

Preventing antisocial behaviour in youth: Scope and challenges of the national service scheme in colleges

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Abstract

Engaging young minds in constructive way and developing their personality in a proper direction is the best way to prevent young people from getting into crime. The National Service Scheme (NSS) programme as part of the National Youth Policy, 2014 is offered in every college so as to develop the personality of participating students while keeping them engaged in the Nation building activities, tasks and processes. By engaging young people in constructive work also by teaching them about values and right attitude the scheme aims to build holistic personality of the participating students. This research is a study of NSS intervention in prevention of youth crime. The basic aim is to understand the initiatives taken in the scheme to keep the youth and community away from engaging in antisocial activities. From the data collected, the study has also tried to conceptualize and built an understand – in terms of its activities and students’ engagement in the experiential learning process that the scheme offers.

Keywords: national service scheme, volunteers, crime prevention, experiential

Introduction

Adolescence and early adulthood are times of change when young people face new challenges, growth and increased vulnerability. Young people who offend early are more likely to go on to be adult offenders. Their offending behaviour can also be very visible and be a matter of concern to their families, to local residents, and the wider community. Young people are also vulnerable to being victims of crime, and they may need support to reduce the likelihood of victimization and increase reporting to police. Crime prevention with and for young people can be an important part of a community safety initiative.

Engaging young minds in constructive way and developing their personality in a proper direction is the best way to prevent young people from getting into crime. The National Service Scheme (NSS) programme as part of the National Youth Policy, 2014 is offered in every college so as to develop the personality of participating students while keeping them engaged in the Nation building activities, tasks and processes. By engaging young people in constructive work also by teaching them about values and right attitude the scheme aims to build holistic personality of the participating students.

This research is a study of NSS intervention in youth crime. The basic aim is to understand the initiatives taken in the scheme to keep the youth and community away from engaging in antisocial activities. From the data collected, the study has also tried to conceptualize and built an understand – in terms of its activities and students’ engagement in the experiential learning process that the scheme offers.

Methodology

The study was conducted with around 250 students from different colleges of Maharashtra. It included interviewing NSS volunteers, non-volunteers & programme officers of the colleges. Besides, focused group discussions were held

with the community youth to understand the impact of NSS activities and processes on them and the community at large. The overall objective of the study was to explore NSS intervention in preventing antisocial behaviour in students; the specific objectives of the study were as below:

- To explore the various crime preventive initiatives taken by NSS.
- To examine the behavioural and attitudinal changes in youth volunteers.
- To study the perception of the youth of the adopted area with regards to the scheme.
- To suggest changes to strengthen the current scheme in its initiatives to prevent youth crime.

Findings of the Study

Some of the major findings of the study are presented below;

Crime preventive initiatives taken by NSS in the colleges

From the below pie diagram, it is clear that many programmes related to crime have been conducted by the colleges. The chart gives an idea of the variety of programmes that were conducted by the colleges. It ranged from organizing sensitization and awareness programmes about tobacco to programmes like cybercrime, terrorism etc.

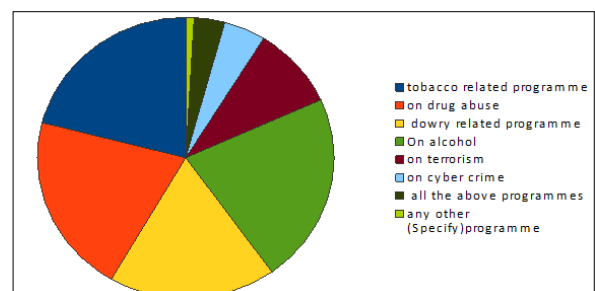


Fig 1

I. Different crime related activities organized by NSS a Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Learnings learnt by NSS volunteers

Most important and vital aspect of any programme is the learning of various skills, attitude and behaviour in the participants. However, with respect to the growing leniency to anti-social behaviour it is very essential to develop a proper value system and a right positive attitude in a student for eg. saying 'no' to drugs/alcohol or any other situation/circumstances leading to any kind of offence, any impelling factors, peer pressure or other family or societal problems is extremely vital in the preventive education against crime.

Table 1

Types of learning	Percentage
Learnt to share	14.1
Developed Communication skills	14.1
Team spirit was promoted	14.1
value of democracy	12.7
Developed mutual respect	14.1
Developed right attitude	15.5
All above changes	15.5

Thus, from the table it is learnt that a majority of the programme officers said that largely right attitude was developed in the NSS students. They also reported of all kind of changes in the students. Skills such as organizing skills, leadership skills, negotiating skills and most importantly communication skills were learnt by majority of students, as reported by their programme officers According to them values guided and navigated an individual throughout life. It plays an important role during decision making situations and deciding between what is right and wrong. Also, according to the table, it is clear that the students have learnt a lot of things from the programmes which they have organized. Not only from the programmes which they organized for others but also from the programmes which were organized for them. Again reiterating, values, right attitude, right approach are not only the words but very imbibed by the students and could demonstrate it through their behaviour and approach.

Extent of awareness created on crime prevention

The programme would be meaningless if it has had no impact on the participants. As reported by the NSS volunteers, it was seen that because of the programmes undertaken in relation to crime prevention in the college as well as in the community, some amount of awareness on crime was noticed amongst NSS volunteers. As per the pie diagram, 25 percent students stated that the programmes have created awareness on a large extent. There were 9 percent students who felt that these efforts had not at all amounted to any kind of awareness generation in the population.

It was interesting to note that these exercises and experiences had made the students to think, understand and act. The students strongly believed in the scheme and said that they were aligned to positive side of life. They also said that the scheme has played an instrumental role in keeping them away from deviant behaviour.

According to the volunteers, the scheme has brought a good and powerful impact on the students. NSS has created

awareness on the social and cultural issues. The activities conducted in NSS brought in lot of positiveness, cultivated good habits and brought in overall constructive changes in them.

To get this experiential learning, they felt that support of the teachers was very crucial. They also expressed the need in creating awareness and counselling each student/youth in the college. And for this, the college needed trained programme officers/ teachers who could counsel students. They also said that the activities of the scheme should be taken on a wider scale and everyone should be allowed to participate and get benefitted.

Perception of Non-Volunteers

The non-volunteers believed that the scheme has taken up a very challenging work of inculcating values of responsibilities, social responsibilities in students. NSS is very helpful to students and society; it is seen to be as an opportunity and a platform to do something. Majority of them informed that good number of efforts have been put in place to bring about change. However, enough focus should be laid on the youth belonging to slum areas.

Perception of Programme Officers/ Officials/Community

The programme officers who were interviewed seemed to be highly motivated and committed. As a teacher and as in charge of NSS they said they had a dual role to play. It was reported that the students work and learn in this process only for two to three years however this learning entirely depends on the leadership of the NSS programme officer. According to a majority of the Programme Officers, NSS is a community and a student friendly scheme which when properly planned and materialised provides maximum benefits to the beneficiaries. Mostly, learning takes place through the programmes and activities organized by the NSS team. These activities are not just activities but are seen from a learning point of view. Benefits are drawn in terms of information, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

It was reported that anxieties are expressed in various forms by youths, for example, drug addiction, alcoholism, strikes, rebellious outbursts and even suicide. These deviant behaviours are signs of peak tensions and growing dissatisfactions. All these anxieties and fears are taken good care by engaging the young students in constructive work.

Opinion of community towards NSS

Majority of the community people when enquired said that they enjoy the programmes organized by the colleges. They find the programmes very interesting and that there is lot of learning component in all the programmes which are organized. Many a times the information and the messages given to them leaves an impact on the mindsets of the villagers. Some people feel that it had some impact on their attitude and changed their perception. Though the opportunity to work with the community youth was less yet was meaningful. More than 30 volunteers had the opportunity to work with the community youth on the issues of crime. Some commented on the scheme saying that it was a good scheme; the programmes were knowledgeable and informative. Few said that the scheme works well only for the college students. They said that the scheme and the related activities have not brought the desired changes that it intends to in the community youth.

Self-assessment by students

A small section in the tool was focussed on some sort of self-assessment on one's own behaviour. This section had questions which indicated their approach and behaviour to a particular situation before and after joining NSS. Situations were given to them to think about their past, present and the future behaviour. Majority of them agreed to say that they have used tobacco regularly, drunk beer, wine and other liquor, have skipped school without any legitimate excuse, have stolen things, have purchased tobacco, have purposely damaged or destroyed public property, have bought wine and liquor for their family members and friends etc.

From the entire list of indicators on deviant behaviour, put forth in this section, a majority of students agreed to say that henceforth they might not buy and use beer, cigarette and tobacco. They said they might not use tobacco, or drink beer, liquor etc. They might not engage into illegal activities like purposely damaging or destroying private property, breaking into a place illegally, skipping college without a legitimate excuse gambling, might not get into fight with someone. They believed that this change has happened because of the current work they are engaged with. They owe this change to the scheme. NSS has given them the scope to reflect on one's own self and opportunity and time to build their characteristics and morale. The change which has taken place in them is not sudden but it is a gradual change, a change which has happened due to the insights developed by being in the scheme for more than a year. While majority of the students said that they would not get into deviant activities there was a section of volunteers who still felt that they would continue to freak out and skip their classes, they would get into unnecessary fights and consume liquor.

Based on the views of the volunteers and non-volunteers it emerges that most of the youth have positive view about the scheme and have agreed to the fact that this process brings in a gradual and substantial change in the overall personality of the participating individual.

Anxieties are expressed in various forms by youths, for example, drug addiction, alcoholism, strikes, rebellious outbursts and even suicide. These deviant behaviours are signs of peak tensions and growing dissatisfactions. All these anxieties and fears are taken good care by engaging the young students in constructive work. Actually, this process has helped those who have seriously and committed involved oneself in all the activities and programmes of the scheme.

Summary

Drug abuse rate is reported to be more in the college going youth. So, the NSS unit feels that it is their responsibility to prevent their students from getting into such things. Apart from NSS there are other youth related schemes in the college which are run hand to hand with NSS for eg. NCC, scouts, guides etc. They also have more or less the same objective of building personality of the students but the social work component is somewhere not highlighted in the other schemes unlike NSS. NSS is a social work programme and is serving as an instrument of social change.

Both volunteers as well as the non-volunteers have realized the need to work directly with more emphasis on this issue as the crime rate is increasing tremendously. The issue of crime needs to be dealt systematically & holistically. The data collected revealed that comparatively more boys and

fewer girls are inclined towards crime as they have the scope, opportunity and the freedom to stay away from home for a longer duration as compared to girls. Majority of the students were of the opinion that the illiterates commit more crime as they are not aware of the laws and the consequences of the crime which they have committed. The criminal tendency was known to be more influenced by a delinquent peer group. At the same time a true peer group can influence a young mind in different way. Interaction with peer group helps in attitude, thoughts and views of a person.

It was informed by a significant number of respondents that the efforts made by the NSS team and the college were not sufficient to meet the large numbers of youth in the college. More and more conscious and hard efforts have to be put in. There was an urgent need to work with a systemic approach wherein many bodies/agencies and institutions could work together for the same cause.

NSS nurtures good talents in students. Numerous programmes organized in college help in diverting the students from committing any offence and helps in gaining ability to understand more about situations. The activities and programmes provide good platform and good source for the young people. There were some sections of volunteers and non-volunteers who did not give any credit to the scheme. They simply said that NSS has no role in building the personality of students. Moreover, the personality change may not be due to NSS but due to other factors of lives eg. family, life experience, media etc.

For a speedy and effective work, networking and collaboration with other organization is very important. Police and the Government should work together with the college students for effective implementation and prevention of crime. The activities should extend beyond college level activities and should be more organized manner.

Discussion

Educational Institutes are the places where all the handholding's are replaced by complete freedom and choices. But this transition from school life to a college life is not very smooth for all the youngsters. Most of them are subjected to special types of stresses; individual and societal, arising from these rapid changes and they take time to adjust with the new community and the atmosphere.

They have tremendous uncertainties about their own identity and what the future has in store for them. They need to compete with peers and win social approval. On one hand, the need for parental approval exists; while on the other, there is this great drive to be independent. Amidst all these issues the ones who are unable to cope react in an unhealthy way. They need proper leadership, guidance, direction, supervision and counselling. And if this help is provided in the college, it works effectively. The scheme provides a platform for one-to-one sharing not only between the college volunteers but also with the officer in charge. It provides opportunity and space for counselling. The best way to avoid any possible trouble, which the youths can create, is to provide them with proper perspective to define a situation that may be called upon to face in the future

NSS is a community and student friendly scheme which is properly planned and materialised providing maximum benefits to the beneficiaries. Mostly, learning's happen through various programmes and activities organized by the

NSS team. It intends to channelize the energies of the youth in a constructive and proper manner thereby alienating them from negative thoughts, energies and forces. The college feels that crime as an issue which is very important and relevant to the present context. They feel that prevention is the best and effective way to handle future crimes and young people getting into antisocial behaviour. They confirmed that not only the families and the school but the higher educational institutions should also be treated as the place to teach youngsters values, attitudes, moral values etc. Therefore, there should be conscious efforts to work on this theme by every college.

Thus, it is analysed that the efforts made by the NSS team and college was not sufficient to bring about required change in the society. More and more conscious and hard efforts have to be put in this respect. There is an urgent need to work with a systemic approach wherein many bodies or agencies and institutions work together for the same cause. Only then one can imagine of some change happening in terms of perspective building and even materializing them in their lives.

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