Designing Changing Lifestyle Tools for Underserved Children

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Abstract

The underprivileged or marginalized children are not only deprived of physical amenities and life opportunities, but of social dignity. Preventive interventions to recognize their abilities and inner resources is the fundamental facet of development and change. Based on this assumption, present study goal was to craft and field test simple, children friendly tools to help children to connect with self and others. Trained field assistants, both male and female, following participatory observation method, gathered specific data on the style life, family and group interaction of underserved children engaged in vendor or begging in a well-known thoroughfare as baseline for designing life changing tools. A set of 5 pictorial learning tools "Good No's" in five areas of daily life were developed and used as life style changing psychoeducational materials. The tools were then field tested on 30 underserved children on a holiday school once a week. Token economy scheme was followed and event sampling observation method was used to recognize the desired change. Reflective feedback and photograph were also taken into account for verification of measured outcome. Inductive analysis from observed phenomenon found the tools to be effective in fostering change in life in the area of safety, self-worth and self-control. The barriers for sustainable change were identified.

Keywords: Children; Under-Privilege; Life Style; Psychoeducational Tools

Introduction

Children face multitude of pressures, from the everyday challenges of life to the increasing threats of discrimination, conflicts, abuse and trauma. This is even truer for underserved children who are deprived of basic life privileges. These may broadly include marginalized children due to poverty or ethnic minority. These children are generally found in streets picking rag, peddling, hawking and or begging. Countless of these children are reared in less than ideal family conditions (e.g. scarcity, violence, substance abuse, family dissonance, family or personal illnesses). According to UNICEF study in 2013, globally almost 385 million children were living in extreme poverty and 19.5% of children in developing countries were in such deprivation that worst effect their body and mind [1]. Quick count survey (QCS) of street children by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 2002 reported an estimate of 2573 street children living in hazardous and precarious condition [2]. Unwarranted environment restrict normal intellectual, social, and emotional development of children and youth that impede them from reaching their full potential as adults [3,4].

Substantial focus on improving physical health and education of the underprivileged or marginalized children has been made by the international and national bodies with noted change. Yet, despite of all promises, a great number of children in Bangladesh is far behind from realization of their human and child rights. They grow up with scarcity, malnutrition, inadequate protection and absence of adult guidance, mostly in streets selling or begging for daily living. These children are not only deprived of physical amenities and life opportu-

nities, but of social dignity and respect. In spite of all odds, the sparkle of life is still alive and vibrant in their eyes. This sign of resiliency has been evident in many instances where children in most difficult situation have proven their strengths and power to withstand adversity, threats and significant sources of stress [5,6].

Resiliency is skills that can be learned. Building resilience can help children manage stress; and feelings of anxiety and uncertainty [7-9]. A consistent relation has been found between exposure to a wide variety of stressors or risk factors child and adolescent well-being. However, some youths are more resilient and able to overcome adversity [10,11]. Resiliency is tied to protective factors such as parental management and social support that moderate the effects of risk and stress [12]. Preventive interventions focus on reducing risk and promoting protective factors in the child as well as their cultural ecologies promote resilience [13].

Dr. Ginsburg has identified seven "C"s of resilience, recognizing that "resilience isn't a simple, one-part entity." Caregivers can use these guidelines to help the children recognize their abilities and inner resources [14]. Among those, connection is one of the fundamental facet of all development and change. Developing close ties to family and community creates a solid sense of security that helps lead to strong values and prevents alternative destructive paths to love and attention. Carol S. Dweck (2000, 2006, 2017) has argued for growth mind set against fixed mind set for creating drive and resiliency for the development of self and virtue of life [16-18]. Growth mindset is the ability and desire to embrace learning, challenges and setbacks which can be nurtured through changing the children's' belief about their ability. Underserved children are less likely to hold such positive mindset, nevertheless it can alter the effect of poverty on achievement [19,20].

Based on this assumption, present study goal was to craft simple, children friendly tools to help children to connect with others to: (1) Build a sense of physical safety and emotional security within self and (2) Allow the expression of all emotions, so that kids will feel comfortable reaching out during difficult time These child friendly tools would be relevant for fostering life changing behavior among underserved children with increased ability to address conflict openly in the group and to resolve problems, create a common area where they can share time, and foster healthy relationships that will reinforce positive messages.

Objective of the Study

Study objective was to design and field test child friendly psychoeducational tools for the underserved children to empower self and changing life style.

Specific objectives are to:

1) Identify the need for changing life style of underserved children.
2) Develop need based pictorial easy to understand psychoeducational materials.
3) Field test the pictorial psychoeducational materials as tools for fostering change in life.

Materials and Methods

Social research approach was followed. Sociologists use empirical evidence, documented by direct experience and/or observation jointly with the scientific method or an interpretive framework. The theoretical foundation rely on an interpretive standpoint through which they can make inference of scientific results. To deliver sound research on the social situations of underserved children, present study involved the prescribed steps: defining a specific question, gathering information and resources through observation, forming a hypothesis, testing the hypothesis in a reproducible manner, analyzing and drawing conclusions from the data, publishing the results and anticipating further development when future researchers respond to and retest findings [21].

A well-known thoroughfare in the capital city of Bangladesh was selected purposefully as a catchment area. The place was chosen on the basis of its popularity as a recognized spot for entertainment, shopping, restaurants and various hangout places for middle class to upper class people. As a result it was a ready place for street vendors and underserved children for easy earning. The study was conducted

on two distinct but overlapping stages: (1) Identifying area to change and developing relevant psychoedcuational materials, and (2) Field testing the psychoedcuational materials. Flow chat of the study method is presented in chart 1.
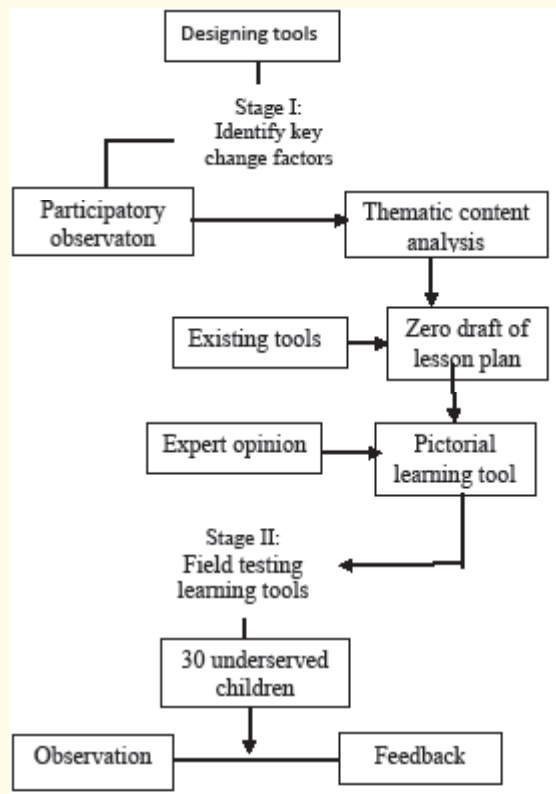

chart 1: *Methodological flow chart of the two stage of the study.*

Stage I: Identifying areas and designing life change tools:

1. **Selection and training of field assistant:** A group of 15 psychology graduates were preliminary selected upon a walk-in interview for training based on their interest and humanitarian values to work with under privileged children. Two day long training was primarily focus on awareness of value system, sensitizing on diversity, compassionate communication, research plan and activities. 10 who showed commitment and gave consent to work on the said project were finally selected as filed assistants.

2. **Choosing catchment area:** Bailey road area was selected as a catchment area based on the selection criteria of popular and recognized as a well-known thoroughfare in the capital city and availability of street merchants and underserved children.

3. **Participatory observation:** 5 trained field assistants, both male and female, following participatory observation method, gathered specific data on their style life, family and group interaction. They mingled with the underserved children and their mothers selling or wandering during evening hours for once or twice a week for 1 month in the catchment area to make a baseline with their life style. During the visit field assistants gave small treats to the children to reinforce bonding and motivate to join a common place for sharing time. Parental consent were verbally taken from the available mothers for joining a holiday child friendly space every Friday afternoon for about 2 hours. A child friendly holiday school of a voluntary organization at Ramna park was conveniently selected to run the program.

4. **Development of psychoeducational tools:** Based on field assistants account of initial concern, focal themes were identified and lesson plans on priority areas based on existing tools and literature such as Tools of Mind by Elene Bodrova and Debora Leongm (2012) [22], Friends by Joy Cowley (1995) [23] and Esteem Builders by Michele Borbe (1989) [24] were drafted. Zero draft were transformed into pictorial learning materials with simple catchy sayings were developed using Goggle image search. For each area 8 to 10 pictorial items were developed. Pictorial materials were reviewed by 4 experts in education psychology. Initial focal concern, identified theme and selection of priority areas are presented in the result section.

Stage-2: Field test of psychoeducational tools:

- **Sample:** 30 underserved children age between 6 to 14 years engaged in vending small products for earning were selected to join the child friendly space. Among them 8 were girls. These underserved children were marginalized from basic needs and found to be involved in picking rags, hawking, peddling and/or begging in streets due to poverty.

- **Materials:** A set of 5 pictorial learning tools "Good No's" in five areas of daily life were used as life style changing psychoeducational materials. Each sets contained 8 - 10 pictorial item with key expression. A Day planner for each day of weekly child friendly space activity for setting a structured learning situation. It included token economy scheme. Sample of each is presented in the appendix. An interview guide to collect socio-demographic data and storyline of daily lifestyle was included. Photographs and reflective feed-back were used to measure the outcomes.

- **Procedure:** The psychoeducational materials were introduced in a child friendly space of a voluntary organization following day planners for 8 months. Each day 3 to 4 trained field assistants were present in rotation. 1 selected 'Good No's materials among the five were introduced interchangeably on each day following the day planner. For the first 2 months field assistants acted as guide to generate discussion around the selected topic. Following the narration of the picture, children recited the saying of 'good no's' aloud in chorus. After the initial months, the day captain would take the role of a guide. Effort was to practice and maintain these behaviors. Small health snacks were provided as incentive. Token economy was used to reinforce compliance following a chart. At the end of each day debriefing sessions with the field assistants held to record the observation and feedback to recognize positive change in children. Over the period psychosocial profile and storyline of the children were prepared following the interview guide by the field assistants.

- **Data recording and entry:** Data coding and formatting SPSS file were prepared for analysis of socioeconomic data. To measure the change factors process account of field workers, photograph and event sampling were recorded and compared to identify the differences in behavior in initial and final days of implementation.

Results and Discussions

Facts and figures of psychosocial profile of the sample for field testing Tools for Changing Life Style for the underserved children (Table 1) shows more boys and older children were included. All children were living with their parents.

Facts	10 - 14 years	Boys	Schooling	Begging	Father unskilled labor	Mother housemaid
Figures (percentage)	60	73	52.4	57.1	38.6	33.3

Table 1: *Facts and figures (majority %) of the field testing sample.*

Though 52.4% has enrolment in formal or non-formal schools [27], only 2 boys (6.6%) were regular in attending school. Regrettably 57.1% were actively involved in begging, however observation revealed that others who were involved in street vending also beseeching

for money. Their daily income varies from 60 - 250 taka. 4.8% of girls worked as domestic worker or involve in crafting besides street peddling at evening time.

Lifestyle pattern (Table 2) reveals about 28 - 53% had unhealthy lifestyle with 9.5% involved in smoking. Despite all odds, 60% expressed happiness and 48% had aim in life (i.e.14.3% doctor/pilot; 14.1% police; 19.1%. job at shop or garment). Storyline of the children revealed 20 to 29% were exposed to external stressors as physical abuse, accidents, and illness.

Daily Lifestyle	Adequate sleep	Regular breakfast	Physical workout	Regular Meal	Joyful activity	Addiction
Percentage	57.1	71.4	71.4	61.9	61.9	9.5

Table 2: Daily lifestyle of the field testing sample.

Identified needs for changing life style of underserved children

Participatory observation in natural setting identified several undesirable, under-controlled behavior in the underserved children. Thematic content analysis of the observed behaviors coded three focal concerns: 1) Indiscipline, 2) conflict and 3) contempt; leading to unsafe, dishonored life style. Five areas of daily living were subsequently deemed necessary for developing learning discourses to bring changing life style of the underserved children. Based on the reflective feedback the broad areas chosen were i) Living together, ii) Self-care, iii) Safety Guard, iv) Road safety and v) Self-protection. Changing life style was hypothesized as the outcome in three areas 1) Safety, 2) self-control and 3) self-worth (Figure 1).
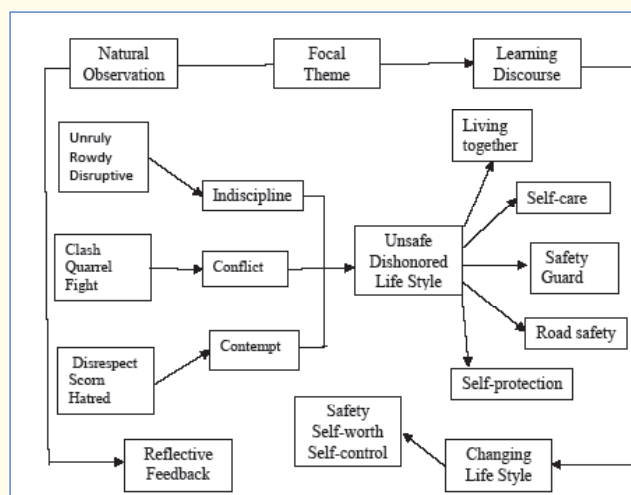

Figure 1: Thematic analysis of content of learning and outcome measure for changing lifestyle.

Developed need based, easy to understand pictorial life changing tools: Founded on the focal theme of the natural observation (as described in method section) 5 areas (living together, self care, safety guard, road safety and self protection) were identified as topic of learning discourse to change the unsafe, dishonored life style to life with sense of safety, self-worth and self-control. To foster growth mind set the "don'ts" were reframed as "Good No's "in preparing the pictorial learning discourses. Sample of pictorial items are presented in box 1.

Box 1: *Sample of items of life changing tools.*

Viability of Life Changing tools (Pictorial psychoeducational booklets)

Inductive method of analyzing the reflective feedback and photograph taken during field test revealed positive behavioral change in the children in the hypothesized area of safety, self-worth and self-control (Figure 2) within the child friendly space, 40-60% of the time over the period of 8 months. Token economy scheme (Box 2) helped them to model compliance and respect. Box 3 presents example of baseline and changed behavior. Emphasis was given more on the process (how) of change than the content (what), i.e. finding things to praise self and others were most challenging for the children, over the period prompting by the field assistants helped them to overcome the internal barrier; rowdy behavior over leadership, taking turns, waiting in a queue were changed to patience; running away to beseech for money or goods during the time period reduced to minimal; harsh tone of complain was superseded by reporting an observation. The Pictorial psychoeducational materials following day planner did foster change in life style of the underserved children in the area of safety, self-worth and self-control.
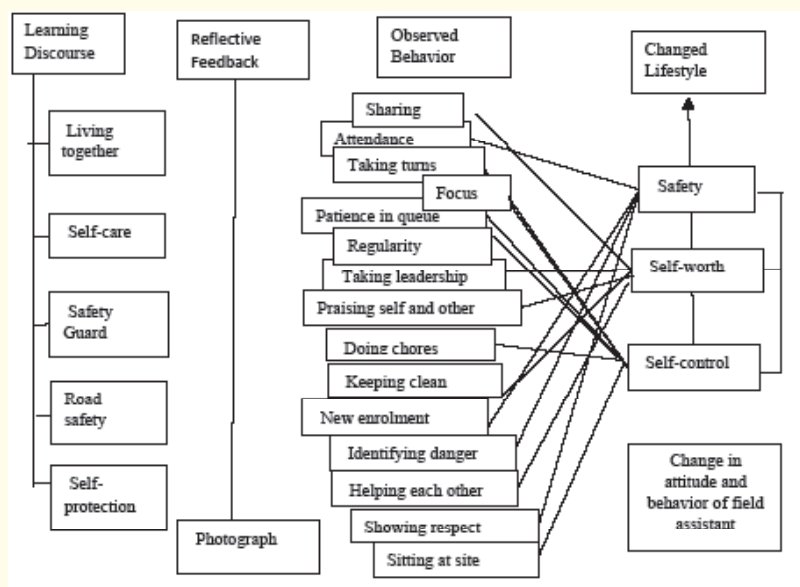

Figure 2: *Inductive analysis of observed behavioral change in the children.*

Box 2: *Token economy scheme.*

Box 3: *Photograph showing change in behaviour befor and after using life changing tools.*

An important byproduct of the child friendly space activity was the change in the attitude and behavior of the field assistant. They become more compassionate and intimate with the children, i.e. sitting close, holding hands, wiping the nose etc. Contrary to the popular belief of lack of parental supervision and care of underserved children, parental concern and protection were noted, i.e. parents visited the space, came to look for the children, and reciprocal alarming bearing in children for parental dismal.

Praising for effort and process incorporated in lesson plan was found to be imperative to achieve the expected outcome of easy to read pictorial psychoeducational tools to build strength through growth mindset [28]. It would help to empower self-worth and improve living style of the underserved children towards health and wellbeing. Thereby, such pictorial psychoeducational learning tools may contribute to social change through breeding resiliency and hope for way forward. Follow up feedback by the research assistants' recognized continuity and persistency of child friendly space for sustainable change in lifestyle of the underserved.

Identified needs and barriers for sustainable autonomy of self were systemic issues. External and internal demands at all levels from micro to macro system of ecological environment has immense impact on the development of the underserved children.28 Everyday underserved children face increased challenges of life. These threatens their basic need of self-integrity, inhibiting them to them in reaching their full potential as adults [29]. Parental adherence is a significant issue to address to make psychological intervention successful. Focus to develop close ties to family and community creates a solid sense of security that helps learning behaviour [30,31]. Well developed values and self-worth would prevent destructive paths alternative and foster love and attention. Printing of booklets from further fine-tuned pictorial psychoeducational tools for wider dissemination and use is recommended. Experiential preparation of the educators to make easy shift from the fixed mind set to growth mind set is a prerequisite for incorporating life changing learning discourse for the underserved children.

Conclusion

To conclude, child friendly psychoeducational materials addressing the need of the underserved children was found to be effective in bringing change in their behaviour in desired fashion. Enabling self-worth through introducing facets of improved living style in a disparity free playful learning environment will support the underserved children towards health and wellbeing. Dividend of life changing intervention may have its share on increased productivity of these overlooked, yet valuable citizen of the country.

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