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Research Article

Child Sponsorship Programme for the Development of Marginalised Children

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Child sponsorship is a vital tool for development by transferring funds from rich countries to children in developing countries. It supports the development of marginalised children primarily through education. This article describes the outcome evaluation of a 10-year intervention by a sponsoring agency in Kerala, India. The study evaluated the outcome regarding self-esteem, achievement motivation and family functioning of the sponsored children, adopting a post-test-only quasi-experimental design with a control group (CG). Data were collected from 80 individuals (Intervention group [IG], *n* = 40 and CG, *n* = 40) and analysed statistically using SPSS. The paired sample t-test rejected the null hypotheses confirming the significant differences in the measure of variables for participants in the IG and CG. The thematic analysis of qualitative data collected by interviewing 10 child-mother dyads triangulated the quantitative results asserting the positive outcome of the intervention.

Keywords
Child sponsorship programme, marginalised children, self-esteem, achievement motivation, family functioning

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INTRODUCTION

The Child Sponsorship Programme (CSP) is an essential tool for development that has evolved into a formally organised service for child welfare under voluntary organisations (non-governmental organisations [NGOs]) (Joseph, 2016). This humanitarian phenomenon has a prodigious capability in raising and mobilising funds internationally for NGOs (Watson and Clarke, 2014). It is a leading form of direct assistance from families in rich countries to children in developing countries (Wydick *et al.,* 2013). It facilitates the target children to get school tuition and uniforms, nutritional meals and healthcare by transferring funds from sponsors in wealthy countries (Ross *et al.,* 2021). Moreover, CSP interventions are not limited to combating the external constraint but also fighting internal conditions such as low psychological well-being, low self-esteem and lack of aspirations and motivation of marginalised children (Joseph and Karalam, 2021; Ross *et al.,* 2021). Despite CSP being one of the most successful fundraising strategies for private aid organisations, scholarly investigation of CSP interventions is limited and the shortage of quality evidence on the effect of these interventions is severe (Joseph & Karalam, 2021; Watson and Clarke, 2014).

According to Kaell (2022), the Save the Children Fund is primarily recognised for launching child sponsorship formally in 1919 after World War I. World Vision is the most significant child sponsorship organisation raising funds based on humanitarianism (Kaell, 2022). According to Watson (2014), there are four types of child sponsorship; institution-based, family-based, community-based and right-based. Rather than placing the marginalised children in boarding schools or orphanages, the family-based CSP assists children in their family environment by empowering them and their family members. It promotes the holistic development of children by addressing the repercussions of poverty on a long-term basis (Watson, 2014).

This article details the outcome evaluation of a family-based CSP run by the Sacred Heart Congregation (SHC) of catholic nuns in Kerala, India. Child sponsorship has been a practice of SHC for a century. In the past, they provided institutionalised childcare through 36 *Balabhavans* (Malayalam term for children's homes) across India. However, SHC began family-based CSP in 2006, acknowledging the significance of the family environment in child development. Therefore, this study was intended

to evaluate the effect of 10 years of CSP intervention by measuring and comparing the self-esteem, achievement motivation and family functioning of adolescents with and without sponsorship in the district of Kottayam, Kerala.

METHODS AND MEASURES

This study evaluated the outcome of a 10-year CSP intervention by a non-profit organisation named 'SEVANIKETAN' by SHC in the Kottayam district of Kerala, measuring the achievement motivation, self-esteem and family functioning of the participants. This doctoral research was registered (reg. no: 1530094) with Christ deemed to be University, Bengaluru.

Study Design

Due to the unavailability of baseline data, this study adopted a post-test-only quasi-experimental design with a control group (CG) (Krishnan, 2018). The effectiveness of CSP intervention was proved by testing the following null hypotheses;

H1(*0*): The difference between participants' self-esteem in the intervention group (IG) and the CG is insignificant.

H2(*0*): The difference between the achievement motivation of participants in the IG and the CG is insignificant.

H3(*0*): The difference between the family functioning of participants in the IG and CG is insignificant.

The hypotheses were tested using paired sample *t*-test, considering the normal distribution of data displayed in the descriptive statistics test.

Theoretical Framework

This study viewed the problems of underprivileged children from an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), assuming an association of deprived family environments to the issues of poor children. The family stress model proposed by Conger *et al.* (2010) links the family's economic hardships to behavioural problems and interparental conflicts with parents, leading to harsh and uninvolved parenting that impairs children's competencies. Furthermore, impoverished children's schools with fewer resources and classroom situations are marked by poor behaviour, low achievement and lack of assistance, exacerbating psychological distress and behavioural problems (Eamon, 2001). In addition, adolescents' educational aspirations are directly correlated to the material well-being of the family (Dercon and Krishnan, 2009). Hope and finding meaning in life are linked to the well-being of individuals (Brassai *et al.,* 2011; Ho *et al.,* 2010; Steger and Kashdan, 2013). Empowerment through CSP promotes the well-being of the beneficiaries (Joseph and Karalam, 2021). Therefore, this study explained the enhanced self-esteem, achievement motivation and family functioning attained by the sponsored children through the

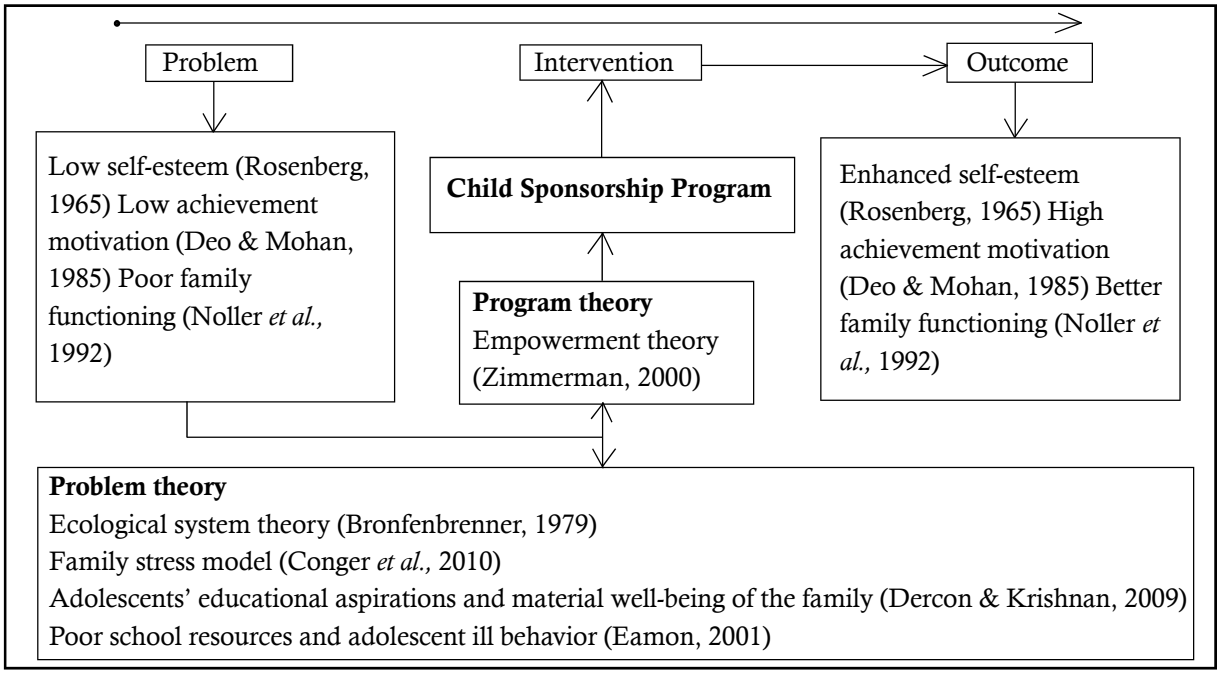


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

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CSP intervention in the light of empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000). Figure 1 represents the theoretical framework. SHC in Kerala started family-based CSP in the year 2006. Currently, the programme provides aid for 950 marginalised (Figure 2) children and their families through eight NGOs.

This study selected the agency from those eight NGOs applying the criteria that an agency completed 10 years of CSP intervention. The only NGO that satisfied the criteria was 'SEVANIKETAN' in the Kottayam district of Kerala.

Agency Profile

SEVANIKETAN was established in 2006 in Kottayam and registered as an NGO under Kerala Societies Registration Act. It provides sponsorship in nine localities in the Kottayam district. Apart from the Director of the NGO, it has a sister-in-charge in each locality. A caretaker for a group of 10 students takes care of the daily learning needs of the group. Besides, there is a local committee comprised of a Panchayat (local body) member, parent representatives, caretakers and the sister-in-charge.

The following criteria determine eligibility for receiving sponsorship from SEVANIKETAN.

- Low-income family
- Homelessness
- Single parent
- Chronically ill parents
- Imprisoned parents
- More number of children
- Differently-abled children
- Age between six and ten
- Residing in the Kottayam district

Figure 2 shows the nine locations of CSP by SEVANIKETAN in the Kottayam district. Table 1 shows the objectives and activities of the agency.

Sampling Strategy

So far, 207 marginalised children have enrolled in the CSP by SEVANIKETAN. Of the total enrolees, 50 stopped receiving sponsorship due to family relocation, membership in other agencies or discontinued studies. This study considered all the 80 beneficiaries who received 10 years of sponsorship from SEVANIKETAN. Of the 80 selected beneficiaries, 20 lived outside the Kottayam district for studies or employment. Therefore, the tools for data collection were handed over to 60 and only 40 of them returned duly filled-in questionnaires.

This study selected a group of 58 individuals similar to the IG as the CG. The socio-demographic data of the IG showed that the age group of participants was 17–20. Therefore, we selected individuals from the Kottayam district who belonged to the 17–20 age group and continued education without sponsorship, although they were eligible. Figure 4 shows the participant flow of this study in Figure 3.

Tools for Data Collection

Researchers developed a questionnaire to explore the socio-demographic profile of participants. The outcome of the 10-year CSP intervention was measured in terms of participants' self-esteem, achievement motivation and family functioning. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965), a 4-point Likert scale with 10 items (five positives and five negative statements), was used to measure the participants' self-esteem. We used Deo Mohan Achievement Motivation Scale (Deo and Mohan, 1985) to

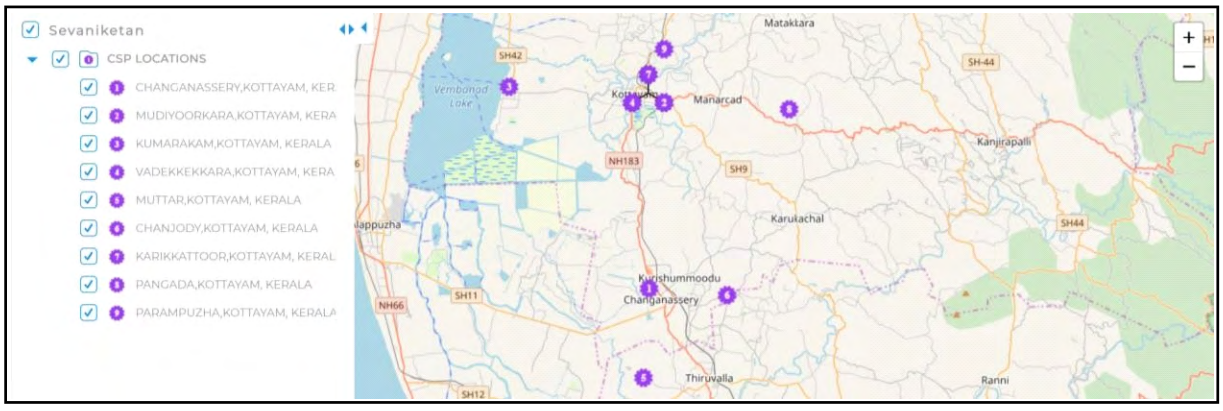


Figure 2. Locations of CSP by SEVANIKETAN

Table 1. Objectives and Activities of the SEVANIKETAN

Strategic Objectives	Operating Objectives	Activities
Academic excellence	Ensuring excellence in academic activities.	Distribution of study materials
Personality development	Accelerating creativity.	Daily tuition class for all the children
Good family functioning	Providing financial assistance for education.	Weekly exposure to arts and sports club
Employment	Practicing money management.	Tri monthly gathering of the entire children in a province
Social mobility	Practicing stress management.	Monthly class for the parents
	Enhancing basic skills in drawing, painting, modelling, umbrella making, bookbinding, etc.	Annual residential camp for three days
	Assuring the personality development of the children	Annual study tour
	Providing life skill training	Exposure visits
	Enhancing enrollees' self-esteem	Medical camp
	Conducting capacity-building programmes for enrolees and siblings.	Income Generating Programmes for the parents
	Enhancing communication skills.	Saving programme for the children and the parents
	Pooling the various resource for enrolees.	Competitions in different areas such as arts & sports, craft work, exhibitions, etc.
	Involving enrolees in volunteer activities.	Home visits of the children who are not improving as intended
	Practicing a healthy lifestyle.	Communication with the sponsors
	Inculcating saving habits	
	Practicing financial management by the parents of enrolees.	
	Engaging in various types of income-generating programmes.	
	Encouraging the parents to save money.	
	Cultivating disciplined life.	
	Instilling employment aspirations.	

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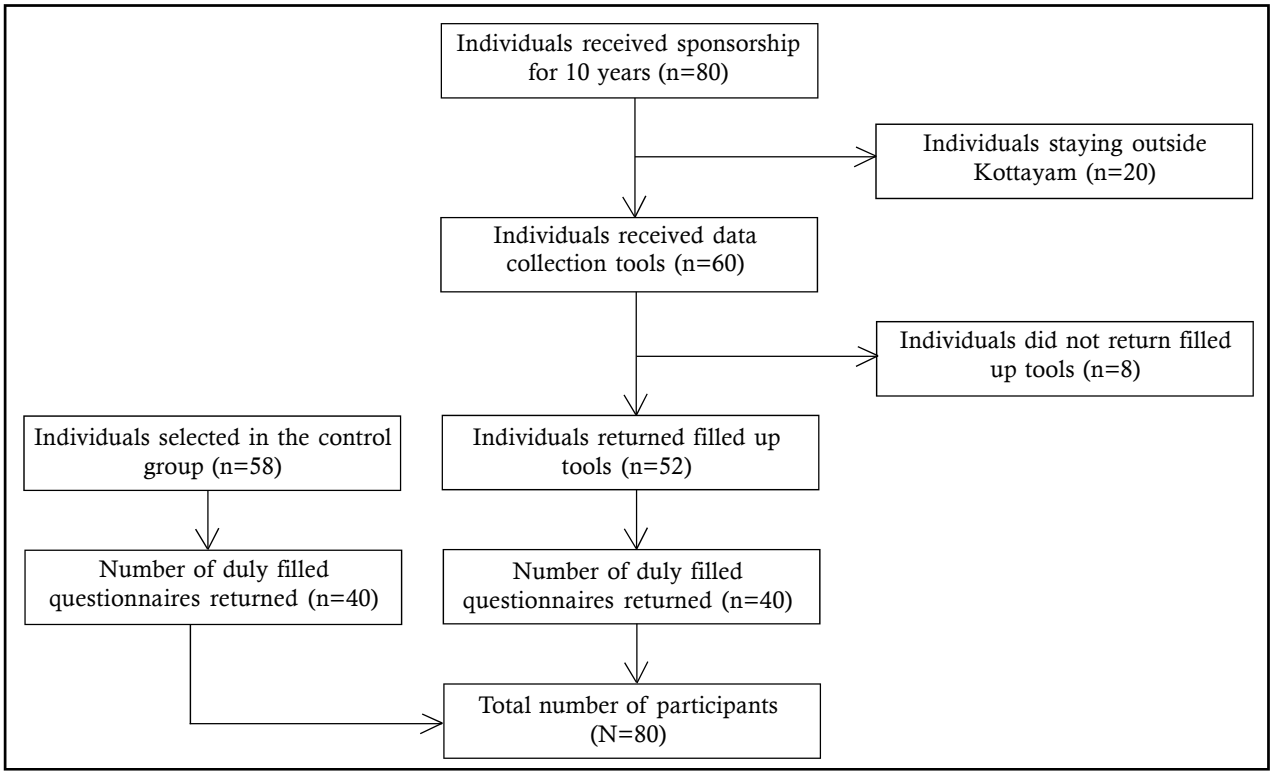


Figure 3. Participant Flow of the Study

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quantify the achievement motivation of the participants. This scale consists of 50 Likert-type items divided into 15 dimensions; academic motivation, academic challenge, need for achievement, achievement anxiety, the meaningfulness of task, importance of grades, relevance of School/College to future goals, attitude towards education, attitude towards teachers, work methods, interpersonal relations, general interest, individual concern, dramatics and sports. The third scale used was the ICPS Family Functioning Scale (Noller *et al.,* 1992). This 30-item Likert scale measured the family functioning of the participants in terms of intimacy, parenting style and conflicts. All items on each scale were translated into the local language and back-translated by a bilingual expert confirming reliability. The tools were pilot-tested and reconfirmed reliability by checking the Cronbach alpha coefficient.

Data Collection

This study obtained consent from the selected agency and the researchers visited nine localities in the Kottayam district, where the individuals received 10 years of sponsorship from SEVANIKETAN reside. They identified the localities with the help of community animators of the sponsorship programme. CG participants were also selected from the same localities.

Data collection was carried out in 9 months between 2019 and 2020. In the first phase, the data were collected from the participants in the IG. After explaining the study's objectives and the instructions for answering the questions, the researchers handed over the questionnaires to the participants and collected the answered ones after a week. Although the tools were distributed to 60 individuals, only 52 returned the questionnaires and only 40 sets of instruments were duly filled out.

In Phase 2, we identified 58 individuals who live in a similar social context to participants in the IG but do not receive sponsorship. The same procedure in the first phase was repeated with this CG for data collection. Only 40 sets of duly filled questionnaires were returned from the CG. Before handing over the questionnaires, we obtained written consent for voluntary participation, data sharing and publication of results signed by all participants.

Data Analysis

All the data collected were entered into SPSS 25 and analysed statistically. Values for the points on the Likert scale were coded and reverse coded for negatively stated items, tested descriptive statistics of the data collected for self-esteem, achievement motivation and family functioning. Hypotheses were tested using paired sample *t*-test. All the participants were anonymised throughout the analysis and reporting of this study.

Triangulation

This study collected qualitative data from 10 child-mother dyads from the IG to triangulate the quantitative results. The data were collected using pre-scheduled in-depth interviews in Malayalam, the local language. Each interview lasted for 90 min. We audio-recorded the data with the consent of the participants. Further, the audio was transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts were analysed thematically using NVivo 12. Under the three themes, self-esteem, achievement motivation and family functioning, the analysis identified 18 codes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-demographic Profile

The socio-demographic profile of the participants in the IG and CG proved that they all live within a similar social context.

Descriptive Statistics

Data analysis confirmed the normal distribution of data by creating Q–Q plots and observing that the data form an approximately straight line for self-esteem, achievement motivation and family functioning (Figures 4–6).

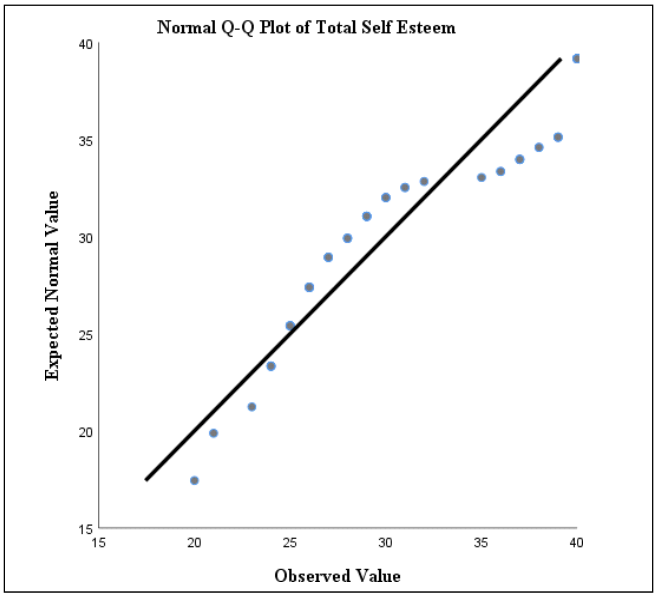


Figure 4. Q–Q Plot of Total Self-esteem

Table 2. Socio-demographic Profile of Participants

		Intervention group (with sponsorship) n = 40		Control group (without sponsorship) n = 40	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Sex	Male	22	55	22	55
	Female	18	45	18	45
Age	17	5	12.5	5	12.5
	18	6	15	6	15
	19	25	62.5	25	62.5
	20	4	10	4	10
Religion	Hindu	18	45	18	45
	Christian	22	55	22	55
	Plus 2	5	12.5	5	12.5
Course studying	Graduation	19	47.5	20	50
	Technical studies	16	40	15	37.5
Annual family income	Below Rs. 20,000	28	70	28	70
	Between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 50,000	12	30	12	30
Own land	<5 cents	23	57.5	15	37.5
	5–10 cents	13	32.5	17	42.5
	10–20 cents	4	10	8	20
House type	Terrace	8	20	10	25
	Roof-tiles	9	22.5	12	30
	Asbestos	23	57.5	18	45

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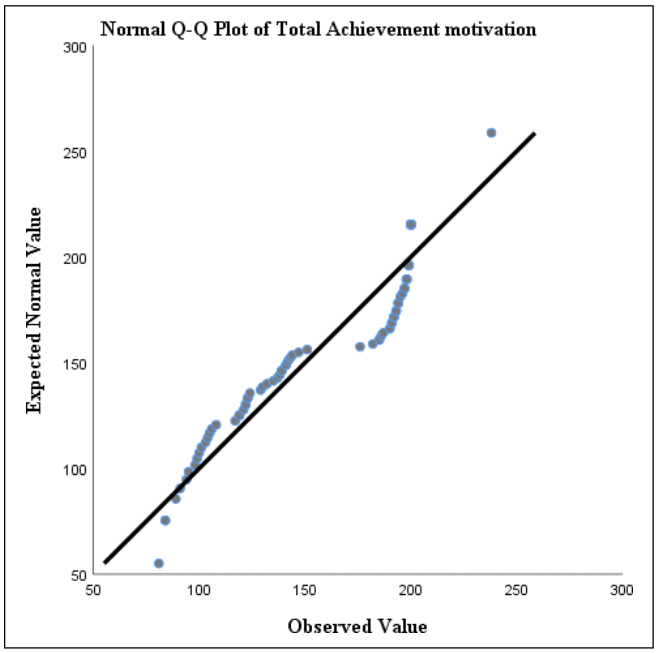


Figure 5. Q–Q Plot of Total Achievement Motivation

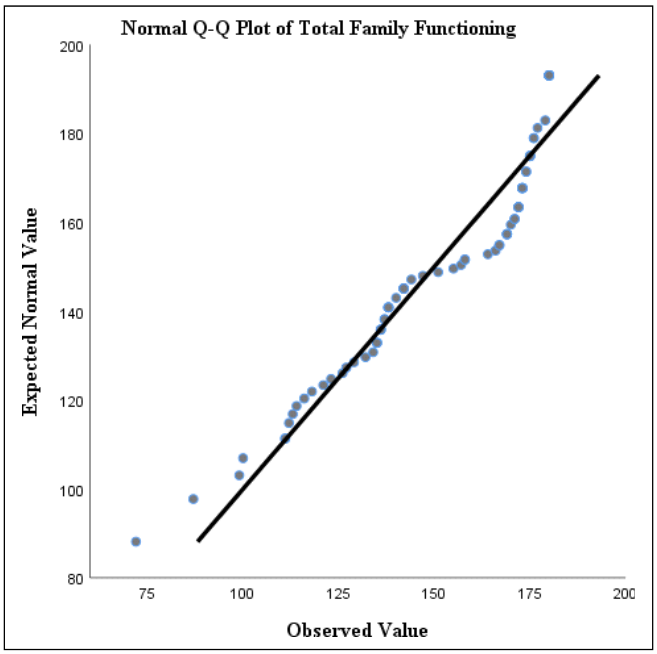


Figure 6. Q–Q Plot of Total Family Functioning

Table 3. Paired Sample *t*-test Results

	Paired differences					*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Total_SE_IG-Total_SE_CG	12.050	3.412	0.539	10.959	13.141	22.339	39	0.000
Total_AM_IG-Total_AM_CG	77.700	24.127	3.815	69.984	85.416	20.368	39	0.000
Total_FF_IG-Total_FF_CG	44.275	18.101	2.862	38.486	50.064	15.470	39	0.000

SE, Self-esteem; AM, Achievement Motivation; FF, Family Functioning; IG, Intervention Group; CG, Control Group

Table 4. Qualitative Results

Theme	Codes	Frequency	Excerpts
Self-esteem	Feeling worthy	12	Through the CSP, I could develop my skills and I feel I am worthy (P2)
	Goal in life	18	CSP helped me to set a goal in life and work towards that (P4)
	Confidence	17	Participation in the agency programmes made me confident to succeed in life despite my family's financial crunch (P10)
	Positive relations	15	Programmes by the agency helped me to be in good relationships with my family members and friends (P1)
	Respect for self and others	12	I learned to accept myself and others as they are and I respect them (P7)
	Belief in God	17	The programme helped us to trust God and His power to help us in our hardships (M2).
	Willingness to take responsibilities	16	She takes responsibility. It is because of the training she got from the agency (M5).
Achievement motivation	Interest in studies	12	The regular tuition classes by the agency kept my interest in studies high (P2).
	Goal in life	10	I have a clear goal in life. I want to become a teacher. I work hard to achieve my goal (P8).
	Academic performance	18	He scores well in all the exams. Tuitions by the agency help him score well (M7).
	Longer study hours	14	After school and tuition, I spent three more hours for studies every day (P9)
	Less stressed	9	Even if we are poor, I don't feel anxious about my studies because I get my school fees, uniform, books and other stationeries from the agency (P3).
	Participation in co-curricular activities	11	I participate in sports and other art festivals in the college (P5).
Family functioning	Parental support	8	Since she is receiving sponsorship, I encourage her to study well (M5).
	Reduced anxiety	9	He gets money for his studies. So, I do not have to worry about that (M3).
	Saving habit	11	I got training for umbrella making and raw materials for it.So, I make and sell umbrellas. I save a part of my income (M1).
	Family communication	9	We communicate family matters and our concerns (M7).
	Healthy lifestyle	8	Classes by the agency motivate us to lead a disciplined life. It helps us to stay away from conflicts and the use of alcohol or any other kind of drugs (M6).
	Enjoying life	7	The regular meetings at the agency and the pleasure trips are a true inspiration for us to enjoy our lives (M5).

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Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested using paired sample *t*-tests in SPSS. Table 3 shows the test results.

Table 3 illustrates that the *p*-value is less than 0.05 for all three pairs. Therefore, this study rejected the null hypotheses and accepted the following alternative hypotheses:

H1(*a*): The difference between the self-esteem of participants in the IG and the CG is significant.

H2(*a*): The difference between the achievement motivation of participants in the IG and the CG is significant.

H3(*a*): The difference between the family functioning of participants in the IG and the CG is significant.

Results of Qualitative Data Analysis

The results of the analysis of qualitative data triangulated the quantitative results. Table 4 shows the results of the thematic analysis.

These results substantiate the conclusions drawn by other studies that proved the effectiveness of child sponsorship interventions in tackling the internal constraints for development in marginalised children. Joseph and Karalam (2021) demonstrated the effectiveness of CSP interventions in enhancing the psychological well-being of adolescents, which resonates with the results of this study since achievement motivations and self-esteem are linked to psychological well-being. Ross and others (2021) confirmed the role of international child sponsorship in developing underprivileged children's educational and vocational aspirations. Similarly, the results of this study indicate a higher achievement motivation among sponsored children than non-sponsored children.

Further, this study proved that material support could improve children's aspirations (Dercon and Krishnan, 2009) by raising their achievement motivation. In light of the family stress model (Conger *et al.,* 2010), the results of this study confirmed the impact of CSP intervention in improving the family functioning of the sponsored children. In addition, the CSP intervention by SEWANIKETAN enhanced the beneficiaries' self-esteem by reducing psychological distress due to the lack of resources (Eamon, 2001).

CONCLUSION

This outcome evaluation study of a 10-year CSP intervention by SEVANIKETAN provides evidence for the effectiveness of child sponsorship in the development of marginalised children in Kerala. It confirms that the CSP intervention is an effective tool for developing underdeveloped countries by investing in underprivileged children. Consistent with the international study findings on child sponsorship, the results of this study endorse CSP to fight inequality and end global poverty. The movement of the poor out of the poverty cycle is a prominent indicator of the development of a country. Therefore, it is vital to extend CSP intervention to raise the self-esteem, achievement motivation and family functioning of marginalised children, which promotes their social mobility.

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