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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Life Skills Development: Empowering the Youth Volunteers of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan Volunteers

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#### Abstract

India is in the midst of a youth bulge. For any country to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend, its youth have to have skills and education in order to be able to contribute to its socio-economic development and in turn raise their standard of living. Volunteerism is considered an important, and increasingly popular, mechanism for enabling young people to not only engage in social issues and contribute to sustainable human development but also their own self-development. The Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), an autonomous organization under the government is the largest network of rural youth in the country for channelizing the power of youth on the principles of voluntarism, self-help and community participation.

The present study titled 'Youth Volunteering and Youth Development: A study of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) volunteers' was undertaken to provide in-depth insights into the participation of youth volunteers in the activities of NYKS and the impact of those activities on the lives of youth volunteers.

The scores of youth volunteers on Life Skills Assessment Scale indicated that more than three-fourth of youth sampled was having Average life skill or more. Regression Analysis of life skills on independent variables (gender, age, educational level, family income, participation years and satisfaction level) indicating that life skills of youth volunteers enhanced with their educational qualification and the satisfaction level with the work that they did as a volunteer in NYKS.

NYKS is providing young people with positive experiences which enhance their strengths and capacity and which affirms them as valued contributors to their communities and shapers of their own future.

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## INTRODUCTION

Life skills have been recognized as core skills that can help young people navigate the challenges of everyday life. They enable them to develop into healthy, responsible, and productive adults. Adolescent life skills are central to psychological theories that aim to understand how skills and competencies develop. From a practical standpoint, the promotion of life skills has been identified as a key resource for enhancing positive and productive development in youth (Jacobs Foundation, 2011).

In general, life skills are considered to be those abilities that help promote well-being, positive health outcomes, and productive development. They comprise a set of core skills that empower young people to take positive steps to promote health, positive social relationships, and positive contributions to society. Life skills are important in helping them shape their world, not just cope with it. Thus, the concept of life skills transcends previous concepts such as coping and adaptation to circumstances; it presupposes an active, autonomous, and responsible stance towards the self in the social world (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). According to the World Health Organization (1997), life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. By emphasizing adaptation and a positive orientation, this commonly used definition is consistent with the skills-based, positive approach to youth development (Benson, 2007).

Under the current 12th Five-year Plan (2012—2017), the government emphasizes skills development even more ambitiously as a priority agenda item. Projecting that by 2022, India's working-age population will reach 700 million, of whom, 500 million needs to be skilled, the government set a national target of skilling 500 million people by then, allocating increased budgets for skills development. GoI (2009) stated that it ambitiously plans to increase the capacity of training institutions to 15 million (currently 2.5 million), by setting up more ITIs, encouraging the private sector to engage in vocational training and expanding tertiary education.

According to Union Budget (2011-12), the Government of India (GoI) currently invests more than Rs 90,000 crores per annum on youth development programmes or approximately Rs 2,710 per young individual per year, through youth-targeted (higher education, skill development, healthcare etc.) and non-targeted (food subsidies, employment etc.) programmes. In addition, the State Governments and a number of other stakeholders are also working on youth development enabling productive youth participation. However, individual organizations in non-Government sector are small and fragmented, and there is little coordination between the various stakeholders working on youth issues.

NASET (2004) defined Youth development as a process that prepares a young person to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and achieve his or her full potential. Youth development is promoted through activities and experiences that help youth develop social, ethical, emotional, physical, cognitive competencies. It supports the young person in developing: (a) the ability to analyse his/her own strengths and weaknesses, set goals, and have the self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and abilities to carry them out (including the ability to establish support networks in order to fully participate in community life and effect positive social change); and (b) the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinions and behaviours of others, and serve as a role model (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998).

Schools that provide formal education are considered "society's most legitimate and formal system of teaching and learning" (LaBelle, 1981, p.315) and are fundamental to the development of youth and their life skills. However, the hierarchic and structured environment of schools leaves many gaps in youth development that can be complemented by a non-formal learning environment. Non-formal education as expressed through youth development is developmentally beneficial in a number of important ways. It involves: Personal choice, experiential learning, and the development of personal relationships. Activities that encourage young people to choose their programs and projects are important because they offer youth the flexibility and freedom to explore their emerging interests (Horn, Flanagan, & Thomson, 1998). Central to Dewey's understanding of democratic education was the importance of numerous and varied interests (Dewey, 1916). When youth can choose the activities in which they participate, they have opportunities to practice and develop decision-making skills. These activities also encourage young people to clarify their interests and values. Choice in program activities and goals also enables non-formal education to respond to community concerns and needs (Walker & Dunham, 1996), and encourages young people to become involved in activities that are meaningful to them and their communities (Carver, 1996; 1998).

There are many non-formal youth development programmes that are running all over the world. 4-H is the nation's largest positive youth development organization empowering young people in U.S. while Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) is the largest grassroots level voluntary organization in India; one of its kind in the world. It channelizes the power of youth who are in the age group of 13-35 years on the principles of voluntarism, self-help and community participation.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has been designated as the nodal Ministry for development and empowerment of youth and adolescents in the country. Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan is one of its flagship programmes of the ministry and is implementing arms setting up, mentoring and nurturing rural youth clubs for promoting youth development. Nehru Yuva Kendras were established in the year 1972 with the objective of providing rural youth avenues to take part in the process of nation building as well providing opportunities for the

development of their personality and skills. NYKS is the largest grassroots level voluntary organization; one of its kind in the world. It channelizes the energy of youth in the age group of 13-35 years on the principles of voluntarism, self-help and community participation (NYKS, 2011). Youth Club provides a platform for the youth to come together, meet, discuss their problem and plan activities for their own development as well as that of the society (NYKS, 2012). Youth Clubs empower the youth to identify the needs and problems of the community and provide solutions by mobilizing the required resources, bring a positive change among the youth and the society by inculcating the national, social, cultural and civic values and provide a platform to explore talents of youth in various fields (NYKS & RGNIYD, 2002)

### **1. Methodology**

NYKS has been divided geographically into four zones namely north, east, west and south. Each zone has a zonal headquarter and the selected states who fall under it. For the study, states from north zone covered by NYKS i.e. Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh were selected. In the study, 9.3% (51) volunteers were NYC (National Youth Corps), they were those volunteers who were selected at the block level and acted as a link b/w the district headquarters and the youth clubs at the village level. The rest of the volunteers i.e. 90.7% (499) volunteers were the youth club members, these are the volunteers who works at the village level.

Life skills refers to a positive behaviour that encompasses a mix of knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and values and designates the possession of certain skills and knowledge how to do something positively, or reach a goal. Recognizing the conceptual framework of WHO, the Life Skills Assessment Scale was constructed to assess the levels of life skills among Indian adolescents. The tool has been developed by the School of life Skills Education and Social Harmony of RGNIYD supported by UNFPA (RGNIYD, 2010). The tool is based on the premise that Life skills can be acquired and enhanced, to bring in personal success in all spheres and for leading quality and productive life. Life skills have the potential of being observed through measurement and the change in behaviour could be overtly seen through life skills enhancement programmes can be measured (RGNIYD, 2010).

The scale has both positive and negative items. The tool has been developed with a view to reduce the halo effect and the logical errors and also to relieve the respondent from monotony. Also care has been exercised to ensure that the double barrelled statements are avoided. The multi-dimensional Life Skills Assessment Scale consists of 100 items in the form of statements in-built with a 5-point scale for the respondent to check the appropriate response which is most descriptive for them.

The score obtained under each dimension represents the level of life skills on the respective domain and summation of all the score obtained under each of the 10 dimensions evolved as a global score for life skills of volunteers. The RGNIYD dimension of life skills were categorized into three broad categories as defined by the CBSE i.e. thinking skills, Social skills and Emotional Skills and the analysis was done of the compiled dimensions.

Participation of youth volunteers in the study was voluntary and was based on their willingness to narrate stories about their experiences with NYKS. Understanding the profile of youth provided insights about the background of youth and their circumstances and context. With nearly three-fourth of youth volunteers falling in the age group of 19 years and more and half of the volunteers completed graduation and one-fourth of them were 12<sup>th</sup> pass. Career and livelihood were critical concern in their lives. With 64% was unemployed and almost similar number of youth volunteers belonging to families having monthly family income less than Rs 15000. Further accentuated the criticality of youth being able to economically contributed to family income. Interestingly, the study sample also had only one-fourth of women and rest were male volunteers.

### **2. Findings:**

A key component of the NYKS youth club is promoting self-development of the youth. The involvement of youth in the youth club's activities is seen as a training ground for life skills development in them. Thus, to further assess the dimension of youth development in terms of life skills, the Life Skills Assessment Tool was used.

#### **3.1 Grand Score of Life Skills**

As per the table, the scores of youth volunteers on Life Skills Assessment Scale indicated that a majority of youth volunteers (61%) had average life skills i.e. were in the score range of 325-386 followed by 18% of youth volunteers had high Life skills i.e. in the score range of 387-417, 13% had low life skills i.e. were in the score range of 293-

324, and 4% had very high life skills and fall in the score range of 418 and above and 4% had very low Life Skills i.e. had score of up to 292.

Very low percentage of youth volunteers having Low life skills and maximum number of volunteers having average life skills it can be stated that the youth volunteers had been benefited from programmes and activities of NYKS. With a definite focus on youth's self-development and being youth centric, the youth volunteers had developed more confidence in themselves and activities and programmes of NYKS contributed to building of abilities and skills of youth. Thus, youth participation in NYKS youth clubs helped in promoting overall life skills competence in youth volunteers and helping them in way to overcome the deficit in opportunities for self-development which were largely lacking in their environment.

### **2.1.1 Composite Life skills score**

The dimensions of ten life skills dimensions were categorized into three broad dimensions as defined by CBSE i.e. thinking Skills, social skills and emotional skills. Life skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help youth to face challenges of everyday life. Youth need to have all three life skills i.e. thinking skills, social skills and emotional skills for consensus building and advocacy on issues of concern.

Thus, from the findings it can be said that the NYKS programmes and activities enhanced the 'thinking skills' of volunteers that included decision-making, problem-solving skills and information gathering skills. The involvement of youth volunteers in various activities enabled them to understand their strengths and weaknesses and evaluating the future consequences of their present actions on others. The volunteers of NYKS had the lower 'Emotional Skills' indicates that their ability to identify causes and effects of stress on oneself and expressing and responding to emotions with an awareness of the consequences was lower than other skills.

## **2.2 Differences in Grand Score of Life skills on Independent variables**

The statistical tests were done to calculate the differences in the grand score of life skills of youth volunteers on independent variables i.e. Gender, Age, Educational level, Participation years and Satisfaction level.

### **2.2.1 Gender on Life Skills**

The difference in life skills scores of youth volunteers was compared on the basis of gender (the two groups i.e. male and female). The scores of volunteers on Life Skills Assessment Scale stated that: Both the male and female had 'Average' Life Skills with the mean score of 360.02 and 357.42.

One way ANOVA indicated that male youth volunteers had higher life skills as compared to the female volunteers. The male youth volunteers had highest 'critical Thinking' skills with the mean score 41.93 and the female had highest 'Self-Awareness'. Both the male and female had lowest 'Coping with Stress' skill with the mean score 24.08 and 25.54.

Categorizing the Life Skills dimensions into three broad dimensions i.e. Thinking Skills, Social Skills and Emotional skills. The male youth volunteers of NYKS had higher thinking and social skills as compared to the female youth volunteers.

The female youth volunteers had higher emotional skills than male youth volunteers. The female youth volunteers were able to understand the emotional turmoil better than the male volunteers.

### **2.2.2 Age on Life Skills Score**

The difference in life skills scores of youth volunteers was compared on the basis of age (three groups i.e. 13-18 years, 19-24 years and 25 years and above). All the three groups of age fall under 'Average' Life Skills. The youth volunteers in the age group of (19-24 years) years had the highest life skills score followed by the volunteers in the age group of (25 years and above). The volunteers in the age group of (13-18 years) had the lowest life skills score.

All the age groups had lowest 'Coping with Stress' skills with the mean score of 25.20, 24.66 and 23.58. One way ANOVA indicated that the volunteers in the age group (13-18 years) had the highest 'Self Awareness' skills with the mean score of 40.25, age group (19-24 years) had highest 'Critical Thinking' skills and the age group (25 years and above) had highest 'Critical Thinking' skills with the mean score 42. In the study, the majority of the youth volunteers were in the age group of 19-24 years and they were only the age group who had highest life skills score. The volunteers in the age group (19-24 years) had the highest 'Thinking skills' (75.58%) and 'Social Skills' (72.89%). And the volunteers in the age group (13-18 years) had the highest 'Emotional Skills' (64.69%)

### **2.2.3 Educational level on Life Skills Scores**

The difference in life skills score was compared on the basis of educational level (three groups i.e. secondary, higher secondary and graduation or higher degree). The figure clearly indicated that the Life Skills of youth volunteers increased with the educational qualification. The volunteers who were highly qualified i.e. graduated or were having higher degree had the highest life skills followed by the volunteers who were higher secondary pass and the volunteers who were 10<sup>th</sup> pas had the lowest life skills.

One way ANOVA indicated that all the educational qualification groups' fall under the 'Average' Life Skill. The volunteers of NYKS who are graduated or have the higher educational qualification had more Thinking skills, Social skills and emotional skills as compared to those who had completed their education up to secondary and higher secondary. The life skills of youth volunteers increased with the increase educational level of youth volunteers because Knowledge and education are key factors to the full and effective participation of youth in the processes of social, economic and political development.

### **2.2.4 Participation years on Scores of Life Skills**

The difference in life skills score of youth volunteers was compared on the basis of participation years (three groups i.e. less than 2 years, 2-4 years and 5 years & more). All the participation years' groups had lowest 'Coping with Stress' skills with the mean score of 25.04, 25.0 and 22.99. One way ANOVA indicated that all the three participation years groups (i.e. less than 2 years, 2-4 years and 5 years & more) had highest 'Critical Thinking' skills with the mean score of 41.64, 41.30 and 42.02. NYKS provided youth volunteers the platform where youth volunteers were able to analyse information and experiences in an objective manner. Critical thinking also contributed to health of youth volunteers by helping them to recognize and assess the factors that influenced attitudes and behaviour, such as values, peer pressure and the media.

The participation group (less than 2 years) had the highest life skills i.e. 72.4% followed by participation group (2-4 years) with 72.04% and participation group (5 years and more) with 71.05%. It means that the life skills of youth volunteers of NYKS decreases with the increase in participation in NYKS.

The composite life skills indicated that the volunteers who had participated for less than 2 years had highest 'Thinking skills', 'Social Skills' and 'Emotional skills' with 75.10%, 72.72% and 64.3% as compared to those who were associated with NYKS for 2-4 years and 5 years & more.

### **2.2.5 Satisfaction Level on Life Skills**

The difference in the life skills scores of youth volunteers were compared on the basis of satisfaction level (three groups i.e. satisfied, somewhat satisfied and not satisfied). The volunteers who were satisfied with the programmes and activities of NYKS had the highest life skills followed by the volunteers who were somewhat satisfied and not satisfied with the work done in NYKS. One way ANOVA indicates that all the three groups of satisfaction level had highest 'Critical Thinking' skills with the mean score of 42.01, 41.07 and 41.33 respectively. All the three groups had lowest 'Coping with stress' skills with the mean score of 24.08, 25.12 and 23.28.

Categorizing the life skills into three broad dimension- the volunteers who were satisfied had the highest 'Thinking skills', 'Social Skills' and 'Emotional skills' with 75.60%, 73.66% and 72.30% followed by the volunteers who were somewhat satisfied and not satisfied. It implied that the life skills of volunteers increased with the increases in satisfaction level achieved from the programmes and activities of NYKS.

## **3.3 Regression Analysis of Life Skills Grand Score on Independent Variables**

Regression analysis of Life skill Grand score on independent variables (age, gender, educational qualification, family income, Participation years and Satisfaction level) was done

B=Unstandardized coefficients

X1 and X2= Educational Qualification and Satisfaction Level

So,  $Y = 357.33 + (X1 * 4.88) + \{X2 * (-6.52)\}$

There was a positive correlation b/w the Life skills of volunteers and the Educational qualification and Satisfaction level. It meant that the life skills of youth volunteers enhanced with their educational level and the satisfaction level with the work that they did in NYKS. Expectantly, higher the educational level and satisfaction level is, higher the prediction of life skills of volunteer. However life skills being related to their satisfaction level indicated the importance of experiences youth in the activities of youth clubs and their satisfaction with them. Thus, more the activities of the NYKS youth clubs are in accordance to the needs of youth based that not only motivates the youth volunteer to continue volunteering with youth clubs but also enabled them to enhance their life skills.

NYKS programmes and activities were potential for life skills development and youth empowerment. Youth-driven programmes and activities of NYKS provided youth access to learning environments where they not only gain knowledge and also develop the key life skills that enabled them to meet the challenges of life.

### 3. Discussion and Conclusion

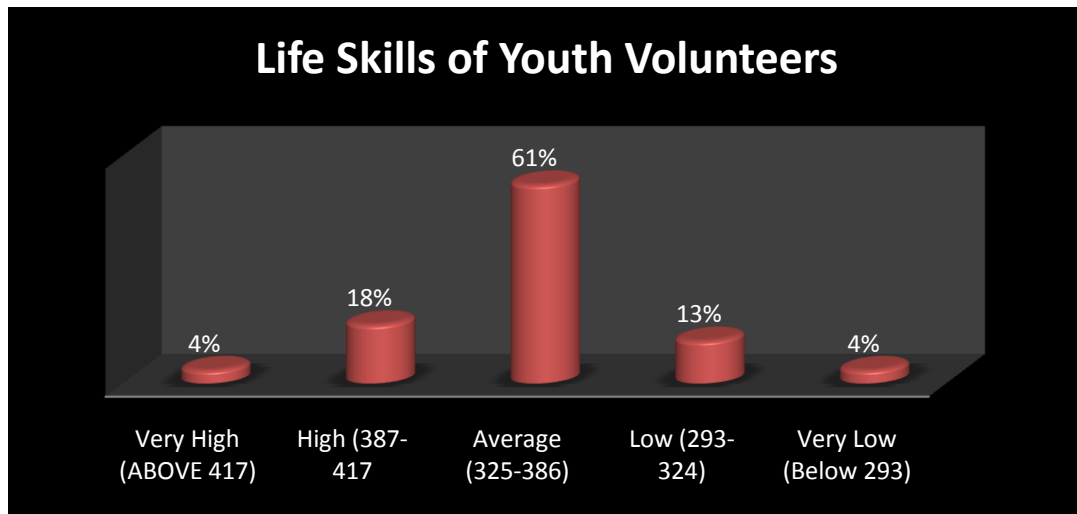
The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports is the nodal Ministry for growth and development of youth in the country. To utilize the youth's potential in a positive way the ministry have made efforts to collaborate with different government and non-government departments. Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan endeavours to help set up, mentor and nurture rural youth clubs. It has been working towards inculcating in the youth an enhanced sense of volunteerism, community service, personality development and good citizenship. It also provides the opportunities for the development of their personality and skills. Recently, the NYKS has collaborated with the Ministry of skills and Entrepreneurship to build on the life skills of youth at rural area so that they can face the challenges of everyday life.

The Regression analysis of life skills score indicated that among six predictor variables (age, gender, educational qualification, family income, participation years and satisfaction level) only 'Educational Qualification' and 'Satisfaction Level' was found contributing significantly towards the Grand score of Life Skills. So, higher the educational qualification and satisfaction level is, higher the prediction of life skills of youth volunteers. Thus, youth volunteers who were satisfied with the activities and programmes of NYKS had higher life skills as compared to those who were less satisfied or not satisfied. Also expectantly, youth volunteers who were more educated had higher life skills.

**Table 3.1: Grand Score of Life skills of youth volunteers (N-550)**

| Classification | Score         | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Very Low       | Up to 292     | 22        | 4.0        |
| Low            | 293 - 324     | 72        | 13.1       |
| Average        | 325 - 386     | 332       | 60.4       |
| High           | 387 - 417     | 101       | 18.4       |
| Very High      | 418 and Above | 23        | 4.2        |
| Total          |               | 550       | 100.0      |

**Figure 3 .1 Grand Score of Life skills of youth volunteers (N-550)**



**Table 4.5.2: Composite Life skills score**

| Composite Life Skills | RGNIYD Life Skills         | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean                        | Std. Deviation |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----|---------|---------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Thinking Skills       | Self -Awareness            | 550 | 16.00   | 98.00   | 40.9200                     | 6.76841        |
|                       | Decision Making            | 550 | 24.00   | 54.00   | 39.6745                     | 5.69004        |
|                       | Problem Solving            | 550 | 17.00   | 45.00   | 35.5055                     | 5.98077        |
|                       | Creative Thinking          | 550 | 10.00   | 40.00   | 29.4236                     | 4.86321        |
|                       | Critical Thinking          | 550 | 15.00   | 55.00   | 41.6782                     | 6.71811        |
|                       | Total (n-250)              | 550 | 81      | 292     | <b>187.2018</b><br>(74.88%) | 30.02054       |
| Social Skills         | Interpersonal Relationship | 550 | 20.00   | 92.00   | 39.5491                     | 5.90918        |
|                       | Effective Communication    | 550 | 18.00   | 45.00   | 32.1618                     | 5.52962        |
|                       | Empathy                    | 550 | 22.00   | 55.00   | 40.0964                     | 5.55153        |
|                       | Total (n- 155)             | 550 | 60.00   | 192     | <b>111.8073</b><br>(72.12%) | 16.99033       |
| Emotional Skills      | Coping with Emotions       | 550 | 22.00   | 54.00   | 36.0600                     | 5.23944        |
|                       | Coping with Stress         | 550 | 8.00    | 39.00   | 24.3982                     | 6.04714        |
|                       | Total (n- 95)              | 550 | 30.00   | 93.00   | <b>60.4582</b><br>(63.63%)  | 11.28658       |
|                       | Life Skill - Grand Total   | 550 | 247.00  | 487.00  | 359.4673<br>(71.89%)        | 36.44271       |

The youth volunteers of NYKS had highest 'Thinking Skills' (74.88%) followed by 'Social skills' with 72.12% and had lowest 'Emotional skills' with 63.63%.

**Figure 4.5.2: Composite Life Skills Score of youth volunteers**

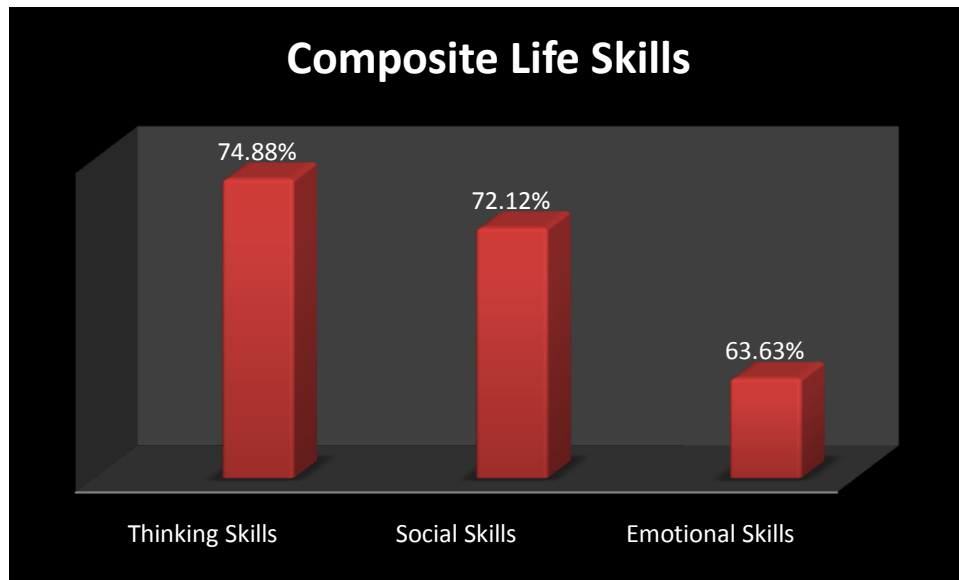


Figure 3.2.1a: Gender on Life Skills score

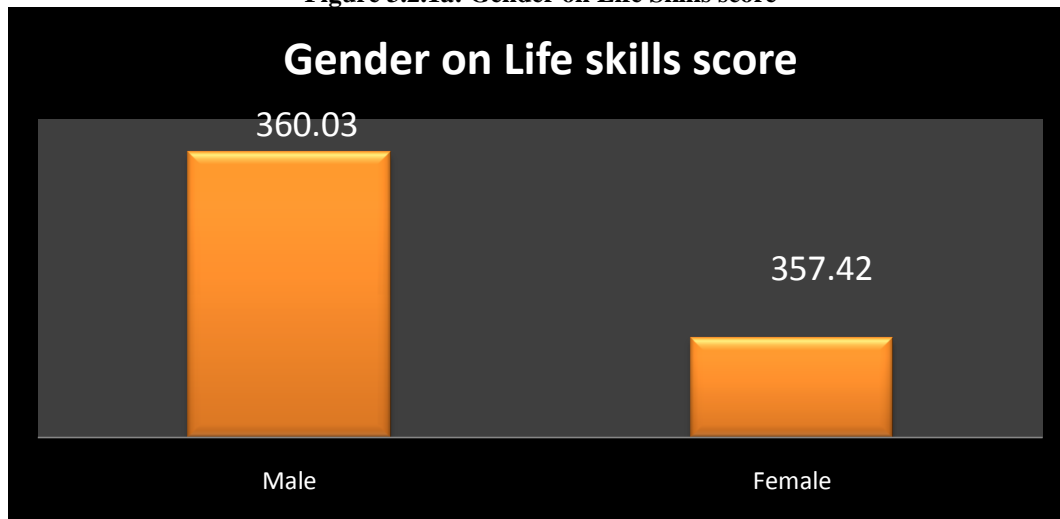


Figure 3.2.1b: Gender on Composite dimensions of Life skills (N-550)



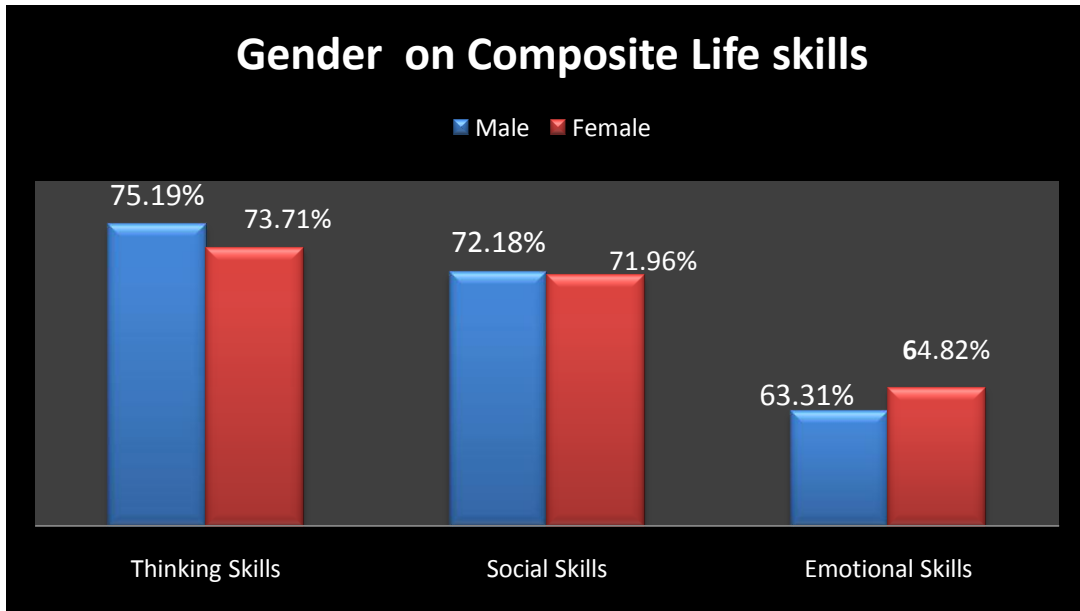


Figure 3.2.2a: Mean score of Age on Life Skills Score (N-550)

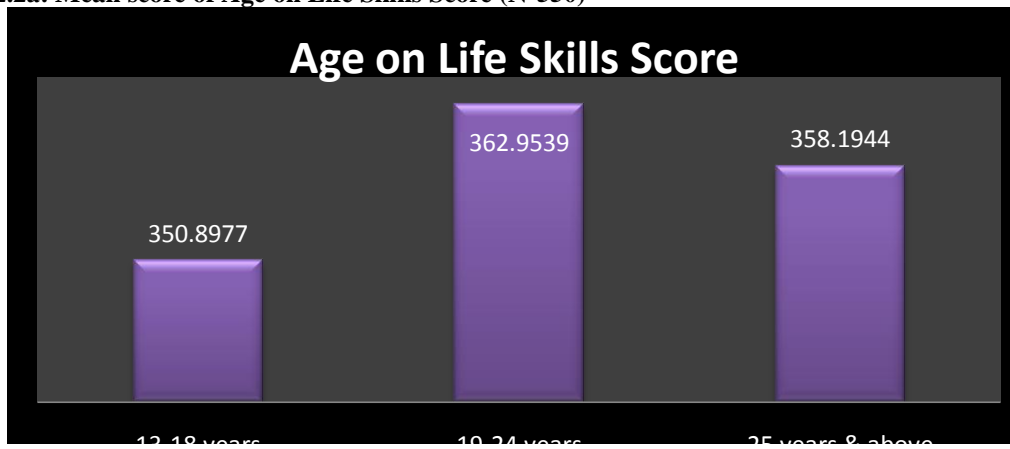
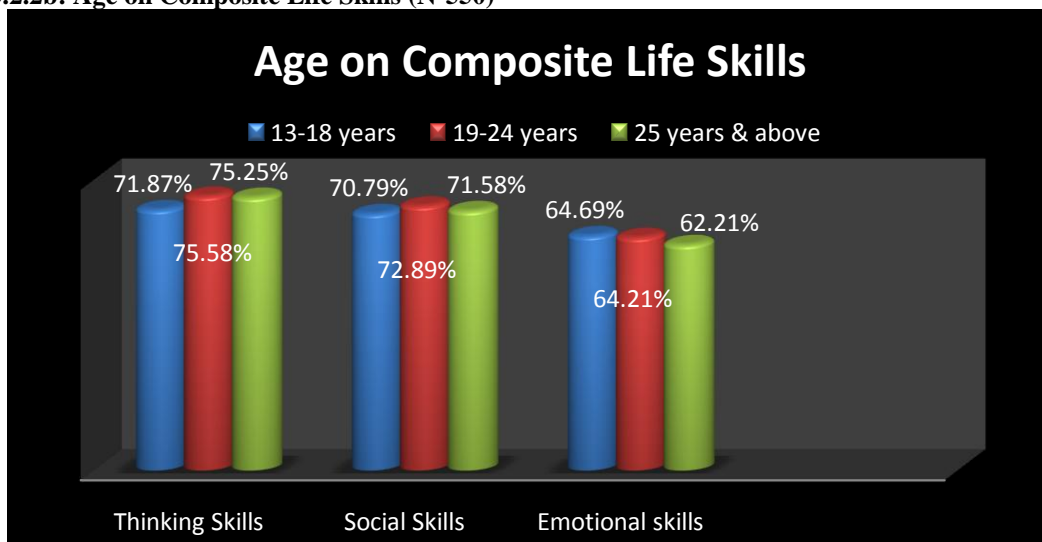
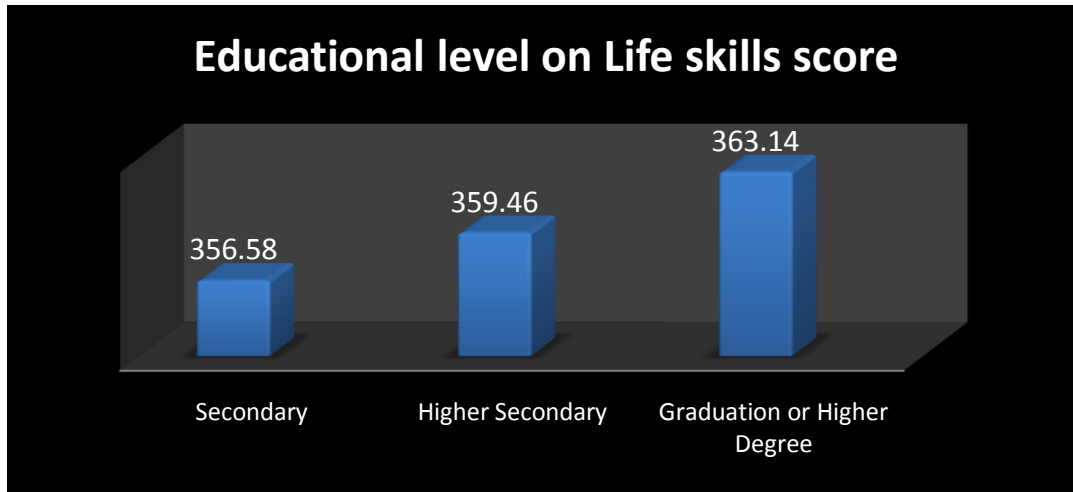


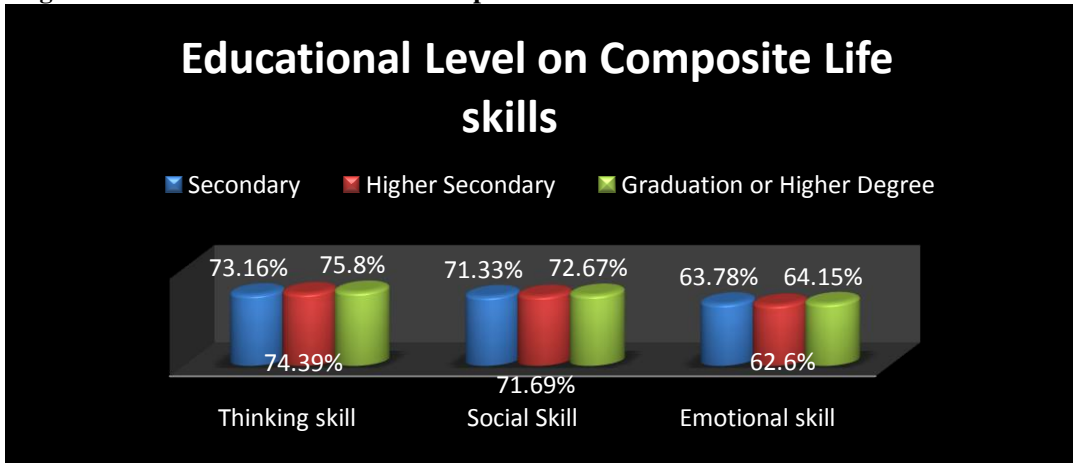
Figure 3.2.2b: Age on Composite Life Skills (N-550)



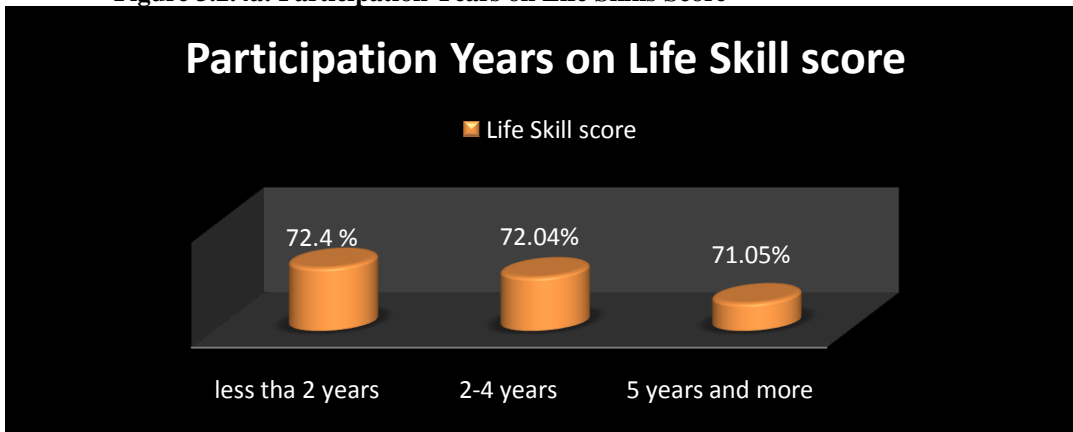
**Figure 3.2.3a: Mean score of Educational Level on Life Skill Score**



**Figure 3.2.3b: Educational level on Composite Life skills**



**Figure 3.2.4a: Participation Years on Life Skills Score**



**Figure 3.2.4b: Participation Years on Composite Life Skills**

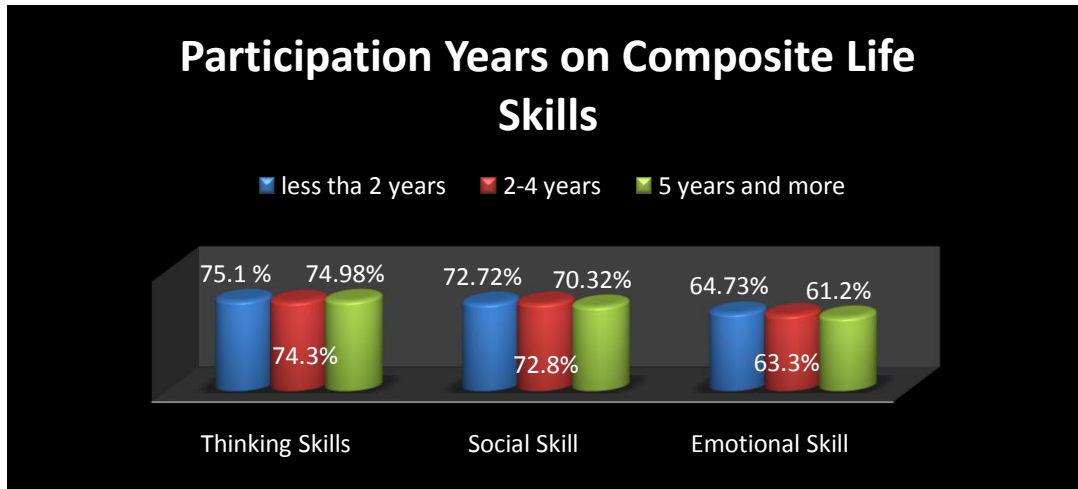


Figure 3.2.5a: Satisfaction Level on Grand Score of Life Skills

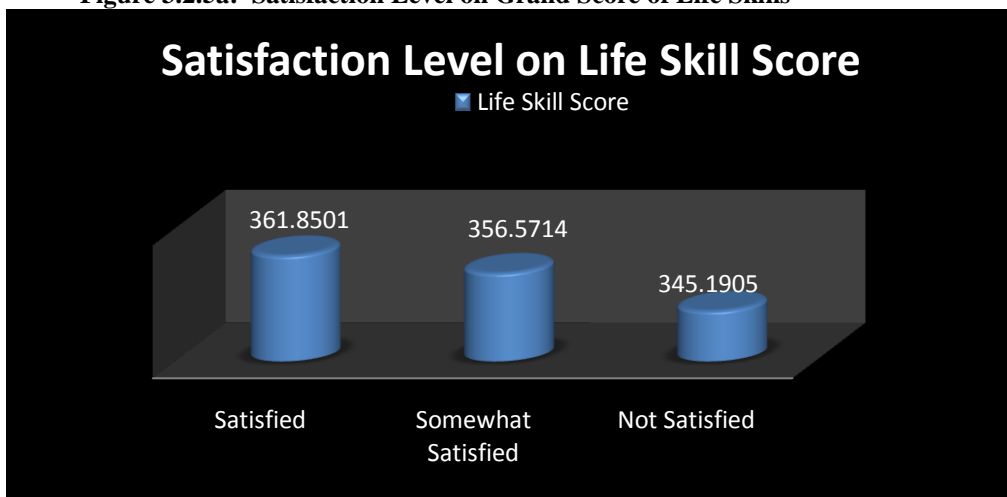
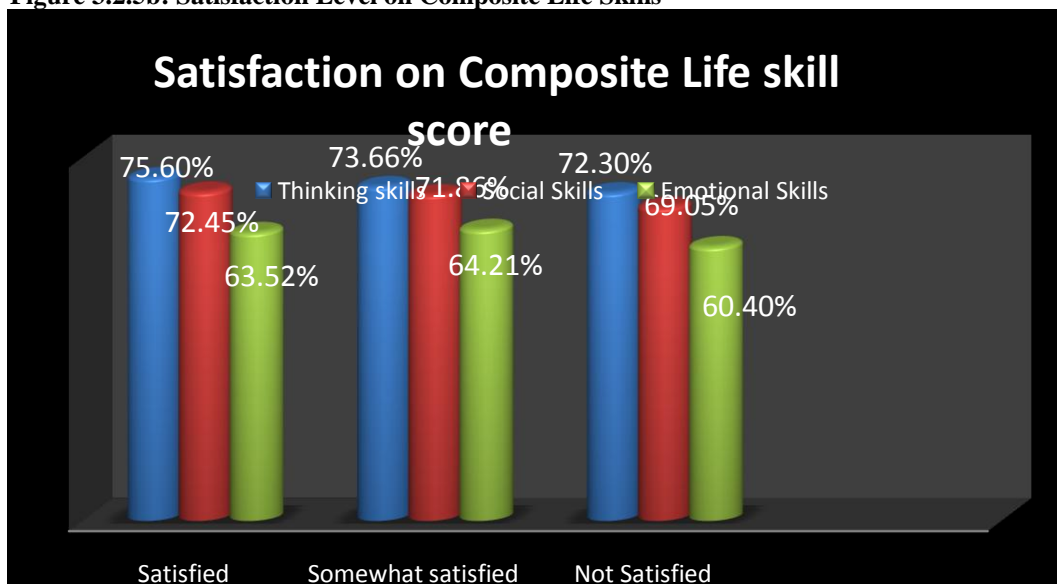


Figure 3.2.5b: Satisfaction Level on Composite Life Skills



**Table 3.3 a: Model Summary of Regression Analysis**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted Square | R | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics |          |     |     |               |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-----------------|---|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
|       |                   |          |                 |   |                            | R Square Change   | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1     | .104 <sup>a</sup> | .011     | .009            |   | 36.27983                   | .011              | 5.941    | 1   | 548 | .015          |
| 2     | .145 <sup>b</sup> | .021     | .017            |   | 36.12534                   | .010              | 5.697    | 1   | 547 | .017          |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Educational level

b. Predictors: (Constant), Educational level, Satisfaction level

In the above table, the Regression analysis indicates that among six predictor variables (age, gender, educational level, family income, participation years and satisfaction level) only 'Educational Level' and 'Satisfaction Level' contributes significantly towards the Grand score of Life Skills and both are significant at 5% level of confidence. Rests of the predictors are not significant at 5% level of confidence.

**Table 4.5.3b: Model Summary of Regression Analysis**

| Model |            | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F     | Sig.              |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| 2     | Regression | 15253.994      | 2   | 7626.997    | 5.844 | .003 <sup>c</sup> |
|       | Residual   | 713856.917     | 547 | 1305.040    |       |                   |
|       | Total      | 729110.911     | 549 |             |       |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: Life Skill – Total; c. Predictors: (Constant), Educational level, Satisfaction Level

**Table 4.5.3c: Coefficients of Regression Analysis**

| Model |                            | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | t      | Sig. |
|-------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|--------|------|
|       |                            | B                           | Std. Error |        |      |
| 2     | (Constant)                 | 357.329                     | 6.139      | 58.209 | .000 |
|       | Educational Qualifications | 4.882                       | 1.973      | 2.474  | .014 |
|       | Satisfaction Level         | 6.523                       | 2.733      | 2.387  | .017 |

Line of Regression (Y) =  $\alpha + (\beta_1 * X_1) + (\beta_2 * X_2)$

Where,  $\alpha$  = constant

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