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Measuring Impact of Positive Youth Development Initiatives on Youth in Lahore, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the impact of positive youth development initiatives on youth in Lahore, Pakistan through the provision of youth services. Youth is considered as one of the most important segments of the population in a country as it has to take over future roles and responsibilities. Currently, Pakistan is one of those countries which has the highest percentage of youth in its population. A survey of the literature showed that due to multiple socio-economic factors, the potential of youth has not been adequately utilized for the development of the country. One of the effective strategies being practised at the global level is an engagement of youth in the mainstream course of development. Using the quantitative method, 357 respondents were studied through a survey questionnaire. The respondents were students studying in 6 Catholic schools in Lahore where youth service projects have been implemented by Youth Engagement Service (YES) Network Pakistan. The findings revealed that the provision of youth services put a positive impact on the personality of beneficiary adolescents. After the provision of youth services, the majority of beneficiary youth was more caring towards other fellows, feeling more worthwhile within them and proved to be more useful for family and community at large. Furthermore, engagement of youth in civic activities turned an adolescent into a productive and outcome-oriented citizen. The study concluded that through positive youth development approach, youth can prove itself as a change maker asset whose potentialities can contribute immensely to the socio-economic development of the country.

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1. Introduction

Youth is always considered a very important part of population in any country. That is why, strength and working of the youth are always determinantal to national development around the globe (USAID, 2012). Every child has been gifted with unique talents, strengths and peculiar interests that provide an opportunity for reaching a bright future. The concept of positive youth development emphasized upon each child's unique talent, interests and potential (Damon, 2004). Positive youth development is opposite to traditional approach for dealing with youth and addressing their stereotype problems such as inability to learn, problems in dealing with emotions, deviating from set social norms and getting involved in anti-social behavior, poor level of motivation for carrying out some serious tasks, being neglected, ignored and living with economic deprivations. This traditional model of youth development has been popular among childcare professionals, mass media and policy makers who always considered youth as part of problem not as an instrument for solution. The traditional approach was based on assumption that youth is a period full of hazards and believed that problems of youth should be immediately fixed before they get worse. This approach is still widely practiced by public and private agencies working for youth development in many parts of the world (Damon, 2004)

Globally, there is no unanimous definition of youth; therefore, there are regional definitions of this term. Because of variation in defining, larger proportion of youth falls in the brackets of youth. Based on regional differences in demographic, economic and socio-cultural conditions, an exact definition of youth has not been possible (UNDESA, 2010). However, UN (2007) defined youth as an individual or person between an age of 15-24 years. The term youth and young people are being used interchangeably.

However, in the context of Pakistan, youth has been defined as “people between the age of 15 and 29” (National Youth Policy, 2009). Based on this definition, two-third of total population of Pakistan constitute youth. According to an estimate, annually 3% of youth are entering in the labor market of the country (Government of Pakistan, 2011). Generally, it has been observed that youth get involved in anti-social activities and behaved in socially deviant way. That is why, there was need to engage youth in positive and healthy activities for channelizing their energies into mainstream (Government of Pakistan, 2009).

In the past decade, a new approach appeared which introduced affirmative vision of youth contrary to traditional approach. This approach defined youth as resource which can be instrumental for accelerating pace of socio-economic development unlike previous approach which assumed youth as problematic segment of population. This approach emphasized upon expression and utilization of potentialities of youth rather viewing their incapacities and inabilities for performing serious tasks. It was worth mentioning that new approach also believed in the potentialities and capacities of youth from disadvantaged areas and problematic background (Damon, 2004).

Youth Engagement Service (YES) Network Pakistan was launched in 2002 for replacing traditional approach about youth which painted them as problematic part of population. YES Network introduced the approach which defines ‘Youth as a solution’ and changemakers in Pakistan rather than taking them as troublesome section of the society. YES Network played facilitative roles in providing motivation, guideline and opportunities to youth for starting their changemaking journey. In addition to it, YES Network provided platform for imparting training, giving risk free funding and practical support to youth (YES, 2019).

The current paper aimed at investigating impact of youth services on youth in Lahore and tried to measure how relatively new approach towards youth can be useful for bringing positive changes in them through their involvement in process of socio-economic development and making them stakeholders in the development course.

Currently, youth constitutes a major part of total population of Pakistan. This tremendous, yet to be tapped population of youth holds immense potential for development of the country. This potential is profoundly crucial and can contribute greatly towards rebuilding communities and the lives of youth as well, however presently this asset is not being utilized properly in the case of Pakistan. As noted by Khalid and Asad (2019), youth is one of the resources in Pakistan that has been under-rated and ignored by stakeholders throughout history of this country. The tendency of disregarding and snubbing youth was one of the reasons for increase in crimes, terrorism and violence within the country. Youth was deprived of opportunities for experiencing growth and materializing their dreams. Instead of being regarded as an asset for positive change, youth are perceived as economic burden. Under these discriminatory conditions, it was important to investigate if provision of youth services can bring positive changes in lives of youth and they can contribute positively towards their families and communities. Currently, there was scarcity of literature showing how positive youth development approach can transform youth into responsible and bona fide citizens. The current paper aimed at filling this gap in the literature by studying impact of youth services on adolescents studying in Catholic schools of Lahore.

2. Literature Review

As an emerging field, youth development is broad research field with various dimensions and aspects (Borden, Conn, Mull, & Wilkens, 2020). Youth in developing countries were considered to be at hub of socio-economic development and change (Lam, 2007). That is why, globally importance of youth development has attracted attention of policy makers and researchers. Every country is taking initiatives for transforming youth lives and channelizing youth potential for socio-economic development. Globally, governments have started allocating budget for youth development and provide them opportunities for making them responsible citizens and getting them prepare for shouldering future responsibilities. It is believed that by doing so, youth would become useful for both families and communities (London et al., 2010).

Similarly, Lloyd, (2005) stated that young people found themselves at gateway of challenges and opportunities brought by globalization of culture and economy. For complete understanding of youth and their current status in the developing countries, it is imperative to contextualize demographic changes which have resulted in every large number of youths in the recent decades. Furthermore, demographic changes have direct impact on employment opportunities, availability of resources and ease of availing resources and opportunities.

There are different aspects and dimensions of youth development which is continuous process. That is why, there are different stakeholders who are supposed to be involved for ensuring development of youth in conducive and cogent environment (Scales et al., 2006). Researchers such as Osgood and Chambers (2000) maintained that there are several agents of youth development including family, peer, neighborhood and schooling. In addition to it, there is need to set development-oriented goals for ensuring positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2011). According to Ostby (2008) provision of basic amenities including health, education and shelter should be ensured for participation of youth in the positive development. Empowerment and engagement of

youth in policy making process can enhance wellbeing of the youth and it is also best way to tap and utilize their potentialities for accelerating pace of socio-economic development.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach is far away from previous negative perception and deficit image of youth which was not only prevalent but also dominated in 20th century in several fields such as psychology, sociology, and other social sciences. The PYD approach believes in identifying strengths and positive qualities of youth which brings positive outcomes from youth expected by the society (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). Based on current situation, it can be stated that youth in Pakistan is facing multiple challenges that is why they can contribute very little for development of the country. In particular, large proportion of youth is facing different health problems which hinder their role and participation in the developmental activities (Khan, 2000).

Positive youth development approach accepts and recognizes presence of adversities and multifaceted developmental challenges that affect adolescents in multiple ways, however, it opposes the notion that adolescent period should be spent on overcoming these 'problems and challenges' that poses risk for them. This approach starts with believe that each adolescent has been bestowed with unique abilities and capabilities and s/he dreams of utilizing this potential for socio-economic gains and establishing good fame within family and community (Damon, 2004).

According to Lam, (2007), Pakistan is one of the countries where a huge proportion of population would be youth even after 2030. According to Imai et al (2008), currently most of the countries at global level are hosting greater number of youth than ever. When youth of a particular country increases than 20% of its total population, the phenomenon is called youth bulge. While discussing ways out for involving youth in the healthy activities, the author added that education is one of the key components for transforming youth which can turn them into a developmental asset. However, in the context of Pakistan, most of the youth belongs to under privileged families and communities and are deprived of education and other basic human needs.

Pakistan, being one of the developing countries is facing gigantic challenges for finding sustainable solution to the existing socio-economic problems. The country has more than 50% of its population under 30 years; however, no viable efforts have been made at government level for investing in this raw human capital and benefitting from skills and energies of youth for socio-economic upliftment. Consequently, Pakistan is lagging behind on the ladder of socio-economic development as compared to its neighboring countries in the South Asia (Khalid & Asad, 2019).

One of the great loss for Pakistan is lack of its youth's trust in securing a socially acceptable quality of life within in the country. Youth in Pakistan seems dis-satisfied with policies and programmes currently in place for catering their needs. There is a sense of disappointment on their part which leads towards depletion of interest in building their career within Pakistan. Most of young people wish to leave abroad where they may be able to earn sufficiently for them and their families and that too with due self-respect and honour. This tendency results into brain drainage and getting deprived of young people who could contribute a lot for their own country (Iqbal, 2017).

Sathar, Kamran, Sadiq and Hussain (2016) maintained that type, quality and frequency of opportunities provided to youth shape their personality and proves to be determinantal for their future life. That is why, youth is considered a pivotal stage of life at which right policies and

interventions should be made by the stakeholders for putting youth on right track. Certain initiatives such as provision of health services, social support and educational and economic opportunities which can transform trajectories of youth’s lives and can offer safe and healthy track for making progress.

Summing up the literature review, it can be deduced that youth is ignored and disregarded segment of a society under traditional youth approach which views youth as a problematic and un-trained for performing serious tasks. Youth development approach has attracted attention of researchers and policy makers as it defines youth as full of potentials which can positively contribute for families and communities. Pakistan has huge number of youth in its population but needs to focus on its engagement in healthy activities for accelerating pace of socio-economic development.

3. Methodology

The main aim of current paper was to examine impact of positive youth development approach on youth in Pakistan through involving youth in civic engagements. The study was quantitative in nature, so quantitative cross-sectional approach was adopted for achieving study objectives. Participants of this study were high school students from 06 Catholic schools located in Lahore. The age of participants was between 14 to 29 years as per definition of youth in Pakistan. A sample of 357 respondents was selected for data collection through stratified random sampling technique. A survey questionnaire was developed for data collection purpose. Initially, survey questionnaire was prepared in English, which was later translated into Urdu for convenience and thorough understanding of respondents. Each filled survey questionnaire was allotted a code and then data were entered in the spreadsheets for further analysis. After data analysis, percentages and frequencies were calculated and displayed in the tables form.

The positive youth development focused on each and every child’s unique talents, strengths, interests, and future potential (Damon, 2004). The term youth has been defined as ‘people between the ages of 15 to 29 years’ (National Youth Policy, 2009).

4. Results

The table 1 reveals that 77% of respondents developed a great deal of caring attitude towards others whom they meet in the daily life. Similarly, 14.6% respondents reported little change in their attitude in term of taking care of people around them.

Table 1: Increase in Caring Attitude of Respondents for Others

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
A great deal	275	77.0	77.0	77.0
Quite a bit	52	14.6	14.6	91.6
Moderately	26	7.3	7.3	96.9
Slightly	2	0.6	0.6	99.4
Not at all	2	0.6	0.6	100.0
Total	357	100	100	

The table 2 highlights significance of youth services in term of increase in the sense of usefulness as family and community member and overall satisfaction from self and surroundings. According to the table, more than one third respondents reported youth services have increased their usefulness for family and community along with overall satisfaction.

Table 2: Increase in Sense of Usefulness and Overall Satisfaction

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
A great deal	238	66.7	66.9	66.9
Quite a bit	98	27.5	27.5	94.4
Moderately	18	5.0	5.1	99.4
Slightly	1	0.3	0.3	99.7
Not at all	1	0.3	0.3	100.0
Total	356	99.7	100	

The table 3 is about how youth services added to sense of self-respect on the part of respondents. The findings show that sense of self-respect increased in 55.5% respondents to a greater extent while 31.4% respondents believed that there is little increase in the sense of self-respect after being beneficiaries of youth services.

Table 3: Increase in Sense of Self Respect of Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
A great deal	210	55.5	55.5	58.8
Quite a bit	112	31.4	31.4	90.2
Moderately	19	5.3	5.3	95.5
Slightly	15	4.2	4.2	99.7
Not at all	1	0.3	0.3	100.0
Total	357	100	100	

5. Discussion

The focus of this paper was investigation of impacts of positive youth development initiatives on youth. Youth is a period of multiple transitions such as physical, cognitive, sexual, emotional, and social. Adolescence, in particular, represents a time when “lifelong health behaviors are formed, when pathways of opportunity or risk emerge, and when the future life course begins to take shape” (McCarthy, Brady & Hallman, 2016). The finding of the study revealed that youth services have positive and pleasant impacts on the youth in Pakistan. The positive youth development approach aims at working with youth, realizing their strengths and potentialities along with provision of conducive environment of utilization of potential. The main philosophy behind this approach is helping adolescents to become productive adults who do perform their roles and responsibilities as a bona fide citizen. Youth constitute a significant part of total population of Pakistan. However, due to mass illiteracy, lack of technical and vocational education, unviability of career counselling service, scarcity of needed resources, political instability and lack of political will are some of the factors to name which are responsible for keeping youth out of mainstream socio-economic activities. That is why youth is unable to contribute for betterment of the society despite their wish for doing the same.

There is a common concept that youth is non-serious and immature for carrying out vital and sensitive tasks, however findings of the study in hand show that youth services are an important instrument for transforming adolescents into productive adults. The results of the study illustrate that there were noticeable positive changes in the personality of adolescents through application of positive youth development approach. A vast majority of respondents felt change in their attitude in term of feeling oneself useful and satisfied with life. This reflects that youth can be transformed from angry and aggressive adolescent to a person who feels him/herself as useful family and community member. It is well documented that when a person is unsatisfied with him/herself, it is expected that s/he would be putting negative impacts in the surroundings. Provision of youth services engage adolescents into healthy activities and provide them diverse opportunities and platform for expression of their concerns, resultantly positive thinking prevails and is reflected in the form of self-satisfaction.

The study findings also demonstrated that youth feels themselves more worthwhile when they were given respect, regard and assured as important part of family and community, their self-confidence and self-respect was boosted. The respondents reported that when we were given due value, we contributed socially and economically, and self-image improved. Unlike traditional approach towards youth, which defined youth as deficient and problem centered, positive youth development focused on identification of true capacities and potentialities of youngsters and aimed at engaging them in productive and healthy activities.

The findings of this study also demonstrated that provision of youth services to adolescents resulted into positive changes in their personality. This was evident that positive youth development approach is need of the hour and traditional approach should be replaced with it. Pakistan with huge percentage of youth needed to put focus on its youth for providing opportunities and making them stakeholder in the process of socio-economic development.

6. Conclusion

Currently, youth constitutes largest part of Pakistan's population. Keeping in view energies and potentialities of youth, it is considered as an asset as well challenge for a country. Asset in the sense that youth, constituting 60% of total population, offers lot of energy, passion and enthusiasm for playing role in socio-economic development of the country. Challenge in the way that if state and society failed to tap the energies and potentialities of youth, they could pose a threat to law and order situation and existing social order. Asset, in the way that youth can play significant role in socio-economic development of the country. The study found that interventions made at school level by YES Network Pakistan brought positive results and it was reflected that positive youth development approach brought fruitful results. This approach implied that youth should be trusted by elder generation and they must be given opportunities and platforms where their potentials can be explored and expressed for winning trust and confidence. Deeply influenced by traditional approach towards youth, elder generation was hardly willing to assign any serious job to youth because of lack of confidence on their abilities and capabilities. However, in the light of this study, it can be stated that youth services such as Girls Guides, and Boys Scouts should be revived and re-launched for engaging our youth into healthy activities.

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