

Perception of adolescent girls about their well-being

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Abstract

This qualitative study was initiated to explore adolescent girls' perceptions about well-being. A part of the BRAC-ICDDR,B joint research project on health and well-being, the study was done purposively in two villages of Matlab Thana among the adolescent girls of BRAC School aged from 11 to 14 years. Mainly Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were done for data collection, but during FGDs, freelist and importance rating exercises were conducted as well. In the study the adolescent girls presented a set of indicators of well-being condition from their perspective. They highly prioritized some indicators for better living like fathers/brothers income, good relations with the family members, healthy body without any illness and education. In developing linkages between the identified indicators, they started with two points i.e. father's/brother's income and income from own poultry and shared livestock. The girls pointed out some socioeconomic and cultural barriers to achieve a well-being condition. However, the study suggested that the findings could be useful to design or measure the effect of interventions on adolescent's well-being.

Introduction

At the present time in the development debate the issue of human well-being is becoming increasingly complex. In general well-being can be defined as a state of being happy and doing well in life, conditions for which are likely to differ from individual to individual. However, it is possible to define certain accepted criteria which are basic to the achievement of a state of well-being e.g. food security and availability of jobs which contribute to both physical and mental well-being. Yet, who defines such criteria and indicators of well-being is of utmost importance given the multiplicity of individual and societal evaluations and the complexities of community livelihood (Mukherjee 1996). However, usually much attention has not been paid to people's perspective towards their own well-being in the nation level. In fact it is rare to find national level studies on realities about people's well-being and people's idea in the development process usually are not considered (UNDP, 1996). Yet, people are conscious about their own well-being and they have a transparent idea about their need and priorities as well (Mahbub and Das Roy 1997).

In identifying people's perception of well-being in general, the notion of adolescents can not be overlooked, as they represent one-third of the Bangladeshi population. Adolescence is commonly defined as the period between childhood and adulthood. It is characterized as a time of accelerated mental and emotional learning and dramatic physical growth. However, there are different expectations of adolescents in different societies or even within societies (Population council 1998). Depending on different expectations, adolescents' perception of well-being can be developed, that reflects their needs and priorities. Hence exploration of adolescents' perception about well-being is useful to get an insight about their needs for achieving a well-being condition. With this aim the present study had been planned and formulated.

Objectives:

The study was mainly carried out to explore adolescent girls' perceptions about well-being.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To solicit the indicators of well-being.
- To identify adolescent girls' preferences in prioritizing these indicators.
- To understand the linkage between the identified indicators.
- To identify the barriers and constraints in achieving better living.

Methodology

This exploratory study tried to gain insight into the problem by investigating adolescent girls' view and their interpretation about the issue. The study design was qualitative and it focused on the core problem through a rapid appraisal. Being a part of the BRAC-ICDDR,B joint research project on health and well-being, the study was done purposively in two villages of Matlab Thana. Data was collected from the adolescent girls of BRAC School aged from 11 to 14 years. Mainly Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held to collect the data, but during FGDs freelist and importance rating exercises were conducted as well.

Limitation

The issue of 'well-being' seemed very vague to the adolescent girls and it was found difficult to conduct the study with these abstract ideas. Anyway, through frequent discussion, an impression about the research theme was given to them that finally helped to obtain reasonably accurate data. Since the study was done through rapid appraisal techniques, the information may be to a certain extent superficial and it was not possible to go much in-depth into the issue. Still, in the study it was tried to attain an abstraction about the well-being perception of the adolescent girls. Finally, the study was conducted in a particular rural area in Bangladesh and as such, the study result, may not be generalized.

Study findings

Indicators of well-being

"Well-being" seemed a very abstract idea to the adolescent girls, so that they could not provide a firm definition of the "well-being" condition as a whole. However, they

presented a set of indicators, which enable us to get an overview about their perception of well-being. Primarily they mentioned the indicators of household well-being and followed by the list on their own well-being as they could think of.

Indicators of household well-being:

1. Security of food and clothing throughout the year.
2. Security of father's/ elder brother's income.
3. Access to agricultural land.
4. Good relation among the household members.
5. Education of the household members.
6. Children have access to education.
7. Have access to cleanliness (ability to buy soap).
8. Healthy members of the household.
9. Well-built house with latrine and tubewell.
10. Have furniture.
11. Livestock and poultry.
12. Have big pond.
13. Electronic goods in the household (radio and television).
14. Flower and timber garden.
15. Vegetable garden.
16. Motor cycle and rickshaw.
17. Well communication of the household with the road.
18. Extended family (close kin can help in times of need).

Indicators of adolescent girls' own well-being

1. Father's/elder brother's income.
2. Security of three full meals a day.
3. Education.
4. Good dress.
5. Cosmetics and ornaments.
6. Access to cleanliness.
7. Healthy body without illness.

8. Good relations with friends.
9. Good relations with the other members in the family.
10. Have own poultry.
11. Have access to share poultry and livestock.
12. Have own radio.
13. Have own flower garden.
14. Have furniture in own room.
15. To visit friends, neighbors and relatives houses, especially grand mothers' house.
16. Get new dress on Eid occasion.
17. Private teacher.
18. Have electricity in the household.
19. Get chance to go nearby school/madrasha.
20. Brothers come to visit with gifts.
21. Mother's brother often comes to visit.

Essential indicators of better living

Through importance rating they determined the essential indicators for better living. In terms of prioritizing the indicators they organized them differently. In the following a list is given according their priority.

Ist priority:

1. Father's/brother's income.
2. Good relations with the family members.
3. Healthy body without any illness.
4. Education.

2nd Priority

1. Security of three full meals a day.
2. Have own poultry.
3. Access to cleanliness.
4. Have electricity in the household.
5. Have access to share poultry and livestock.

3rd priority

1. Have furniture in own room.
2. Private teacher.
3. Good relations with friends.
4. Get new dress on Eid occasion.
5. Cosmetics and ornaments.

4th priority

Get chance to go nearby school/madrasha.

Brothers come to visit with gifts.

5th priority

1. Have own flower garden.
2. Have own radio.
3. To visit friends, neighbors and relatives houses, especially grand mothers' house.
4. Mother's brother and other relatives come to visit.

The linkage between the identified indicators

The adolescent girls developed a linkage along with identified them singly (Figure 1). They drew the linkages from two points. They initiated with the indicator from father's/brother income and then relate it to three full meals a day, education, good dress, cosmetics and ornaments, private teacher, electricity in the household, furniture in their own room, new dress in Eid, chance to visit relatives, and also have visitors in the household. They mentioned that security of three full meals a day ensured healthy body without any illness. All of these factors result good relations among the household members.

Have own poultry and have access to share livestock and poultry were another two points from which they developed a linkage as well. They stated that from the income of their own poultry and shared livestock and poultry they could buy a private radio and organize their garden. They could also manage to have cosmetics, ornaments and good dress. Even, sometimes they could meet their educational expenses from that money as well. They pointed those poultry and livestock would provide them better nutrition also.

The barriers and constraints in achieving better living

The adolescent girls identified some barriers in achieving well-being condition from their point of view. These are in the following:

- Father has no income.
- Father does not want to bear the expenses for ornaments, cosmetics and good dress.
- Since they have grown up parents do not allow them to: i. go out alone to visit the relatives and friends, ii. play outside of the household, iii. go to neighbour's pond for taking bath.
- Do not have enough homestead land to organize a flower garden.
- Most of the time due to household works they do not get enough time for study.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to explore adolescent girls' perceptions about well-being. The study findings revealed that in spite of an elusive idea about well-being the adolescent girls presented a set of indicators of well-being condition from their perspective. In identifying the essential indicators for better living they highly prioritized some indicators like fathers/brothers income, good relations with the family members, healthy body without any illness and education. The girls developed linkages between the identified indicators and they started with two points. Those were father' s/brother's income and income from own poultry and shared livestock. Finally the girls pointed out some socioeconomic and cultural barriers to achieve a well-being condition. However, the study suggested that the adolescent girls could articulate their perception about a well-being condition. The study findings can be useful to design or measure the effect of interventions on adolescent's well-being.

References

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Figure 1. Linkage between the indicators

