



Kusuma Young Researcher's Award (KYRA) 2010

KYRA 2010 Winner

Dr. Chandrani Dasgupta's research paper titled 'Resilience and vulnerability of children living in Kashmir: a study of mental health amidst political violence' was declared the winner of KYRA 2010. Dr. Dasgupta will be awarded INR 200,000.

The paper's hypothesis asserted that:

- Children living in the high violence area of Bandipore were more vulnerable compared to children living in the low violence area of Uri.
- Children living in the high violence area of Bandipore are less resilient than the children living in the low violence area of Uri.
- Vulnerability and resilience differ significantly depending on age, gender and socio-economic background.

The study followed a quantitative methodology to understand the reality of living with political violence, by studying the perception and attitude of adolescents. Resilience was measured using the Child and Youth Resilience Measure developed by the International Resilience Project (Ungar and Liebenberg, 2006). Vulnerability was measured using the Self Reporting Questionnaire 20, derived from four psychiatric morbidity instruments from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Information was collected from 375 school-going children aged 14 to 17 years (199 boys and 176 girls). 187 and 188 children were attending government and private schools respectively.

The key findings of the paper were as follows:

- More than half of the children interviewed in Bandipore had suffered physical injuries due to political violence as compared to around one third of the children from Uri.
- Living in poor socio-economic circumstances made children more vulnerable to gunfire, destruction of home, school and neighbourhood as compared to children living in better socio-economic circumstances.
- The impact of political violence on education was evidenced by: disrupted school hours; sub-standard teaching; conferring degrees without strict evaluation; an under-skilled workforce generated by poor quality education; run down government schools in rural areas; the existence of only one University in Kashmir making it inaccessible for rural youth; exorbitant fees for private schools; lack of a commensurate increase in higher education institutes with the growing youth population and a lack of employment opportunities for graduates.
- The most common examples of vulnerability were: getting frightened easily; fatigue; feeling unhappy; not enjoying daily activities; difficulty in decision making; trouble thinking clearly; headaches; poor appetite; frequent crying and constantly feeling nervous.
- High levels of violent socio-economic circumstances did not have an impact on resilience. However, children from good socio-economic circumstances were more resilient to medium and low-level violence than those from poor socio-economic circumstances.

- As a result of high levels of exposure to violence, resilience associated with family, community, religion, friends and self-belief became weaker for adolescents belonging to higher socio-economic strata, but became stronger for adolescents belonging to lower socio-economic strata.
- Very high levels of violence led to drastic changes for children from protected and privileged environments, but similar changes were not out of the ordinary for children living in impoverished conditions.
- Girls were more vulnerable as they became older, whereas the vulnerability of boys did not vary as they became older.

KYRA 2010 Runner-Up

Javaid Rashid's research paper titled 'Torture and imprisonment: a study of incarcerated children in Kashmir' was declared the runner-up of KYRA 2010. Mr. Rashid will be awarded INR 100,000.

The study focused on 45 children who had faced torture or had been detained or imprisoned by security forces. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach was employed to study and interpret the information provided by the victims. The study was a qualitative and exploratory investigation, which took over six months to complete. Information was collected from imprisoned or incarcerated children, the prison houses and the parents of the children. The study collected 43 case studies, which provided an overview of children subjected to torture and violence and the direct impact on their lives.

The study was aimed at understanding the risk and vulnerability to which children in conflict zones are exposed. The study documented incidents of torture and incarceration; reviewed the impact of traumatic exposure on the wellbeing of children; and suggested strategies for the reform of the juvenile justice system in the context of an armed conflict.

Key findings:

- A juvenile involved in, or alleged to be involved in, militant activities is dealt no differently than an adult offender.
- Juvenile offenders' detention with adult prisoners was a common occurrence.
- Inhumane torture of juvenile offenders by the security forces had traumatised and, in some cases, inflicted irreversible physical injuries upon children.
- The trials were delayed for unreasonable and illegal lengths of time.
- The State Juvenile Justice Act (JJA) defines a juvenile as a boy not older than 16 years and a girl not older than 18 years. As juvenile offences are more common for boys than girls, the JJA must amend this provision, making 18 years as the age bar for both boys and girls.
- Kashmir lacks observation homes and the judicial infrastructure, which permit a discretionary approach to underage trials and first-time offenders.
- The juveniles' case details were held at the district or tehsil-level offices only, but were unavailable to the public.
- There was a dearth of trained professionals on juvenile psychology - even though the JJA has clear provisions for it.
- The juvenile home in Jammu did not have sufficient capacity or resources to cater to the educational needs of its juveniles.