Title: Gamification of Positive Youth Development Tools into a Mobile App (Paravi) aimed at Disrupting the Cycle of Violence against Women and Children in Sri Lanka

Background and aims:
Building on the successful online adaptation of services during COVID-19, Shanthi Maargam, a non-profit organization dedicated to youth well-being in Sri Lanka, has developed a "digital safe space' - a mobile App (Application) targeting marginalized youth at risk of violence in their homes and online. Sri Lanka is a low-middle-income country (LMIC) in South Asia battling an economic crisis with a large unmet need for youth violence prevention services. This work focuses on effective, ethical, and inclusive research and interventions aimed at breaking the cycle of VAW/VAC using online/virtual/remote methods adapted to reach marginalized populations.

Objectives: To share lessons learnt in designing, developing, and testing an accessible, youth-informed digital intervention aimed at developing and measuring gender-equitable attitudes to address VAC/VAW. With one-on-one contact with a counsellor, self-help resources, and gamified positive youth development models informed by a collaborative co-design processes, this Mobile App holds immense potential for transformative change among the target group.

Methods: Using the 5 stages of the Design Thinking process (Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test) and incorporating mixed data collection methods, more than 60 youth leaders, counsellors, advisors, and technical teams have collaborated to co-create a unique Mobile App (Paravi) with a local identity embedded in the design and functions. Using focus group discussions and journey mapping, more than 30 youth and counsellors have continuously engaged to support agile App development and define and ideate features attractive to youth (identifiable avatars, local landmarks). Gamification and goal tracking ensure youth buy-in while Phone/Data Management Services ensure Mobile Phones are used safely by the participating youth - an opportunity to address online harrassment and IPV among youth. More than 60 youth are given Mobile Phones to help test the App in real world settings.

Results: The App development process offers valuable insights into the youth needs, practical issues, technical limitations, and possibilities and challenges in Mobile App design and testing in LMIC settings. Positive youth development (PYD) models for VAC/VAW prevention are adaptable to 'Gamification' with limitations. With in-App language modules that adapt translations into local contexts, and individual support from counsellors and staff, PYDs can be effectively gamified to online tools. Validated data collection tools such as Gender Equality Measures (GEM), can also be incorporated into a Mobile App whileIn-App user data provides an innovative method to measure and track youth engagement, online safety, and risks.

Recommendations: Lessons learned offer a nuanced understanding and real-world experiences of technology adoption for marginilzed youth communities in LMIC settings. Innovative technologies combined with user engagement can help adapt tools for effective and ethical VAC/VAW interventions/research via a Mobile App. In-App data can be used to measure real time change and to support formal evaluation methods.

Contribution

This research significantly contributes to the broader understanding of positive youth development methods for VAC/VAW prevention and the potential of digital interventions in LMIC settings. It helps bridge gaps in user-centred interventions and service provision and innovation to conduct safe and ethical ressearch outside traiditonal data collection methods while ensuring safety of online tools. It provides insights into the unique needs and challenges vulnerable adolescents face in resource-constrained environments and offers innovative solutions applicable in a wider context to prevent VAC/VAW.