemic (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). The transcendental design also enabled the researchers to collect data from several participants who experienced the phenomenon of rendering services during the time of the time of disruption, paying more attention to how they described their perceptions of the phenomenon.

Study Population and Sampling

As part of the recruitment process, the researchers first negotiated access with THIS and FMN. Upon gaining access, the researchers engaged appropriate structures in identifying the participants. Thereafter, the researchers approached the participants and gave them all relevant information regarding the study (Creswell, 2014). The researchers applied a non-probability sampling technique in the form of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is also referred to as judgmental, which implies that the

selection of participants is solely based on the judgment of the researchers (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The researchers approached only those people who, in their opinion, were likely to have information on the study phenomenon and were willing to and available for sharing it. The researchers obtained oral consent from the respondents. Fictitious names are used throughout this paper to protect the identities of the people involved and mentioned in this study, including interview excerpts and case studies.

Data Collection Methods

The researchers made use of two sources of data collection, primary data collection through focus group discussions and secondary data collection through document analysis. As a core qualitative data collection method, focus group discussions gather highly contextualized, in-depth, and rich data (Creswell, 2014). Through the focus groups, researchers collected data on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of interventions provided by THIS and FMN to families and children amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal. The focus groups were loosely designed to allow for flexibility of discussions (Kumar, 2019). Focus group discussions were conducted until data saturation was reached. Data saturation is the stage when the data collection process is ended because no new insights about the research topic are generated by continued data collection (Kumar, 2019). In this study, data got saturated after three focus group sessions with participants.

To augment data from the focus group discussions, the researchers gathered data through document analysis. This entailed an analysis of organizational and project related documents such as policies, regulations, annual progress reports, statistics, models, implementation plans, and existing literature on rendering services to families and children amid times of disasters and pandemics. Document analysis, as Berg (2009) notes, is a useful data collection method in research studies such as this study.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from focus group discussions was analysed using thematic analysis. Six steps guided the researchers during data analysis and formulation of themes. These steps included processing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, creating definitions, and naming themes and producing the report (Creswell, 2014).

In conducting document analysis, the researchers were guided by the concepts relevant to the study, the researchers used the directed content analysis method in the document analysis (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The directed content analysis method focused on manifest content, which refers to the visible content of the document manifested in forms such as words and sentences. The latent content was also analysed, which refers to the underlying meaning conveyed through the document (Berg, 2009). Most of the reports used for the study were publicly available and permission to access and use the reports for the study were obtained from THIS and FMN when necessary.

Interventions

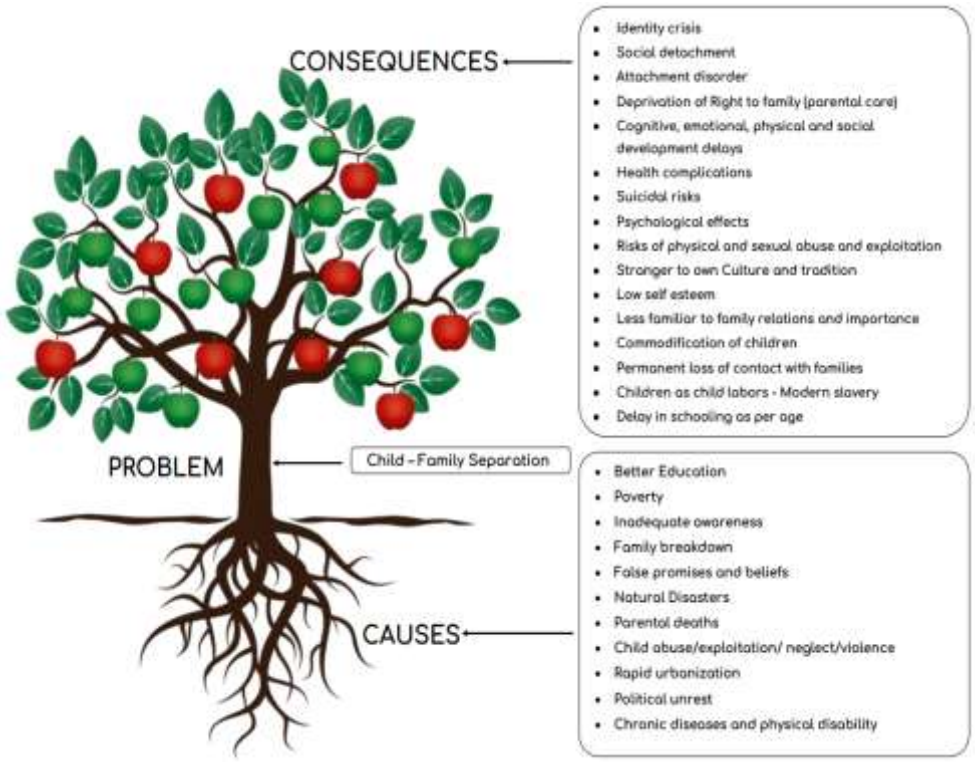
This section of the paper describes the COVID-19 child protection responses through FMN and THIS partnership supporting the National Child Rights Council (NCRC) and National Center for Children at Risk -104 for the rescue of children and closure of abusive and exploitative children's homes and family support and advocacy efforts during the pandemic. The work is grouped into micro-level

work and macro-level work based on units of intervention: work with individuals and families is discussed under micro-level work and work concerning wider engagements with communities, government, and non-government stakeholders, and advocacy is described as macro-level work.

Micro-level Work

Deinstitutionalization and Family reintegration is a notable work of THIS and FMN during the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple reasons are identified for institutionalization of children worldwide. Browne (2009) identified that children in Central Asia and Eastern Europe were more likely to be institutionalized because of a disability (23 percent), abandonment (33 percent), and abuse or neglect (14 percent). In Western European countries, the most common reason for institutionalization of children was abuse and neglect (68 percent). Abandonment (4 percent) and disability (4 percent) were identified to be nominally associated with institutionalization. Through their work, THIS identified several causes of child-family separation contributing to institutionalization of children in Nepal; Figure 1 depicts the causes of child-family separation, along with its consequences. With over a decade of experience relating to deinstitutionalization practices, THIS realized that amid multiple driving factors for institutionalization of children in Nepal, family reintegration is a sustainable solution for positive development for children separated from their family and that with the right support and intervention, a child can grow holistically in their family and community. This realization fueled their work even amid the challenges relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1 Causes and Consequences of Child-Family Separation in Nepal



THIS supported children and families in a myriad of ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. It took responsibility for the care of 14 children rescued from Sahara International Nepal on June 17,

2020. It was also involved in the rescue of children from the controversial Care Child Orphanage on August 5, 2020 and in planning children's reunification with families (THIS, 2020). THIS provided transitional care services for 76 vulnerable children rescued from 10 exploitative children's homes to carry out 8-steps family reintegration processes (THIS, 2020 and 2021). THIS carried out more than 100 missions in 41 districts in the year 2019-20 including 147 family tracing and assessments, and 281 monitoring and follow-up visits from children reunified with families (THIS, 2020). Additionally, THIS reached out to 124 children and their families with COVID-19 emergency support, 116 children with educational support, 64 children and families with food support, four children in three families with livelihood support, and four youths with vocational training support (THIS, 2019).

Case Study 1

Independent Susheli and Swastika

Susheli and Swatika (now 13 and 11 years respectively) were placed into Care Child Orphanage in Kathmandu in 2020 for a secure future by their relative after they lost their mother to uterine cancer, 5 years after their father's suicidal death. One of their key tasks in the orphanage was to stay beautiful and dance for visitors to the orphanage. Even in those tender ages, they soon learnt that the orphanage would get money to feed them if they continued to please the visitors. Through two years of work of THIS, these sisters were reunited with their elder sister Ujeli. Hailing from Rukum, Susheli and Swastika started living in Rolpa where Ujeli was married to. Ujeli's husband's family generously welcomed their daughter-in-law's younger siblings to the family and encouraged them to be independent and helped set up their room with kitchen. The family said: "We did not want to mix the organizational support as we believe anything that comes for them must be used for the defined purposes." Unlike other children in institutions during lockdown, Susheli and Swastika enjoyed the utmost love and care from her sister and her in-laws which they had never imagined before their removal from the institution. In a letter that Susheli wrote to THIS, she shared:

> "We always become happy to see *Dai* [literal translation brother, referring to a team member of THIS] when he visits us here. Every brother and sister in the organization are like 'Gods' who put others' emotions first before theirs and have come into our lives. We request everyone to come to visit us."

Similarly, THIS supported 1,997 children, parents, people with disability, and elderly citizens through the COVID-19 emergency relief program in 2020-21. It also reached out to 286 reunified children and adults 409 times in 32 districts to ensure they receive adequate care in families and communities (THIS, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, they called the children on the phone regularly to find out the help they needed and how they were coping with the situation at home and counseled children and families. They also provided emergency cash payments, food, and other necessities to the neediest. THIS supported five families with access to livelihoods and 86 families with access to meals; furthermore, they helped 217 children , including 112 girls, access quality education (THIS, 2021). THIS reached out to more than 7000 individuals in 2019-20 and about 22,000 individuals in 2020-21 including children , parents, students, professionals, and leaders through community sessions like Friday Friends, Breaking the Orphanage Myth, and community awareness events (THIS, 2020, 2021).

Case Study 2

Anshu says No to Orphanage

11-year-old Anshu had spent a year and a half in the *Care Child Orphanage* before being rescued and reunited with her family in a remote village in Jumla, Karnali Province. She is happy to know she is not going back. She is a young advocate who says 'No' to orphanage life and tells her parents never to listen to any such people who talk about the city's orphanages because she has suffered the pain of separation. THIS team remembers energetic Anshu during family tracing in November 2020 and how she would not stop running even on difficult roads to reach her home. The thought of meals prepared by her mother could not stop her from smiling. On the way home, she thought how tall and naughty her brother might have grown. When Anshu finally reached home, her mother Himali could not hold her happiness flowing out of her eyes at the sight of her daughter; words could not come out of her mouth on how thankful and happy she was, yet her eyes told it all.

Poor economic conditions and hopes of better education in the city forced her family to send 9-year Anshu to Kathmandu with their relative. On the contrary, Anshu recalled being famished and the discomfort at being forced to sit on the lap of visitors. Her struggles ended when a national television exposed the orphanage and the orphanage owner's set-up of gaining attention and money by staging a rescue of a newborn baby from a nearby bush. Revelation of the set-up and child maltreatment was followed by a rescue of 11 young girls, including Anshu, by the National Child Rights Council, National Center for Children at Risk, Budhanilkantha Municipality and Police Personnel. These girls were safely transferred to THIS's transitional care on 5 August 2020 and were reunited with their families in late 2020 with the easing of lockdown and lifting of mobility restrictions. Anshu was reunified with her family on 29 November 2020 in Jumla district.

Since reunification with her family, Anshu has been under constant monitoring until the exit from her case management in 2023. During COVID 19 lockdown, THIS team conducted remote follow ups with Anshu and her family to know their situation and to listen to Anshu and her everyday life. Anshu is in good health, and she remembers to dial 100 or call Tenzin in case of any problem or emergency.

Macro-level Work

FMN has done phenomenal work in child rescue and reunification in Nepal including advocating for the best interest of children, assisting reintegration work throughout the country, supporting orphanage children, monitoring orphanages' social media accounts to prevent illegal and unethical fundraising campaigns, and informing tourists about the harms of institutionalization of care (FMN, 2021). In 2019-20 in Humla, THIS reached out to communities with messages of safety related to COVID-19 through radio jingles, mikes, posters, and home-visits; THIS office in Humla set up a loudspeaker in the office premises to continuously disseminate information on hygiene and made water and soap available for handwashing (THIS, 2020). Additionally, they painted messages on rocks requesting parents not to send children away from families in the name of education (THIS, 2020). In 2021, THIS and Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality, Chitwan partnered for a Public Service Announcement (PSA) with the messages of the risks of violence and neglect of children in families due to the disrupted lives of parents. The Rural Municipality Vice-Chairperson recorded his own voice for a community-friendly message. Furthermore, FMN also helped establish Shine Together Care Experienced Network Nepal (FMN, 2021). A key macro-level engagement of FMN and THIS amid the pandemic is advocacy as detailed below.

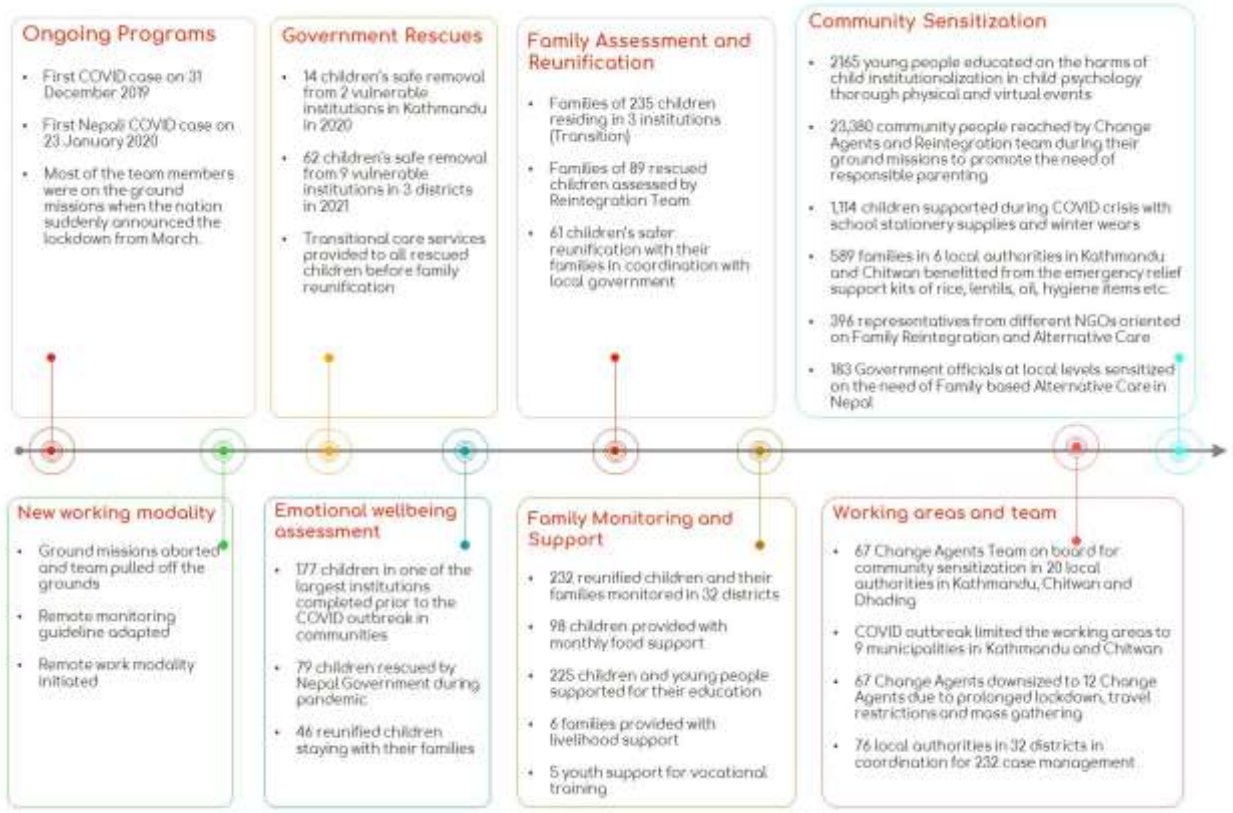
Advocacy

The pandemic also opened the doors for strong collaboration and building on the momentum of care reform globally. FMN participated in the Biennial International Conference (BICON) as one of the opening plenary speakers on the UN – Day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and Alternative Care on behalf of Asia-Pacific and presented the recommendations. FMN also spearheaded the 4th BICON on Alternative Care and shared the learning and promising practices of family-based alternative care practices in Nepal, highlighting the need for foster care. FMN has been advocating for relief and education support for children and families all over Nepal (FMN, 2021). In response to the rapid reintegration of children from residential institutions to families in the aftermaths of the COVID-19 pandemic, FMN commended the leadership of Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC) and National Child Rights Council (NCRC) and collective efforts for child protection following the 2015 earthquake, illuminated child protection concerns arising due to COVID-19, urged child protection authorities to document the number of children sent home amid the COVID-19 outbreak, requested support and monitoring for children rapidly reintegrated into families, created of a ward-level mechanism for guardianship transfer from institutions to families, and drew attention to other types of family-based care including kinship and foster care. There efforts promoted the concept that families are the best place for children to thrive (FMN, 2020).

FMN (2020) also demonstrated that the transition from institution to families needs to be meticulously planned, keeping the best interests of the children at the core of all actions. They expressed concern for children's physical, emotional, social vulnerabilities when returning to families without adequate preparation and support system. Furthermore, FMN viewed the pandemic as an opportunity to look at care reform critically, strategize deinstitutionalization, and transition from residential care to community-based services. They offered their technical expertise in these processes (FMN, 2020). FMN strongly warned institutional care providers that children should not be sent home to families without adequate support and counseling.

Similarly, FMN contributed to the appeal issued on August 19, 2020, concerning the rapid reunification of children from institutions into families as a member of the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG). With the context that an overwhelming majority of children in institutional care have both parents or guardians and that many children within institutions are trafficked in the pretext of good education and better lives, the CPWG (2020) reiterated that unnecessary institutionalization of children is contrary to their best interests. The CPWG expressed grave concern about children in institutional care who were rapidly unified with their families before the COVID-19 compelled nationwide lockdown without adequate case management procedures. The CPWG (2020) also found that children reported mixed feelings on being unified with family—many of them wanted to return to institutional care as they had met their families for the first time in years and struggled to rebuild relationships with family members. Some expressed worries about having to return to the institution after the lockdown. Some of the key recommendations of the CPWG to the Nepal Government included restriction and prohibition of irregular admission of children in institutional care during COVID-19 and establishment of new residential institutions of care; mapping of children rapidly reunified with families and provision of stipends for families with unified children in need. The timeline given in Figure 2 presents the work of FMN and THIS amid the pandemic.

Figure 2 Timeline: Deinstitutionalization during Disruption



Analysis of Interventions

The Strengths

Collaboration is a crucial aspect and a notable strength of the work of FMN and THIS. Firstly, the strong collaboration between FMN and THIS is a unique strength that is hard to find between donor INGOs and NGO partners in Nepal. Their belief in equal partnership and demonstration of working as one does not go unnoticed. Both the organizations exhibit passion and commitment which forms the basis of their partnership. Secondly, their focus on collaborating with various stakeholders in child protection concerns during the health pandemic is pronounced, as evidenced in the following statement: "every effort has been made to work with local government and non-government organizations to protect children from trafficking and bring their collective attention to child protection during the pandemic" (FMN, 2021, p. 3). Such strong collaboration could be the cause for the increased effectiveness of interventions.

The processes FMN and THIS followed in their work, per se, is a strength of the interventions they implemented. They meticulously designed the reintegration guidelines and put significant effort into following up and providing the necessary support for family reintegration; for example, they support a care giveruntil the family declares that they do not need support or after the child reaches 18 or completes 10+2 (earlier the support was provided until they completed class 10). The support provided takes into consideration the health and education of the children and their relationship with the family. THIS takes the monitoring engagements seriously and family reunification for them is not limited to mere physical reunification. The belief that significant work begins when children are placed back into families speaks of their orientation towards family reunification. They consider the length of separation from family, the family environment, the psychological conditions, and the emotional well-

being of the child as important aspects of family reunification interventions. Investment in meticulous planning and sincere follow-up have resulted in notable child protection case management, viz. 90-95% success of family reintegration efforts. The family reintegration process implemented by THIS and FMN has set benchmarks for other organizations working in this area.

Another notable strength of the work of FMN and THIS is the ability to see the silver lining in the cloud-they identified chances to contribute to families and children amid challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, as discussed below under the 'opportunities' section. Global disasters require immediate response and the ability to deal with multifaceted problems. THIS exhibited resilience, perseverance, and swift response in the face of the pandemic. Commitment to funding was another strength that was displayed in the work of FMN and THIS during the pandemic. Although many organizations cut their funding, downsized their staff, and some even closed their operations, FMN and THIS continued all their programs; the commitment to work and the enthusiasm exhibited in the face of difficulty is a crucial strength of the interventions. THIS was listed as one of the transitional care service providers by NCRC in 2020. For every child removed from institutions by the Nepalese government and transferred to THIS transitional care for case management and family reintegration, the government supports THIS with 5,000 per month per child. This is an appreciable step and THIS can divert the resource partner's budget to other community engagements.

Case Study 3

Bimala's Life During and Post Lockdown in Nepal

Bimala (18 years) is the sole guardian for her younger siblings – Shital (12) and Arun (11). They have been living in the Rupandehi district of Nepal since their reunification with their family in 2015. The family has been a child-headed household since the pandemic period when Bimala was only 14. Her parents had gone to India for employment and used to send money. However, the lockdown due to COVID and resultant employment crisis meant they could neither send money nor come back to their children. Despite all the challenges, Bimala shared [during the first remote follow-up post-COVID lockdown in Nepal] that they were happy with each other. Later, THIS team reached them during lockdown with the help of neighbors and a distant relative who kept visiting them to ensure their living. THIS team also provided Bimala with a mobile phone, along with food supplies and bedding items for winter, so she could stay connected with the team. Although Bimala's parents returned during the middle of 2021, they were forced to return to India for work. They supported with house repairs and essentials like new gas stoves so that Bimala did not have to spend hours blowing the smoke to cook food on firewood and Arun would not have to walk to the forest to collect wood. THIS also supported 2 bicycles for the children so they could save an hour of walking to their schools every day. Bimala and her siblings have been under regular monitoring and education support.

The Weaknesses

The pandemic created unprecedented circumstances for everyone. Neither FMN nor THIS could project or prepare for the substantial rise of mental health issues and thus were not fully equipped to provide the required support. The psychological counseling provided to the children could have been better; children showed signs and symptoms of psychological harm and they struggled to address the needs of these children immediately. This points to the need to develop structured mental health counseling interventions and build the capacities of the staff to intervene at times like this. Many of the families that THIS extended one-time support to expected multiple/continued support, indicating the possible need for continued support to more families in need.

Another weakness in the work of THIS and FMN was that the interventions were not adequate. Incidences of child marriages in the families of reunified children were reported. Young girls left home marrying young men and such incidences were identified only when the team reached out to these families as part of regular monitoring. The team could not prevent child marriages during the pandemic due to the delay in the flow of information and travel restrictions and THIS reflects that a joint effort with the government could have prevented these incidences.

The achievements of the work of FMN and THIS also helped them realize that they could have done better work in collaborating with local governments. They forged a collaboration with the Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality through a six-month follow-up and secured a 30% commitment to the funding of their work in the Municipality for a year. This highlights the need for stronger advocacy, collaboration with CBOs and local government to tap into local resources. For example, orphan children's allowances could be better tapped in but physical restrictions due to the pandemic have obstructed this. The NCRC has issued directives to all government bodies to provide allowance to orphan children and children with disability 3000 per person throughout Nepal to keep children in families (kinship care) so that they do not end up in institutions but this information is yet to be widely disseminated and stakeholders in the areas of child protection, including FMN and THIS, could have played an instrumental role in this.

Perhaps another weakness in the work of FMN and THIS is their nature of maintaining a low profile. Their belief in doing, rather than blowing their horn, might be limiting their reach to relevant stakeholders including communities. Better use of social media is another prominent area that these organizations could work towards including wide dissemination of information on trafficking into institutions. Documentation –of not just the work but also processes—is an area for improvement for FMN and THIS. Additionally, investing in research and strengthening organizational research capacities would significantly contribute to their work; for example, they could have conducted more longitudinal studies of children and families they had worked with. This would have served as solid evidence of their effective interventions.

The Opportunities

FMN and THIS saw the pandemic as an opportunity to learn, reflect, and innovate. The pandemic taught FMN and THIS about the alternatives of physical presence to further their work thus expanding the work modality. For example, it opened them to the possibilities of carrying out monitoring, counseling, follow-ups remotely through mobile phones and applications like Messenger and Viber (THIS, 2020). The shift from paper banking to mobile and internet banking facilitated efficient support to families and communities to ensure continued services even amid the COVID-19 pandemic (THIS, 2020). The leaders at these organizations express that the COVID-19 pandemic prepared them to work well with lockdown, bandh, and with other times involving risks in physical movement.

Apart from the continued programmatic intervention, FMN and THIS could also support more rescue operations during the pandemic. The Government took monitoring of orphanages more seriously during the pandemic as the vulnerabilities of children were heightened and the frequency of monitoring operations was high. Additionally, the pandemic also created circumstances for the closure of institutions that were poorly managed. Many childcare homes/orphanages that were running poorly, such as through begging and accepting leftovers from social events like weddings and *bratabandh*

(sacred thread giving ceremonies), were forced to close due to the pandemic and resultant restrictions on mobility. This forced many orphanages that were vocally against THIS and FMN to accept the path that they had long advocated- putting children in institutions back into families. The pandemic, in this sense, facilitated their collaboration with the government in taking children out of orphanages and placing them into families through the closure of childcare institutions that were not adequately caring for children. Since the beginning of the pandemic in Nepal, THIS has supported children rescued from 10 orphanages.

The rapid displacement of children from institutions in the aftermaths of the pandemic drew the attention of relevant stakeholders, highlighted the importance of family during the emergency, and illuminated the importance of children's right to alternative care. The government visibly moved towards alternative care, more so due to the pandemic, and towards a rights-based child protection approach. The pandemic also provided an opportunity for deep discussions on alternative care in Asia through the Biennial International conference (BICON) on alternative Care for Children in Asia on 8-9 December 2021. Additionally, the pandemic also provided an avenue to share the work of FMN and THIS on a global platform and to connect globally through BICON and UNDGD.

The Threats/Challenges

The Nepal Government's expansion of monitoring and rescue operations in numbers and frequencies due to the pandemic led to the rapid reunification of children with families without adequate planning and support. The transition from institution to family for a child needs careful planning and management. It also requires significant work towards preparing the family for receiving the child, supporting, strengthening, and monitoring the family, thus making family reintegration a delicate and planned process (CPWG, 2020). However, COVID-19, particularly the lockdown, presented significant challenges in these processess. For example, communication with children and families had to be virtual. Mr. Dhan Bahadur Lama, the Executive Director of THIS, expressed that year 2020 was the most challenging in the 17-year history of THIS, even including various ups and downs in its initial years such as massive earthquakes and landslides in 2015 (THIS, 2020).

The pandemic presented challenges greater than the earthquake in 2015 in the sense that the challenges were repetitive. During the earthquake the time between the first and second shock was difficult. For example, while finding Tarpaulin, gas, food, etc. was difficult but people could sit together, work together, could share resources, cook together, sleep together and the challenges subsided with time. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic these challenges were repetitive due to lockdown, partial lockdown, and restricted transportation (odd and even number system). The uncertainties made it difficult for the senior management team to plan and execute the plans including field visits. An example could be the challenges in setting up the monitoring calendar by the case management teams. Following the calendar was severely impacted due to the pandemic.

In addition to following the calendar, living up to the ideals of child protection work was a challenge amid the pandemic. Since physical mobility was restricted, social workers could not be on the frontline physically. Children in institutions often do not have proper documentation on their biological families and are prevented from communicating with their biological families regularly. The lockdown presented significant challenges in tracing the families of the rescued children since physical visits to potential information providers was not a possibility under the lockdown. Hence, many rescued

children who could otherwise be reunited with their families had to wait in transitional care provided by THIS for the partial lockdowns and easing of mobility restrictions.

Repairing psychological harm virtually was a challenge. Being physically present allowed workers to observe many things including the physical, social, economic environment of the families and the body language of children and family members. This was limited through virtual media. Additionally, some severe cases required weekly follow up but that was impacted by the travel restrictions associated with the pandemic. As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic was responded to with lockdown, partial lockdown, and restricted transportation (odd and even number system) which delayed family reunification efforts. Restricted mobility also added to the challenges of preventing child marriages and intercepting adolescent girls' marriage; THIS failed to prevent these despite all their efforts remotely. They could not conduct community awareness programs as much as was necessary.

The pandemic and the resultant complete lockdowns and partial lockdowns impacted the livelihoods of many families and pushed poor families further into poverty. Many families lost income sources due to the travel restrictions resulting from the pandemic. Most of the children that THIS and FMN work with come from families with low incomes that are dependent on daily wages for a living and were also the most impacted by the lockdowns and mobility restrictions. This economic crisis increased significant pressure on THIS and FMN to expand their services and outreach. However, this was challenging. THIS reached out to some but could not cover all those in need and providing timely support was a significant challenge. The pandemic also added to the workloads of organizations committed to their service users. Many children whose cases were closed a few years back reached out to THIS for help. Addressing their needs was a challenge because of the gap in the information about their whereabouts. Additionally, having to live in constant fear of acquiring the virus from others resulted in limited social interactions and work together and this added to the challenges of work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most education institutions were also forced to close due to the threats presented by the pandemic. Most educational institutions in the country were not ready to take the teaching and learning into the online space, impacting the learning continuum of students across the nation. Loss of jobs for parents and closure of schools meant that parents and children had to share the same physical space at home for long durations and amid anxiety resulting in disrupted routines. Conflicts between parents and children increased. Loss of income opportunities for the parents and conflict between parents and children created avenues for violence, neglect, exploitation, and abuse in the families while some parents also decided to part ways. Child marriage is one of the consequences of disrupted routines and family chaos. Despite realizing the need for increased mental health support to families during the pandemic, THIS could do little on this front due to the dire need of prioritizing protecting children rescued from institutional care and reuniting them with families.

Another significant challenge concerning child protection and the pandemic was the deprivation of academic engagement, the delay in administration resulting in loss of academic years for children. Krishna, a care leaver supported by THIS, expresses, "I should have been in my 3rd year of Engineering but I am still in 2nd year. We were able to cover our courses over online classes but it is difficult as we are missing practical learning" (THIS, 2021, p. 4). The pandemic also forced THIS to diversify work modality, shifting the office from a shared physical space to an individual's home and from cash and cheques to banking through the internet and mobile phones (THIS, 2021).

In a nutshell, the pandemic and resultant rescue operations were a double-edged sword leading to rapid reunification of children in families without adequate preparation and back door entry of children in institutions. This was a prominent challenge in the child protection work during the pandemic since the government reached out to them for the reunification of children from remote parts of Nepal in brief notices and large capacities. After NCRC rescues children, cases of children from Karnali (difficult to reach) are handed to THIS, and having a bulk of children reintegrate with families in remote and hard-to-reach areas was a challenge that THIS consistently had to deal with. The politicization of relief efforts also added to the challenges of the work of FMN and THIS: community members accused them of favoring families closer to/related to the politicians over vulnerable families in dire need of support. As a crucial aspect of their intervention involves collaboration with the local government, the prioritization of public health over child protection was difficult to deal with. Local authorities asked the staff members of THIS to support with medicine and health interventions at their request of preparing for possible child protection concerns during the pandemic.

The Way Ahead: Proposing Effective and Efficient Family Reintegration

FMN and THIS deeply believe that Child Care Homes/Orphanages should be the last resort for children and that children should grow within families. A non-negotiable arrangement for effective and efficient child protection, including family integration, is the assigning of Child Welfare Officer at all local governments. The importance of a local contact is pronounced during emergencies requiring immediate interventions. The Child Welfare Officers can also tap into social security schemes to help children at risk and help in gatekeeping for such children. However, out of 753 local governments in the country, only about 60 have instituted Child Welfare Officers. Additionally, child right committees should also be in place at all levels of governance. A notable response of THIS to the families in need that are severely impacted by the pandemic is providing food stipends; this is believed to have prevented unnecessary institutionalization of many children. Such support should be integrated in the actions of the local governments for sustainability. However, many local governments did not have information on their constituencies concerning the most vulnerable families and this information should be maintained moving ahead so that families in need can be reached early. Another key arrangement necessary during disruption is the treatment of social workers as essential workers/frontline workers who are exempted from the restrictions on mobility. This will significantly help to address the needs of children in need and to prevent events like child marriages.

Several studies globally and in Nepal point out that a significant percentage of children in institutions (orphanages) in Nepal have one or both living parents. A major contributor of separation of children from families is education—parents send their children to institutions in the hope for a better education. The Government should adequately invest in education so that children have easy, unrestricted and reliable access to good education. Another key reasons for separation of children from families is the struggle of families to make a living. To address this, government should extend adequate livelihood support to families in need and vulnerable families.

Children in institutions could experience emotional turmoil in having to explain, time and again, that they are orphans. On the one hand, children in institutions suffer from psychological issues, on the other hand there are multiple benefits of family reintegration including children learning their own culture and language and strengthening their sense of identities. Another significant problem with children in orphanages in Nepal is that many of them are forced to take the family name/surname of the owner/administrator of the orphanage. This is a violation of the children's right to identity and severely

impacts their documentation with state mechanisms including birth registration and citizenship certificate. Thus, children should be reintegrated in families whenever possible and alternative family care arrangements should be made when biological families are not present. Along these lines, rapid reunification in response to COVID-19 looks like a boon for children at the outset but we are yet to notice the repercussions on children and families. Reintegration of children into families is a meticulous, slow, and guided process that requires significant time and resources which rapid reunification during the COVID-19 pandemic did not largely display. Children were not adequately counseled for reunification and families were not sufficiently prepared to take children in.

Helping families meet basic needs is the foundation to preparing them for reunification with the child. The families should be trained to receive the child, depending upon factors including the age of the child, the duration of separation and family composition. The importance of the social relations model and the ecological model cannot be underestimated in understanding the family in relation to the child. Problem tree and solution tree can significantly contribute to understanding the problems in the family and identifying solutions to these. The family reintegration process should be adaptable, easy to follow, relevant to the context of the family and the community. Making the community aware of the ill-impacts of the separation of children from families, helping the parents understand the value of raising children in families and preventing their separation and gatekeeping are important steps in child protection that the guidelines should include. It is important to note that organizations working in family reintegration have their own guidelines. The government has also issued guidelines in case management which are not widely disseminated or followed. In this context, having a uniform family reintegration guideline for all institutions in the country would be an important next step. The guidelines followed by THIS could serve as a good practice in the Nepali context; an independent monitoring and evaluation team from the Social Welfare Council that performed a mid-term evaluation of a five-year project implemented by THIS suggested that THIS should be a resource organization concerning family reunification.

The role of the government is primary in moving forward. It is clear that rescue and rapid reunification is not the most appropriate response to children in institutions in general, especially during disruptions. Orphanages should be encouraged to gradually move towards deinstitutionalization. Government should promote the understanding that families are the best places for children to grow and despite noble intentions by the institutions, they are unknowingly doing more harm than good to the children under their care. It is imperative to understand that child care reform is possible only with their collaboration. The other responsibility of the government is to issue directives, including moratorium, and to disseminate it widely. In this context, the directives issued by NCRC are appreciable since they were done both in Nepali and English—this helped guide the stakeholders within Nepal and provided knowledge to the international community on the way forward. Monitoring of child care institutions is an area that naturally needs the government's attention. Monitoring should focus more on legal compliance than on the infrastructure and services provided by the institutions.

Remodeling or repurposing of institutions is another important step moving forward. The Nepalese Government removes children from vulnerable institutions after which the institutional infrastructure resources remain idle. The resources can be used to strengthen communities in various ways and strong communities can support families in need. Study shows 90% of funding to the institutions in Nepal are international fundied. This may imply the donors supporting the institutions should either stop funding or divert their funding to other institutions. Donor mapping and sensitization will help direct funding to the family-based care in communities.

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