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Effectiveness of 2D animated storytelling in drug awareness among upcountry Sri Lankan students

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Background: In upcountry Sri Lanka, a region where the infrastructure for health education is limited and adolescent drug use is a growing concern, traditional lecture-based drug awareness methods have not effectively engaged students or promoted protective behavioral change. This study addresses a critical gap in child protection strategies by evaluating the efficacy of 2D animated storytelling as a culturally relevant and scalable medium for drug awareness in underserved school communities.

Method: A mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was employed to compare the effectiveness of a traditional lecture with a 10-minute animated short film titled "A Journey of Redemption." The animation was developed through a structured production pipeline to ensure cultural and narrative relevance. The study involved 80 students from grades 9 to 11, with data collected through pre- and post-tests, Likert-scale engagement surveys, and classroom observations. Statistical analysis using SPSS revealed that students exposed to the animated intervention demonstrated significantly higher engagement, "M" stands for Mean ($M = 4.85$ vs. 3.14 , $p < .001$) and a 28% greater improvement in knowledge retention.

Results: Observation data showed reduced distraction during the animation session (3.75%) compared to the traditional lecture (20%). Furthermore, 89% of students expressed interest in creating their own animations, highlighting animation's dual role as both an educational and creative empowerment tool.

Conclusions: These findings evidence that the potential of animated storytelling not only to enhance drug awareness but also to foster participatory resilience an essential element of child protection. The study recommends integrating animation into national child protection education policies and expanding research to assess its long-term behavioral impact across Sri Lanka's diverse school populations.

Keywords: Drug awareness, 2D animation, storytelling, student engagement, social impact.