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Grassroots sports development through Panchayat Yuva Krida aur Khel Abhiyan (PYKKA): An analytical study of awareness and participation among rural youth

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Abstract

The Panchayat Yuva Krida aur Khel Abhiyan (PYKKA) was introduced by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) in 2008–09 to encourage sports participation at the grassroots level by providing basic infrastructure, training, and competition opportunities for rural youth. This study critically examines and determines the extent of awareness and participation produced through PYKKA among rural population in selected Indian states. Using a multistage sampling design across 24 districts from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. The responses were gathered from 95 Kridashrees and 980 rural youth. Utilizing descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis, the researchers assessed five major constructs—awareness, infrastructure, training, participation, and satisfaction. The data indicated a moderate level of awareness about PYKKA among rural youth, yet this awareness rarely translated into active involvement because of poor sports infrastructure and irregular training opportunities. For example, in several villages, playgrounds remained undeveloped or lacked basic equipment leads to discouragement of players to do regular practice. Gender difference and weak administrative supervision further limited program success. The paper concludes that while PYKKA played a revolutionary role in energizing the rural sports while long-term sustainability required consistent funding, trained facilitators, and community involvement. Recommendations are proposed to enhance future grassroots sports initiatives in India.

Keywords: PYKKA, grassroots development, sports policy, rural youth, participation, India

1. Introduction

Sports form an integral component of human development, contributing to physical well-being, social cohesion, and national identity. In India, traditional sports like kabaddi, kho-kho, wrestling, and archery have historically strengthened community bonds. However, with modernization and academic pressure, rural sports gradually lost prominence (Ajmer Singh *et al.*, 2001) ^[1]. To reverse this trend, the Government of India launched several programs post-independence, culminating in the Panchayat Yuva Krida aur Khel Abhiyan (PYKKA) in 2008–09 (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2009).

PYKKA aimed to promote sports among rural youth by establishing playgrounds, providing sports equipment, and organizing competitions at block, district, and national levels. The scheme's philosophy was rooted in the National Sports Policy (2001) ^[9], which emphasized “broad-basing” of sports and “achieving excellence.” The emphasis on grassroots development marked a paradigm shift from elite-focused training programs to inclusive participation models (Planning Commission, 2005) ^[10].

Despite noble intentions, questions emerged regarding the effectiveness of PYKKA in fostering sustainable participation. Reports suggested inconsistencies in infrastructure utilization, inadequate awareness campaigns, and limited female involvement (Mission Directorate PYKKA, 2012) ^[8].

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to evaluate the awareness and participation outcomes of PYKKA, offering evidence-based insights into its successes and shortcomings.

2. Review of Related Literature (2000–2014)

A review of prior research highlights both structural and socio-cultural challenges to rural sports development.

Basumatary (2006) ^[2] evaluated the Sports Authority of India's talent promotion schemes and identified administrative weaknesses and lack of continuity as major barriers to achieving objectives. Similarly, the Institute for Development of Backward Regions (2002) ^[7] found that the National Coaching Scheme underperformed due to poor monitoring and inadequate coaching support.

Bhartiya Stree Shakti (2005) ^[3] studied gender inequality in Indian sports, concluding that systemic bias, sexual harassment, and lack of infrastructure discouraged women from participating. Raja (2012) ^[13] analyzed rural attitudes toward sports in Tamil Nadu and found no significant difference between male and female interest levels, suggesting cultural change was possible with institutional encouragement.

On the policy front, the National Sports Policy (2001) ^[9] called for integrating sports within education and creating rural infrastructure, while the PYKKA Implementation Report (Mission Directorate, 2012) ^[8] underscored achievements but also cited irregular fund disbursal and inadequate feedback systems.

Comparatively, international literature (Green & Houlihan, 2005; Hylton & Bramham, 2008) ^[5, 6] highlighted that grassroots sports success depends on consistent coaching, volunteer development, and school–community partnerships. Collectively, these studies stress that awareness, accessibility, and continuity are the key determinants of sports participation in rural contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Method

This study used a descriptive and evaluative assessment. Quantitative methods were employed to analyze patterns of awareness and participation among beneficiaries and

implementers of PYKKA.

3.2 Sample and Procedure

Multistage sampling was adopted. At Stage 1, 24 districts were selected from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan (15% of each state's total districts). At Stage 2, 5 villages were randomly chosen from each district using SPSS 23.0. Finally, 10 rural youths and one Kridashree were selected from each village.

Total participants

- 95 Kridashrees (end-point implementers)
- 980 Rural Youths (12–18 years)

3.3 Tools and Data Collection

Two close-ended questionnaires were used—one each for Kridashrees and rural youth. Constructs were developed based on PYKKA's mission objectives:

1. Awareness
2. Infrastructure and Equipment
3. Training and Competition
4. Participation
5. Regularity & Satisfaction

Content validity was confirmed through expert review (LNIPE Gwalior, PYKKA Resource Centre). Data were collected personally to ensure accuracy.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages) and the Chi-square test to examine associations between awareness, infrastructure, and participation levels at 0.05 significance.

4. Results

The analysis focused on five key constructs—awareness, infrastructure, training and competition, participation, and satisfaction—across 95 Kridashrees and 980 rural youths from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations in SPSS 23.0. Table 1 summarizes the overall trends derived from the responses.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Major Findings on Awareness and Participation

| Construct | Major Findings | Interpretation |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Awareness | 65% of rural youths were aware of PYKKA; 35% remained unaware. | Awareness moderately achieved, indicating the scheme reached villages but lacked consistent dissemination and visibility campaigns. |
| Infrastructure | Only 48% reported access to developed playgrounds or maintained sports areas. | Infrastructure unevenly distributed; many rural blocks lacked basic playing fields or equipment. |
| Training & Competition | Regular training was reported in only 18% of villages. | Severe shortage of trained coaches and weak supervision mechanisms limited sustained engagement. |
| Participation | 68% participated in block-level events; only 22% advanced to district level. | Participation constrained by inadequate travel allowances, poor logistics, and limited parental encouragement. |
| Satisfaction | 57% expressed satisfaction; 43% reported dissatisfaction with scheme implementation. | Dissatisfaction linked to irregular honoraria for Kridashrees, poor accommodation, and inconsistent communication. |

These results confirm that awareness and participation were positively correlated, yet both were constrained by

infrastructural shortage, administrative delays, and gender differences.

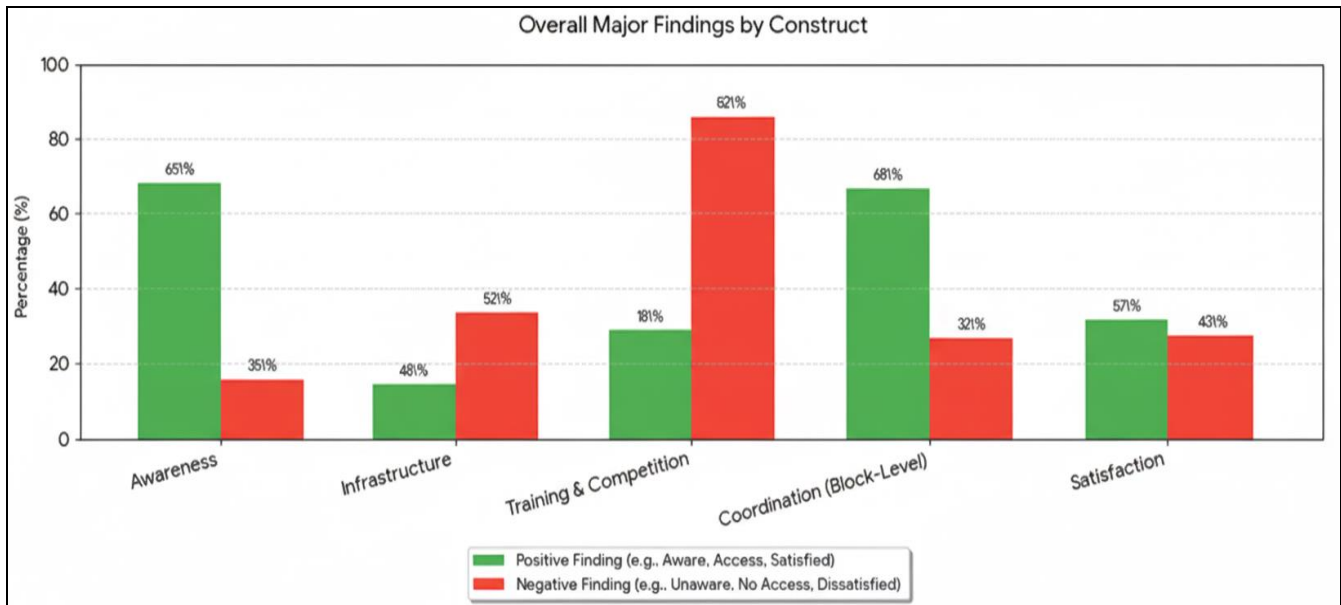


Fig 1: Bar chart showing overall major findings by construct, comparing positive (green) and negative (red) responses across Awareness, Infrastructure, Learning & Competency, Work Level, and Satisfaction.

Fig.1 visually compares the percentage of youth reporting a Positive Finding (e.g., aware, access, satisfied) versus a Negative Finding (e.g., unaware, no access, dissatisfied) for each construct.

- Table 1 shows results of the study and it is visual in Fig. 1 that success of participation (block-level) showing (68%) a high level of grassroots involvement and the program has achieved (65%) a strong level of public awareness among the target group.
- It also shows the most severe imbalance (82%) in training and competition, 52 % youth still lack proper sports infrastructure, which could be a major barrier to participation and training but with the government initiatives 57% youth are feeling satisfied.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insight into the new dynamics of rural sports participation in India during the PYKKA period. The results confirm that awareness is a prerequisite for participation, earlier arguments supports that sports engagement in rural India is primarily shaped by social exposure, institutional involvement, and leadership interest (Basumatary, 2006; Raja, 2012) ^[2]. While the PYKKA program succeeded in introducing the concept of structured sports to villages, its presence and consistency were uneven across states.

The differences observed among Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan indicate that state-level administrative commitment and local governance capacity play a significant role in implementing policy into ground level. For instance, Uttar Pradesh exhibited higher awareness levels due to consistent district-level meetings and community-driven events, while Rajasthan lagged, possibly due to dispersed settlements and weaker communication infrastructure. This aligns with Green and Houlihan (2005) ^[5], who argue that sports policies often fail not because of conceptual flaws but because of “implementation gaps” at sub-national levels.

Furthermore, the gender dimension remains critical. The study shows that female awareness and participation were significantly lower, reaffirming earlier observations by Bhartiya Stree Shakti (2005) ^[3] that deep-rooted gender norms and lack of supportive facilities reduce women’s engagement

in physical activity. In rural India, sports are still perceived as a male domain, and participation by girls often invites social criticism or logistical barriers such as unsafe playgrounds, lack of toilets and inadequate changing facilities. Therefore, despite PYKKA’s inclusive vision, structural patriarchy continues to shape access to sports resources.

Another key insight found in this study is that infrastructure development alone does not guarantee participation. Many villages had basic sports kits or fields sanctioned under PYKKA, yet utilization remained suboptimal. This observation resonates with Deodhar *et al.* (2010), who found in the context of public welfare programs that resource allocation without active supervision often leads to underperformance. Similarly, the Institute for Development of Backward Regions (2002) ^[7] highlighted that even well-intentioned schemes require continuous local engagement to convert resources into meaningful outcomes.

The role of Kridashrees emerged as both pivotal and problematic. They were designed as the grassroots catalysts of PYKKA, responsible for mobilizing youth and organizing competitions. However, the field evidence reveals that many lacked formal training, job stability, or motivational incentives. Their temporary contractual nature, combined with delayed honorarium payments, weakened the delivery chain. From an administrative perspective, this points toward a classic “principal-agent problem,” where field-level implementers possess limited accountability and motivation (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984) ^[12]. A sustainable solution would require institutionalizing the Kridashree cadre through structured capacity-building and linking their performance with measurable community outcomes.

The findings also highlight a discrepancy between infrastructure provision and cultural readiness. While PYKKA aimed to democratize sports, the cultural mindset in many rural communities remained academically oriented, viewing sports as a distraction from studies. This reflects a broader educational-sports conflict noted by Hylton and Bramham (2008) ^[6], who observed that societies often separate academic achievement from athletic development, particularly where economic pressures dominate family priorities. Awareness programs must therefore address this psychological barrier by communicating the holistic

developmental value of sports — in terms of discipline, teamwork, and employability.

From a policy perspective, the data suggest that PYKKA functioned more as a resource distribution model than a holistic development program. There was limited follow-up on utilization, feedback, or monitoring outcomes. As a result, many playgrounds or sports kits remained symbolic rather than functional. The National Sports Policy (2001) ^[9] had already recommended periodic evaluation mechanisms and decentralized monitoring, but PYKKA's short lifespan (2008–2014) curtailed its ability to institutionalize these systems.

A comparative reflection with international community-sport initiatives further enriches this discussion. Programs such as the UK's *Active Communities* and Australia's *Sport for All* movements emphasized sustained coaching support, local leadership development, and strong school-sport linkages (Green & Houlihan, 2005) ^[5]. By contrast, PYKKA's dependence on short-term schemes and irregular competitions limited its long-term continuity. However, its bottom-up design remains a pioneering step for a country as vast and diverse as India, where over 60% of the population resides in rural areas (Planning Commission, 2013) ^[11].

Critically, the success of any grassroots policy lies not just in quantitative outcomes but in the creation of a sustained sports culture. In many surveyed villages, the study observed positive shifts in community attitudes — youths began organizing informal tournaments, and schools increasingly used open fields for morning exercises. These micro-level behavioral changes, though modest, represent the first signs of cultural transformation. As Singh (2014) ^[14] notes, the rural sports movement in India must evolve gradually, linking participation with pride and identity rather than treating sports as a state-sponsored event.

Nevertheless, several systemic weaknesses persisted. Communication between state sports departments and local panchayats was fragmented; monitoring reports were inconsistent; and feedback loops were absent. Without digital databases or regular evaluation mechanisms, program performance was often based on anecdotal evidence. This underscores the need for integrating information management systems even at the rural level.

Finally, from a developmental standpoint, the PYKKA experience reveals that policy intent must be matched by local adaptability. Each village operates within its unique socio-cultural and economic context. Therefore, standard models of sports delivery are less effective than flexible, context-specific approaches. The lessons from this research support a decentralized planning framework where local sports councils, led by teachers and Kridashrees, plan and monitor sports activities suited to their resources and interests.

In conclusion, the discussion points toward a nuanced understanding: PYKKA was neither a failure nor a complete success. It served as an important experimental platform, proving that rural India is ready for structured sports engagement if supported by sustained awareness, trained personnel, and adequate resources. The program's partial success laid the foundation for future sports policies, which inherited many of PYKKA's ideas but aimed to address its administrative and monitoring shortcomings. The broader implication of this study, therefore, is that sports development in India must be viewed not merely as physical activity but as a community empowerment process, linking participation, inclusion, and national identity.

6. Conclusion

PYKKA represented India's first serious attempt to integrate rural sports with national development objectives. This study demonstrates that while the program achieved moderate awareness and partial infrastructure development, it fell short in sustaining training and female participation. Future policies must ensure consistent monitoring, gender-sensitive planning, and enhanced incentives for grassroots facilitators.

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