

## Article

# Mythical Consciousness & Existential Connectedness Among Children: Findings from a Case Study at a Himalayan Village

Shachi Negi<sup>1</sup> & Arun Pratap Singh<sup>\* 2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>DIT University, India

<sup>2</sup>Sri Sri University, India

## Abstract

Folk stories are integral to cultivating cultural rootedness and connectedness with the natural surroundings in us. In the contemporary educational and social context, emotional wellness and sustainability issues are at the core of popular educational pedagogies, government policies, and healthcare practices. But, unfortunately, due to overemphasis on objectivity across different spheres of life, the human psyche is becoming increasingly fragmented, disoriented, and disconnected from nature resulting in multiple grave mental health challenges, and environment-degrading behavior. In this backdrop, myth can be relevant as a prime modus-operandi to positively modify human consciousness during younger age. Realizing the above, we have sought to explore the utility of mythical stories in shaping the younger selves. In particular, we analyzed prevalent mythical stories and Himalayan natives' reflections regarding their meanings and process of influencing cognitions and behaviors related to existential connectedness. By using thematic analysis, we found that younger sections of the Indigenous community in the Central Himalayan region acquire several values and norms instrumental for broadening existential connectedness and experiencing the absence of stress and sedentary lifestyle habits.

**Keywords:** Mythical consciousness, mental health, sustainability, indigenous community, folklore.

## 1. Introduction

Although myths do not contain empirical realities, they offer a unique set of indigenous cultural knowledge systems to enrich us in several ways (Nixon, 2010; Olojede, 2013). They open us to an unbounded experiential trajectory and harmonize our cognitive processes (Nixon, 2010). By affectively engaging in contemplation, they connect us affectively with natural objects, alter physiological responses (Laderman, 1987), build up sustainability values, elevate positive emotions (Glik, 1988; Mannell, Ahmad & Ahmad, 2018), and facilitate the realization of affective value of everything around us (Gursoy, 1996). But unfortunately, myths and their relevance for wellness have been least acknowledged (Nelson & Wilson, 2017). Due to an

---

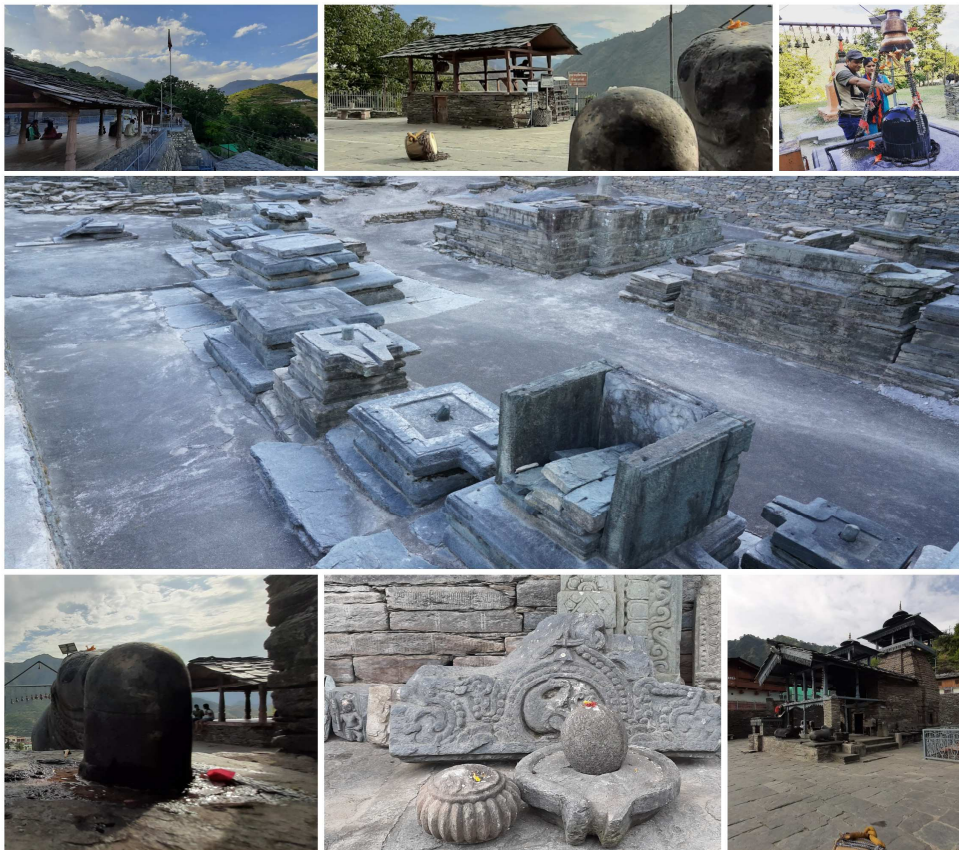
\* Correspondence: Associate Prof. Arun Pratap Singh, Sri Sri University, India. Email: jyotiarun13@gmail.com

overemphasis on positivistic ideals in social sciences and medical fields, we consider them more as hoaxes than as cultural tools and processes to nourish our self (Loughlin, Lewith & Falkenberg, 2013). Consequently, the modern psyche is experiencing rigidity, segregation and an increase in vulnerability to several mental health-related maladies (substance, sensual preoccupations, and various maladjustments in our lifestyle) (Singh & Misra, 2012; World Economic Forum, 2019).

Against the above backdrop, there is greater recognition of traditional and indigenous practices. In the last few decades, behavioral scientists have cognized the relevance of mythical stories to nurture emotional wellness and promote sustainable behaviors (Dalal & Misra, 2010). But, there is insufficient literature to account for the pertinence of folk stories to improve existential connectedness. Existential connectedness is a cognitive capacity to feel affiliated with the living and non-living tangible entities around us implicating greater intensity in the meaning of life, well-being, and performance (Sjoberg, Beck, Rasmussen & Edberg, 2017). Recently, there has been an increase in recognition for its promotion during school education. Since children have greater neuroplasticity than others, they can easily incorporate symbolic meanings to imbue a sense of connection with other beings and objects (Damarin & Raphael, 2014). Given the above scenario, we sought to explore the utility of myths for promoting connectedness and its associations with emotional vigor, the experience of divinity, social belongingness, and affiliation with nature. In the above pursuance, we chose a village (Lakhamandal) of the central Himalayas region, where mythological stories echo every aspect of life.

## 2. Location

Situated at the bank of the Yamuna river, *Lakhamandal* has several mythological inscriptions as shown in pictures 1, 2 & 3. The earliest architectural activity at this place dates back to circa 5th-8th century CE. We listened to two mythical stories indicating the genesis of the village name. According to the first story, this village had one hundred thousand temples during a particular historical period. So, the word *Lakha* stands for one hundred thousand and *Mandala* denotes temples. Another story says that one hundred thousand tantric mystic diagrams existed in this terrain. The villagers worship popular mythological characters (*Pandavas* and *Kauravas*), celebrate their life history in the form of rituals, and folklores, and affiliate with either of them. *Pandavas* are depicted as the epitome of high moral & ethical principles and *Kauravas* in juxtaposition to their beliefs. The clans, associating themselves with *Pandavas*, are known as the *Paths*; and those with *Kauravas* are as *Spathas*. The celebration of a particular ritual (*Jagar*) takes place during autumn, winter, and spring season. The weapons, which are still preserved in temples, are perceived to protect inhabitants.

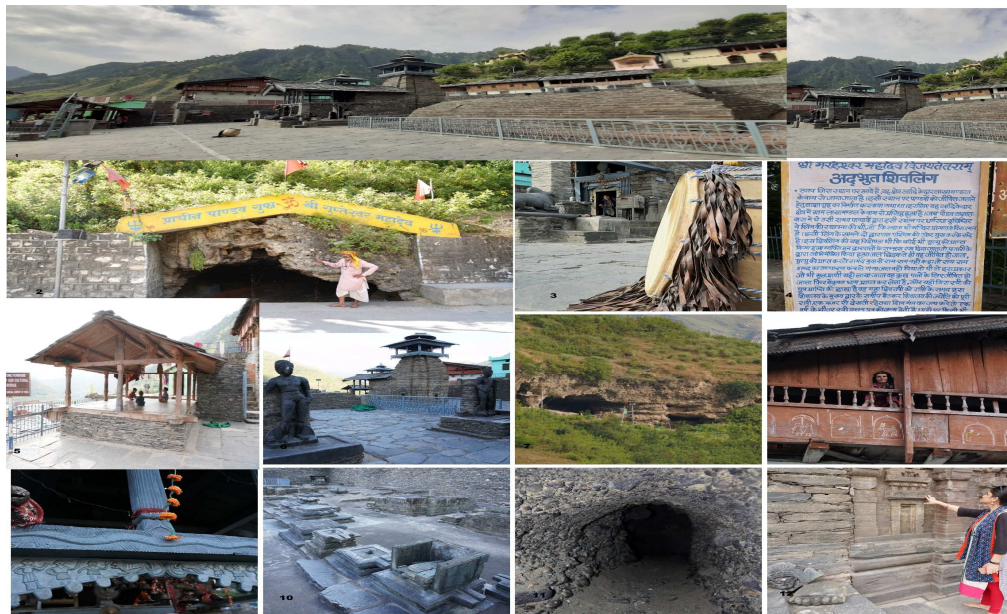


**Picture 1.** Shiv Lingam spread around the temple.

This village has a population of 1044; of which 458 are males and 586 females (National Population Census, 2011) with a comparably greater literacy rate among males than females. The residents primarily constitute Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe sections with primary income source of labor work and agriculture.



Picture 2. A view of Lakhamandal village



Picture 3. From LtoR: 1.Lakhshyagrah 2.Dhundhi Odaari Cave 3.Temple entrance 4.Note about the ShivLing inside the temple 5.Hut 6. Dev & Danav 7.Cave for Panadava's escape 8.Residence beside the temple 9.Wooden architecture 10.plenty of Shiv Lingam 11.Inside Dhundhi Odaari Cave 12.Researcher inspecting inside the temple.

### **3. Materials & Method**

Due to a deep passion for understanding the folklore of the Himalayan region, we visited Lakhmandal village quite frequently. An increase in familiarity led to the closer observation of their rituals and tale-telling in different forms on various occasions. We started to reflect on the value of folklores for promoting existential connectedness and realized the utility of mythical stories from our own childhood experiences. In the further literature review, we noted the potential role of mythical thinking not only for psychological wellness but also for sustaining our life on this earth. This led to the current small endeavor to explore the role of folklores in promoting existential connectedness.

We undertook the below procedure: determining key questions, the ambit of conceptual scope, conducting interviews, observation reports, peer reports, interpretation of mythological stories for themes, and their synthesis for preparing a final report. Before the actual study, we undertook a review and prepared a list of questions. In congruence to the above, we analyzed folklore and collected data in the below forms: demographic information, personal interviews, questionnaires, peer and family reports, photographs, and observation of relevant utterances. Therefore, we could qualitatively validate the symbolic and functional value of different categories of folklore. We collected the data with following objectives: (1) to understand symbolic meanings and functional value of folklores; (2) to explore implications of mythical consciousness for existential connectedness. Due to extreme falls in the temperature during winter, we collected our data during the October & November months of 2021.

### **4. Results & Discussion**

First of all, we analyzed the folklores to decipher their meanings. We examined different modes of their delivery: folklore, tale-telling, the celebration of festivals, daily religious rituals/practices, and folksongs. We identified several symbolic meanings and functional values of folklores as given in Table 1. The first story establishes conglomerated significance of nature, animals, and emotional resources. The second and third stories bring out the importance of detachment and faith to inoculate the psyche from the wear and tear of life. The fourth and fifth stories emphasize the relevance of truth, integrity, and faith in life. The concept/notion/archetype of boon is that it cannot be returned if once given.

**Table 1.** Sample of Stories, their Symbolic Meanings and Functional Value

S	Story/Sub Stories	Symbolic Meaning	Functional Value
1.	<b>Myth of temple discovery:</b> On one day in Khaatal kingdom, A king's cow was crossing the river <i>Yamuna</i> flowing with full fervor. As per king's order, his men followed the cow. They got frightened but ultimately crossed the river by catching cow tail ultimately. After following the cow for some time, they saw the cow standing in front of a <i>shiv lingam</i> and draining her milk on <i>Lingam</i> , situated in the midst of the forest. Informer returned and told about the whole incidence and then, the king ordered his men to clear the forest and from then the temple is being established; which is a replica of Kedarnath Temple.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Shiva</i> is believed as lord of animals. Cow symbolizes as mother and hindu considers her holy.</li> <li>• Deep connection and union between devotee, and the lord.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecological relevance of cow and other animals</li> <li>• Animals not inferior to human beings</li> <li>• Importance of emotional resources</li> </ul>
2.	<b>Dev &amp; Danav:</b> King Daksha organized Yajana but did not call Lord Shiva. When His daughter came there, Lord Shiva was disgraced in gathering. As a result, Sati immolated herself. Later, Shiva got enraged and produced two Gods: Veer & Bhadra in <i>satyug</i> who became Jay and Vijay in <i>Tretayug</i> and became Dwar & Pal in <i>dwaparyug</i> , and transformed now as Dev & Danav in <i>kalyuga</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soul is immortal but body is mortal.</li> <li>• Endless powers of God</li> <li>• Time flows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impermanency of life</li> <li>• Worries and pleasures continue to recycle</li> <li>• Respect of husband by wife</li> </ul>
3.	Lord Shiva used to grant life to those people who apologized for their sins and when their body was placed between the two statues. On One day, when Lord Shiva gave life to a child; her mother hid child in lap. Shiva could not resurrect then. Since then the practice of awakening the dead has been stopped by Lord Shiva. But still the two statues are remaining stand tall reminding the mythology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God is graceful and compassionate</li> <li>• Resurrection of being</li> <li>• Matter also have powers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of death of body as an ultimate truth</li> <li>• Detachment</li> <li>• We can seek God's help</li> </ul>
4.	<b>Lakshayagrah:</b> Duryudhana built the structure to kill his cousin brothers, <i>Pandavas</i> however escaped unscathed through an underground passage towards Chakrapur. The epical Chakrapur is known as Hanol at the present time. The cave formations near Lakahmandal are believed to be used by <i>Pandavas</i> to take refuge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truth prevails</li> <li>• Battle between negative and positive forces</li> <li>• Faith provides power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of destiny</li> <li>• Unpredictability in human life.</li> <li>• Creativity, flexibility and acceptance for the world.</li> </ul>
5.	<b>Dhundhi Odaari Cave:</b> Pandavas took refuge to hid from kauravas in the cave called Dhundhi Odaari	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature protects if integrity is intact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of Natural places</li> </ul>

*Jagar* is popular folklore of the central Himalayas. It enacts the myth of *Pandavas* to incorporate immortality of the essence of human being. This originated from the Sanskrit language root word *Jaga* denoting for awakening. *Jagar* is believed to have the potential to awaken supernatural powers. The performers, during the celebration of cultural festivals, wear a specific attire to suit the mythological character and perform different mythical actions. The narrator of *Jagar* is called *Jagariya* who plays indigenous musical instruments and narrates ballads of God or dead spirits in a lyrical fashion. These songs allude to different mythical stories of Indian epics including Mahabharat/ Ramayana. The myth of *Pandavas* is enacted through *Pandav Nritya* (dance of Pandavas), where the priest invokes the spirits of *Pandavas* in performers through certain rituals. Villagers seek solutions for their problems spirits get invoked in individuals. The chief priest and a key informant shared that the performers display a great

degree of endurance and stamina during the observance of rituals. The celebration of *Jagar* demonstrates the reach of myth to the mass psyche. This affirmation of faith for the historical reality of *Pandavas* is so strong that they hold on to firm convictions regarding the divine and supernatural powers of those persons who enact the roles of these mythical characters.

As informed by the chief priest and elders, children listen to folk stories in congregations, perform the rituals (i.e., *Arti*, *Bhajan*), play different conventional games i.e., *kabaddi*, *Gitte*, *Pakadam-pakadaee*) in the temple premises, and help in other preparatory activities (i.e., spreading mat, distribution of sweet) for worship. As demonstrated in Table 2, children displayed self-motivation, existential connectedness, and mutuality in all the above activities without any support from elders. Researchers observed children enthusiastically participated in the ceremony without any compulsion or force. An interesting realization was that the children had no idea of the meaning of stress, denoting that they lacked its experience. We deliberately asked them questions about perplexing situations of life, morally conflicting dilemmas, but found no signs of stress. They looked happier without any modern gazettes. We also noticed that natives tend to seek the deity's grace in difficult times.

**Table 2.** Utterances of natives and their implications

Category	Utterances	Implications
Priest	<i>Ye mata ji ki patthi hai</i> (Goat is daughter of my mother deity) <i>Ye vardan dene wali mataji hai</i> (Goats give us boon) <i>Paandav bilkul Ashirvaad dekar jaate hain</i> (Pandavas bless us); <i>Voh rakhshon ki dharti hai</i> (That is land of devils). <i>Pandit ne thoda gadbad kari to aag lag gayi</i> (Priest mistake led to fire) <i>Is pandavon ki dharti ko naman karo</i> (Bow to this land of Pandavas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatedness with animals</li> <li>• Emotional attachment with animals</li> <li>• Faith in myth</li> <li>• Power of natural elements</li> </ul>
Parents/Grand Parents:	<i>Pandav ki Katha ab bhi chal rahi hai aage bhi chalega</i> (It is happening now and will continue future) <i>Bachche Sabke saath rahana pasand karte hain</i> (Like to live together) <i>80% pahari khana khate hain</i> ( In majority of instances, children consume traditional food items) <i>Maine to rakkha nahin TV</i> (I do not have TV at my home) <i>80% chances hain ki mandir men hi milenge</i> (There is greater chance to get children playing in Temple)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief in sustenance of mythical traditions</li> <li>• Collectivism</li> <li>• Inclination towards temple more than social media or television</li> </ul>
Children	<i>Baalveer achchhaa lagta hai kyonki usamen pariyan hoti hain</i> (like Balveer T.V serial because it consists fairies) <i>Yudhishtir bhaiyon mai sabse acha laga unki kahani padh ke</i> (I liked Yudhishtar the most by reading the stories) <i>Pandav nritya main log jhumte hai kyunki unme devi devata aate hai</i> (In Pandav Nritya, people dances as God and Goddesses came through them) <i>Jo hum mangte hai wo(devi-devta) hume dete hai</i> (Whatever we ask from deities, they bless us) <i>Mene padamvo ki kahaniya suni hain dada daadi se aur yaha murtiya bhi hai</i> (I have heard the stories of <i>pandavas</i> from my grandparents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mythical conscious is working in psyche</li> <li>• Strong belief in supreme power</li> <li>• Collective conscious prevailing</li> </ul>

To some degree, these myths also orient dietary habits towards healthiness. Many children reported a degree of fondness for traditional food. Children also confessed to enjoying the company of cows during grass grazing. The children seem to be more joyful without any opportunity to watch TV. These children were less vulnerable to the unhealthy influence of society and mass media. Their only means of entertainment was the Lakhamandal temple, where they visited after their school and stayed till evening.



**Picture 4:** Life inside the temple

Jung postulated the concept of archetypes as universally shared unconscious structures and acquired through interaction with elders and exposure to different artifacts (Jung, 2002). Myths are instrumental for archetypes as they act as intermediary processes. They bring forth unconscious constraints in the realms of awareness. Therefore, myths are transferred from one generation to another with their underlying meanings. This study indicates several levers espoused in mythological consciousness to promote existential connectedness through unconscious pathways.

As reflected in Tables 1 & 2, several stories demonstrate that natural objects have unlimited power like a warrior, and collectivism is required to succeed in life. By imbibing faith in consciousness residing not only in insects and animals but also in non-living objects, myths help us transgress perceptual boundaries and broaden emotional connectedness and perceived support. A belief in the existence of supreme power furthers this connectedness and integrates our



cognitive schema. As a result, the experience of stress gets minimized and cognitive complexity reduced.

Myths can introject values, virtues, and norms. The theory of deeds and their corresponding consequences, featured in several mythological stories, harnesses a commitment for engagement in the welfare of others. As outlined in Table 1, faith in the impermanence of everything, detachment, and role of destiny, seems to help accept the unpredictability of life. While praising the different aspects of existence, the children also imbibed connectedness with them during worship. As demonstrated through an increase in physical prowess during the celebration of *Jagar* in this study, incorporation of existential connectedness can increase vigor and cognitive abilities (Laderman, 1987). A strongly believed myth can connect so deeply that it may create a hypnotic trance state (Glik, 1988). Any deep experience of existential connectedness can facilitate deep intra-individual realization, bring mutuality in social relationships and develop positive attitudes towards different categories of objects and nature, and ideals. Moreover, it helps to incorporate free will and self-regulation for healthy lifestyle practices.

## 5. Conclusion

This study indicates the causality and instrumentality of myths as an intra-psyche resource for flourishing existential connectedness among children. In a clustered manner, non-dualistic faith in consciousness, theism, collectivism, detachment, and impermanence of everything increase existential connectedness. Moreover, it also demonstrates that mythical consciousness can facilitate positive change in adolescent lifestyle and emotional wellness. They can serve as an adjunctive tool to increase social functioning among children. Due to the greater plausibility of childhood, we can utilize myths to prevent further deterioration in their lifestyle and positively alter it. However, to incorporate fables into the educational process, a need to tweak educational pedagogies is pertinent. Given the contemporary scenario of erosion of mythological consciousness, we would have to preserve myths through concerted efforts by different stakeholders (i.e., government, NGOs, and academicians).

*Received April 1, 2022; Accepted June 8, 2022*

## References

- Dalal, Ajit & Misra, Girishwar (2010). The core and context of Indian psychology. *Psychology & Developing Societies* 22(1),121-155. Doi: 10.1177/097133360902200105.
- Demarin, Vida & Raphael, Bene (2014). Neuroplasticity. *Periodicum Biologorum*, 116(2), 209-211.

- Glik, D.C. (1988). Symbolic, ritual and social dynamics of spiritual healing. *Social Science & Medicine*, 27 (11), 1197-1206. DOI: 0.1016/0277-9536(88)90349-8.
- Gürsoy, Akile (1996). Beyond the orthodox: Heresy in medicine and the social sciences from a cross-cultural perspective. *Social Science & Medicine*, 43(5), 577-599. DOI: 10.1016/0277-9536(96)00106-2.
- Houghton, T. (2011). Does positivism really “work” in the social sciences. *E-International Students*. Downloaded from: <https://bit.ly/2GHqT8C> on 17.12.2019.
- Jung, Carl Gustav (2002). The psychology of the child archetype. In Carl Gustav Jung and Károly Kerényi, Jung and Kerenyi. *The Science of Mythology* (p. 83-118). Routledge: London.
- Laderman, C. (1987). The ambiguity of symbols in the structure of healing. *Social Science & Medicine*, 24 (4), 293-301. DOI: 10.1016/0277-9536(87)90148-1
- Loughlin, M., Lewith, G. & Falkenberg, T. (2013). Science, practice and mythology: a definition and examination of the implications of scientism in medicine. *Health Care Analysis*, 21(2), 130-145. DOI: 10.1007/s10728-012-0211-6.
- Mannell, J., Ahmad, L. & Ahmad, A. (2018). Narrative storytelling as mental health support for women experiencing gender-based violence in Afghanistan. *Social Science & Medicine*, 214, 91-98. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.08.011.
- National Population Census (2011). *Lakha Mandal Population - Dehradun, Uttarakhand*. Downloaded from <https://bit.ly/3bz7nNh> on 17.12.2019.
- Nelson, S.E. & Wilson, K. (2017). The mental health of Indigenous peoples in Canada: A critical review of research. *Social Science & Medicine*, 176, 93-112. doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.01.021.
- Nixon, G.M. (2010). Myth and mind: The origin of human consciousness in the discovery of sacred. *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research*, 1(3), 289-338.
- Olojede, H.T. (2013). A critique of the scientific method. *Science Journal of Sociology & Anthropology*, 1-5. doi: 10.7237/sjsa/146.
- Singh, A.P. & Misra, G. (2012). Adolescent lifestyle in India: Prevalence of risk and health-promotive factors. *Psychology & Developing Societies*, 24(2), 145-160. doi: 10.1177/097133361202400203.
- Sjoberg, M., Beck, I., Rasmussen, B.H. & Edberg, A.K. (2017). Being disconnected from life: meanings of existential loneliness as narrated by frail older people. *Aging & Mental Health*, 22(10), 1357-1364. DOI: 10.1080/13607863.2017.1348481
- World Economic Forum (2019). Empowering 8 billion minds enabling better mental health for all via the ethical adoption of technologies. Downloaded from <https://bit.ly/3ujSPb8> on 17.12.2019.