

# Life Skills: Improving Perceived Self-efficacy and Resilience among Children Separated from Families

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## Abstract

As per the Multidimensional Poverty Index, released by NITI Aayog in 2021, one in every four Indians was living in poverty. While there are many reasons such as illness, death of parents, divorce, job loss, conflict, a child may end up in a child care institution (CCI) or children's home often due to poverty. It is well established that factors such as poverty, lack of education opportunities, mental health challenges, addiction, peer influence can lead children to situations of vulnerability, family separation and or crime. For systematic and holistic development of these children and families, the socio-legal approach put forth by the Juvenile Justice Act 2021, recognizes that while children need to take responsibility for their behaviour, they also require opportunities to steer their life towards socially constructive ways. In this direction, developing life skills, especially resilience and self-efficacy, among children becomes paramount, which helps them in dealing with destabilisers in their lives and meeting aspiration.

This study examines the effectiveness of life skill training given to the children separated from families for various reasons. The assessment was completed with 136 children, 52 children newly admitted in CCIs and not exposed to LSE, while 84 children earlier admitted to CCIs and were re-integrated back to the family post family strengthening intervention including LSE. With these children, two broad skills, perceived self-efficacy and resilience were measured using standard scales that are tested for this specific age group in multiple contexts including in India. Measurement of perceived self-efficacy reflects that 51% children, who were exposed to Miracle Foundation India's Life skill program have a good level of self-efficacy as compared to 33% children, who were not exposed to the same. The organization has been working for two decades in the realm of family

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strengthening, building agency for children and youth to realize their full potential.

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## Introduction

The significance of life skills is paramount in enabling an individual to deal with the complexities of life and have a fulfilling experience in coherence with her/his environment. Children progressing towards adolescence represents one of the critical transitions in the life span and is marked by a tremendous pace of physical and psychological human development and change that is second only to that of infancy (WHO, 2009) [www.who.int](http://www.who.int). Adding a concentric layer to the above scenario is the situation of children who get separated from families, get placed in child care institutions (CCIs) or end up in other vulnerable situations due to family breakdown owing to lack of income, livelihood support, chronic health issues, alcoholism, substance abuse, isolation and family discord, delinquency etc. Being separated from their family is traumatic for a child, the trauma can lead to:

- **Attachment issues** – traumatized children feel that the world is uncertain and unpredictable and may have issues with distrust of people. As a result, they may have difficulty relating to and empathizing with others.
- **Difficulty regulating emotions** – have trouble identifying and communicating feelings, lacking coping skills, cannot control emotions
- **Poor behaviour control** – lack impulse control, self-destructive behaviour, aggression
- **Learning difficulties** – due to inability to focus and concentrate, problems with language development due to changes in brain
- **Low self-esteem, shame, guilt** – and often feel un-loved and rejected by family

All these difficulties lead to struggles throughout their lives. Most of them are unable to utilize their potential in an appropriate way due to lack of guidance and motivation.

The socio-legal approach lens of the Juvenile Justice system in India is not

only to provide attention, care, protection to children but also to prevent them getting into crime, vulnerable situations repeatedly. The Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection) of Children Act 2021 emphasises on the components of assessing the areas of child vulnerability and preparing a plan of intervention, working with each individual child and guiding them to take responsibility for their behaviour/action, creating opportunities in the community to enable the children in need of care & protection, or children in conflict with law to re-enter mainstream society (education, training, job, positive relationships with others), opportunities for them to lead productive and law abiding lives, working in collaboration with social workers, legal representatives and other experts as part of the multi-disciplinary teams.

In this sphere, among other enabler, Life skills education plays an indispensable role. It considers psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help children to take right decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

## **The Study and its Objective**

Miracle Foundation India has been working for two decades in the realm of family strengthening, family-based alternative care, preventing risk of separation of children in families, transitioning children from institutions back into families, building agency of children and youth to realize their full potential. The organization works with the child protection system: Government, stakeholders, civil society partners and community support structures, youth across different states in the country.

Miracle Foundation India leverages the technical wherewithal of Mission Vatsalya guidelines, JJ Act tools of individual care plan (ICP) and social investigation report (SIR), complemented with the Thrive Scale methodology developed by the organisation which recognizes the critical nature of safety for the child within a family environment across five well-being domains – Family and social Relationship, Education, Physical and Mental Health, Household Economy, and Living Condition. It uses a strength-based approach by focusing on areas in which families are thriving and can be optimized to prevent child separation from family.

As a structured support intervention in the wellbeing domain of education,

Miracle Foundation India has developed a comprehensive life skills education program (22 modules specific to age groups 5-8, 9-12, 13+) based upon the core set of life skills as identified by WHO (1994) for the promotion and well-being of children and adolescents. The primal understanding was that the practice of these life skills led to an increased sense of competence and positive changes in children's behavior resulting in greater confidence and self-esteem, a healthy, positive lifestyle, and the ability to become self-sustaining citizens of the world community.

The six steps of Miracle Foundation India's approach to learning life skills included:

- Understanding the issues and life skills needed
- Relating issues to the children's own lives
- Practicing skills in a safe and supportive environment
- Applying life skills in real-life situations
- Reflecting on experiences
- Strengthening life skills for further use

The objective of the study was to assess the effectiveness of life skill training (with regard to the parameters of perceived self-efficacy and resilience) imparted to children who experienced family separation. The assessment was carried out with 136 children referring to a time span of one-year 2021 to 2022. Of the total, 52 children were newly admitted in CCIs, yet to be exposed to life skills education, while 84 children having lived in CCIs until they were re-integrated with family following an individualized child centered case management process, with due attention to five well-being domain specific family strengthening intervention including LSE.

## **Literature Review**

Puspakumarag (2013) in his study showed that life skills training was effective in preventing a wide range of problems such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, violence Bullying & to promote self-confidence and self-esteem among adolescents.

Sabeen Qamar and Mumtaz Akhter (2020), studied the relationship between secondary school students' self-efficacy and resilience. The study sample was drawn from both genders, and in urban and rural locales. The study found a high level of self-efficacy beliefs in boys in comparison to girls. The same trend was seen while comparing resilience between boys and girls in the sample. The self-efficacy beliefs and resilience of urban students

outclassed the rural population. A strong, positive, and significant relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs and resilience.

Elisabetta Sagone, Maria Elvira De Caroli, Rossella Falanga and Maria Luisa Indiana (2020) used the Perceived Self-efficacy in Life Skills Scales (PSES\_PE/NE: Empathic Self-efficacy Scale; PSES\_PS: Problem-solving Self-efficacy Scale) and the Resiliency Attitudes and Skills Profile (Italian-RASP) composed of five factors (sense of humour, competence, adapt-ability, engagement, and control). Results demonstrated that the factors of resilience were strongly (adaptability and engagement) and moderately (sense of humour and competence) related to perceived self-efficacy in the analysed domains; consequently, adolescents who perceived themselves as highly efficient in empathy and in problem-solving were more resilient than those who perceived themselves as lowly efficient in the same domains. Future research should investigate these relations in other life skills expressed by children and adults.

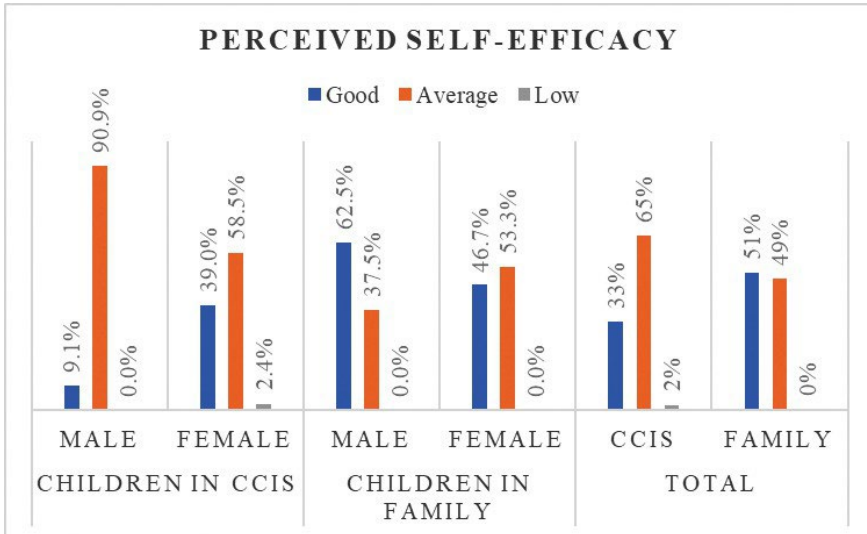
## **Methodology**

The study was a cross-sectional study carried out using in-depth interview tools translated in local language. It was a random selection of 52 children newly admitted in CCIs yet to be exposed to life skills education, as well as a random selection of 84 children having lived in CCIs until they were re-integrated with family. The average age among the 136 respondents was 15 years. Gender wise distribution was 26 percent boys, and 74 percent girls.

For perceived self-efficacy, the General Self-Efficacy scale (Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995) was used. The scale comprises ten statements to assess response on a four-point scale. The statements focus on accomplishment of goals, dealing with unforeseen situations, and finding a range of solutions to a given challenge. Each individual respondent gets a score that can range from 10-40 with 40 being the highest score. For resilience, the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (Liebenberg, L., Ungar, M., and LeBlanc, J.C. (2013) was used. This is a twelve item scale that looks at Individual Personal Skills (like cooperation), Individual Peer Support (the feeling that I am supported by friends), Individual Social Skill (whom to approach for help), Physical Caregiving (the sense of being cared for in terms of physical needs), Psychological Caregiving (psychological support from caregivers), Context or Sense of Belonging. The questionnaire was deployed on the Survey CTO data collection application, data was collected

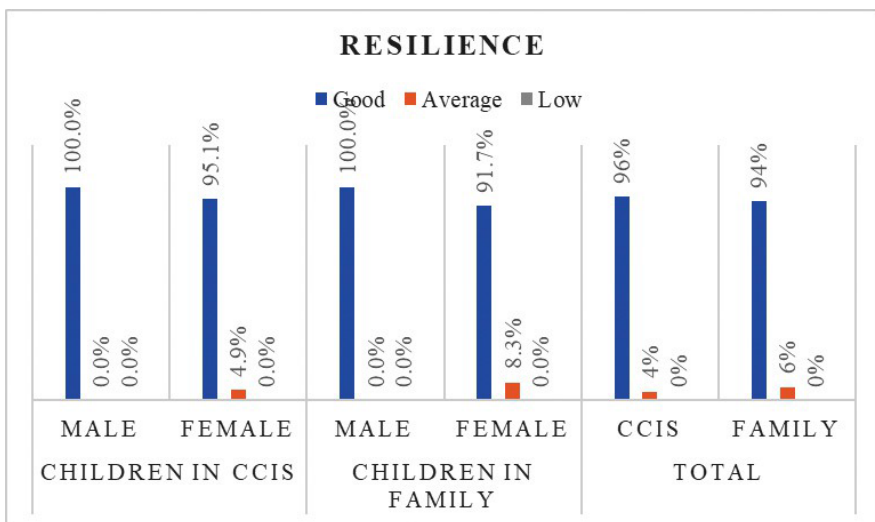
by the team using mobile phone. Thereafter analysis of the data was done basis the perceived self-efficacy and resilience framework.

## Results & Discussion



*Figure 1: Perceived Self- Efficacy*

Figure 1 shows that overall, 44% children had good perceived self-efficacy whereas 55% children had average perceived self-efficacy (See Appendix A for additional data). Among children newly admitted in CCI without exposure to LSE, both boys and girl children exhibited average perceived self- efficacy. Whereas children who were exposed to LSE and further re-integrated with family, both the boys and girl children exhibited good perceived self-efficacy. 51% children in the family had good level of self-efficacy as compared to 33% children in CCIs.



*Figure 2: Resilience*

Figure 2 shows that overall, 95% children had good resilience scores while 5% children had average resilience scores (See Appendix B for additional data). 100% boy children both in CCI and family had good resilience scores while 4.9% girls in CCI and 8.3% girls in family had average resilience scores.

Adolescence is a pivotal developmental period in which youth begin to form an enduring sense of personal identity and agency about themselves. Self-efficacy is hypothesized to affect individuals' task choices, effort, persistence, and achievement ((Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Compared with learners who doubt their capabilities, those who have high perceived self-efficacy are apt to participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at higher levels. The findings reflect that almost half of sampled children have an average level of perceived self-efficacy and proportion of girls falling under this more than boys.

Resilience is defined as “the ability of an individual to function competently in the face of adversity or stress” An adolescent who is resilient is likely to enter adulthood with a good chance of coping well – even if he or she has experienced difficult circumstances in life. The findings reflect that although the average resilience index is good, a significant proportion of children experience lack of resourcefulness in their community and find difficulty in managing emotions during difficult times.

## **Conclusion**

The high perceived self- efficacy among children exposed to life skills education, and now reintegrated with family is indicative of the vital importance of thorough preparation of children as part of the case management process towards a safe and sustainable reintegration with family. Among the five stages of the case management process (intake, assessment, planning & implementation, follow-up /evaluation, case closure), the planning and implementation stage focuses on intervention planning based on the assessed needs, vulnerabilities. Psycho social support, life skills education interventions (self-awareness, problem solving & decision making, expressing emotions, stress management, thinking skills among others) play a critical role in preparing children.

The findings reflect a noteworthy point of strengthening interventions focusing on self-awareness, problems solving and communication skills for girls with a proportion of girls with average perceived self-efficacy, as well as the need for more work on expressing, managing emotions among children across the board in the total sample.

The study has certainly opened up scope for further examination, Self esteem and self-efficacy are inter-related constructs. What a child thinks he/she is capable of achieving is different from what he/she thinks he/she is of worth. A student may be having a high self-esteem level but feel less efficacious in mathematics and science subjects. Similarly, he/she can have low self-esteem but feel efficacious on arts and music.

More empirical research is required to see the relationship between perceived self-efficacy and resilience. Sabeen Qamar and Mumtaz Akhter (2020) states that Individuals with a high level of self-efficacy within a situation perceive tough situations or tasks as opportunities for learning rather than avoiding more difficult matters

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**Appendix**

Appendix A:

Perceived Self-efficacy	Children in CCl's		Children in Family		Total		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	CCl's	Family	Overall
Good	9.1%	39.0%	62.5%	46.7%	33%	51%	44%
Average	90.9%	58.5%	37.5%	53.3%	65%	49%	55%
Low	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2%	0%	1%

Appendix B:

Resilience	Children in CCl's		Children in Family		Total		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	CCl's	Family	Overall
Good	100%	95.1%	100%	91.7%	96%	94%	95%
Average	0.0%	4.9%	0.0%	8.3%	4%	6%	5%
Low	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0%	0%	0%

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