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# GROW(ing): An Exemplary Educational Approach in *Irudhi*Suttru

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# **Abstract**

Education can transform a person's life by aiding in the development of reason and the attainment of freedom of expression. It entails a process of learning and teaching that progresses through various phases of development for both the instructor and the student. *Black* (2005), *Chak de India* (2007), *Iqbal* (2005), *Mary Com* (2014), *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), *Dangal* (2016) etc., are just a few of the popular Indian films about teaching, counselling, and mentoring. Films like *Black, Iqbal* and *Taare Zameen Par* pictured coaching for students with special needs. This article attempts to analyse the Tamil film *Irudhi Suttru* as a representation of John Whitmore's GROW(goal, reality, options, will) paradigm of coaching, as described in his 1992 book *Coaching for Performance*. A young, unfortunate adolescent girl named Madhi is featured in the film, and with the assistance of her coach Prabhu, she goes on to win an international boxing championship. This research paper analyses the movie *Irudhi Suttru* as a film that portrays the journey of a little-known female athlete becoming a world champion through coaching and mentoring. The research study aims to demonstrate that the coach in the movie Prabhu, played by Indian actor and writer R. Madhavan, adopted Whitmore's GROW coaching model to instruct his exceptional student Madhi, portrayed by Indian actoress Ritika Singh.

**Keywords:** Coaching, Education, Grow, Learning, Mentoring, Performance.

## Introduction

Education in India is a highly debated but not thoroughly researched topic. India's educational system is as diverse as the country itself. In the field of athletics education in India, however, the age-old custom of 'Guru' and 'shishya' still exists in a limited capacity. However, this is quite acceptable in the field of sports, which requires mentoring or tutoring in addition to facilitation. Dead Poets Society, To Sir With Love, Tuesdays with Morrie, Mona Lisa Smile, Good Will Hunting are some of the famous Hollywood movies that pictured education, teaching, coaching and mentoring in different modes. *Iqbal, Taare Zameen* Par, Black, Chakde India, Mary Com are also some of the famous movies from India that depicted different types of coaching and mentoring. Of these, Taare Zameen Par was a movie about an autistic child and how he overcomes his challenge with proper guidance. Black was a film that left the audience in tears by depicting a beautiful bonding between a teacher and his student who was deaf, blind and dumb. Bollywood films like Mary Com (2014), Chakde India (2007), Igbal (2005), Dangal (2016), Jhund (2022), Ghoomer

(2023) and Sultan (2016) can be considered as sports films. A sports film is a type of film that uses one or more sports as the major theme and the plot revolves around the athlete and his or her game. Most of these sports films used a variety of coaching methods, ranging from holistic to group coaching, and some of them aimed to depict the development of affective values in athletes. Mary Com is a biopic on Mary Com, the Indian boxer who won Olympic medals for India. Chak de India was a blockbuster which presented the fabulous tale of a fictional Indian women's hockey team. *Iqbal* told the story of a youth who was dumb but he aspired to become a cricketer overcoming all obstacles with the help of his personal trainer. In India, Cricket dominates the field of sports as it is a spectator sport, while the remainder of the sports occupies positions below this elite game. Jhund (2022) is a Hindi-language biopic on Vijay Barse who formed an NGO to save children from the slums by orienting them into sports. Ghoomer (2023) is a Hindi movie directed by R Balki starring Abhishek Bachchan, Saiyami Kher, Shabana Azmi and Angad Bedi in the lead roles.

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The film presented the tale of a resilient girl Anina Dixit also called Ani, who had high hopes of joining the Indian cricket team as a batswoman, however fate fails her when she loses her right arm. Sports like Hockey, Football. Khabbadi, Handball, Shooting, and Boxing are mostly sidelined. In the article "The Wood Magic: Cricket in India - A Postcolonial Benediction" Somshankar writes thus: Cricket in India unquestionably become the de facto national game and has therefore come to corner the lion's share of the public attention as well as financial and infra-structural support, while other games to varying degrees languish for want of support and following (1). In addition to this distinction between sports, we also observe a bias between men's and women's sports in India. Despite their athletic prowess, women encounter challenges in establishing their identity within a patriarchal society. They frequently experience double marginalization and must contend for the fundamental rights to which they are entitled. Paradoxically, India has experienced manifestation of democracy wherein individuals who hold privileged positions hold the highest authoritative authority. An additional significant deficiency within the system is the paucity of female representation in positions of authority, which impedes the progress of women. The exploitation of female sports personnel by those in authority is facilitated, in part, by inadequate representation of women government departments, if we examine the sports domain. Sakshi Malik, who had won a bronze medal at the 2016 Summer Olympics, Vinesh Phogat, and several other wrestlers, filed allegations sexual and psychological harassment against Brij Bhushan Singh, the thenpresident of the Wrestling Federation of India, in 2023. Their efforts to substantiate their accusations against Brij Bhushan Singh continue. Malik became an outspoken voice over harassment and discrimination faced by female athletes in India, a plight underscored by charges filed against Singh in June accusing him of sexually harassing six female wrestlers, including a minor, during his time leading the WFI (2). Sudha Kongara, in the film Irudhi Suttru highlights all of these inequities, issues in Indian society through the tale of a female boxer named Madhi and her trainer Prabhu. The film is based on the lives of several real-life national champions. The 2016 Tamil film Irudhi Suttru is directed by Sudha Kongara Prasad and stars Madhavan, Ritika Singh, Nassar, etc. The film is categorised as a sports drama and was released simultaneously in Tamil and Hindi under the title Saala Khadoos. Ritika Singh, who portrayed Madhi, received a national award in addition to garnering numerous Filmfare awards. The Tamil film was so successful that it was adapted in Telugu as Guru. Even though the film follows the typical structure of a motivational film, the film's theme distinguishes it from many others of its kind. It narrates the tale of a carefree adolescent who becomes a boxing world champion through rigorous training. The film is not only about boxing and training but also about the plight of women boxers in India, including their financial and social struggles. The film depicts social actuality in a cinematic fashion.

# Methodology

Sir John Douglas Whitmore was a prominent thinker and pioneer in the field of coaching. He has authored five books on leadership, coaching and mentoring. In addition to being an author he was a performance consultant and a British racing driver. He introduced the GROW model of coaching for the first time in 1992. It was a coaching model that comprised four phases. This model was derived from Timothy Galleway's Inner Game Theory (a coaching methodology). Sir John Whitmore was a student of Timothy Galleway; he along with Graham Alexander and Alan Fine developed the GROW paradigm. First and foremost, this coaching model requires capturing the student's interest. It is a coaching philosophy that is based on the establishment of goals, the comprehension of reality, the pursuit of options, and the actual pursuit of the decided goals through the development of determination and will. Coaching is not merely a technique to be wheeled out and rigidly applied in certain prescribed circumstances. It is a way of managing, a way of treating people, a way of thinking, a way of being (3).

GROW coaching model is suitable for young adults who require help to perform better in difficult circumstances. This model of coaching can be called as unconventional since it is helpful in situations were the subject or the student does not cooperate with the educator or coach. GROW coaching model is different from other models of

coaching in one aspect, that is regarding the stages of the coaching technique. Unlike peer coaching, transformative and facilitative coaching GROW model never insists in following a particular order. Any of the four stages of coaching can happen at any time followed by the next stage in coaching; flexibility is a feature of the GROW model. Thus GROW coaching model requires the coach to grab the interest of the student. The next step is to establish attainable objectives. Together, the coach and student must generate options for achieving these objectives. The next stage in this coaching model is to cultivate willpower. The order of these steps is not required to be identical. However, completing all four stages result in the intended learning outcome. Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximize their own performance. It is a process that helps students to learn (3). Coaching and mentoring are two concepts commonly used in the field of education and training. Currently, the term is predominantly used in the corporate sector to train employees in order to aid in the development of specific skills. They are, fundamentally, learning and development activities that share similar roots despite lively debate among academics and practitioners as to the meaning (and implications) of each word... A good coach will also mentor and a good mentor will coach too, as appropriate to the situation and the relationship. Hence, these Knowledge Solutions treat the two terms interchangeably: both are related processes for analysis, reflection, and action, intended to enable employees achieve their full potential with a focus on skills, performance, and "life" (personal) coaching and mentoring. Unlike conventional training, coaching and mentoring focus on the person, not the subject; they draw out rather than put in; they develop rather than impose; they reflect rather than direct; they are continuous—not one-time events. In brief, they are a form of change facilitation (4). In the book Coaching for Performance Whitmore states that the key terms-SEE (Self, Esteem, Enthusiasm), HEAR (High, Energy, Awareness, Responsibility) and GROW (Goals, Reality, Options, Will) (3) are the three ingredients of coaching for performance. This research article aims to analyze the methods of the GROW coaching style employed by the coach for his student in the Tamil film Irudhi Suttru. The

study aims to explore the challenges faced by female athletes in India and examines how coaching methods such as GROW can assist talented athletes in overcoming obstacles that hinder their performance. In the movie *Irudhi Suttru*, the coach had to engage the interest of his talented student and help her establish a mindset that would strengthen her performance as a boxer. After the student gained an understanding of the truth, the coach's role was limited to that of a facilitator, assisting her in comprehending the available options.

## **Writings on Coaching and Mentoring**

Coaching is a process that entails rigorous training according to a method to prepare the student/learner/athlete/employee to perform or pass a specific test or game in the most exceptional manner. Numerous hypotheses have been discussed by academicians and researchers around the globe. It includes mentoring in addition to coaching for the development of a particular skill or aptitude.

The *Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education* was edited by Margaret L. Kern and Michael L. Wehmeyer and published in 2021. It is a collection of articles written by authors about various approaches to positive education pedagogy. Additionally, the work contains remarks on the significance of creative learning in Education. The book defines terms such as positive education, self-determination, coping skills, engaging education, and self-transformation, among others (5).

Dale H. Schunk's *Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective* (2012) is a text on various learning theories, such as constructivism, behaviourism, cognitive learning process, etc. It includes brief remarks on motivation, instruction versus learning, and issues related to learning and brain development (6).

In the chapter on counselling and mentoring in *Knowledge Solutions* (2017), Olivier Serrat provides a comprehensive definition of the terms against the corporate backdrop. In addition, Serrat defines terms such as self-development, appraisal, and evaluation (4).

"A Review of Coaching and Mentoring Theories and Models", an article by Mastura binti Kamarudin, Azni Yati binti Kamarudin, Ramiaida binti Darmi and Noor Saazai binti Mat Saad was published in 2020 in the journal titled International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development published this article. The research paper introduces three prominent coaching and mentoring theories, including Biggs's Presage-Process-Product model, ZPD theory and the GROW model (7). The article also provides extensive definitions of coaching and mentoring."A Study of Transformational Mentoring Strategy on Enhancing Effectiveness", a dissertation submitted Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in 2001 by Mary Celestina Ergat, is an investigation into mentoring strategies to enhance effectiveness. The research aimed to establish a transformational mentoring strategy. Ranchi's Ursuline English Medium School served as the sample source for this study (8). "Mental Skills Training for Coaches to Help Athletes Focus Their Attention, Manage Arousal, and Improve Performance in Sport" is a 2006 research article authored by James M. Howland that discusses ways to improve attention and thereby arouse assisting athletes excitement, thereby performing better in sports. The article also provides examples to demonstrate that stress can sometimes produce the finest results. In a sense, it heightens focus and induces a competitive anxiety (9) that aids athletes' performance. Sir John Whitmore is the author of the book Coaching for Performance. The initial publication was in 1992. It is a book about performance and mentoring. In this work, Whitmore attempts to define coaching, describe the process of coaching and then presents the GROW coaching paradigm (3). He explains how psychological knowledge is also necessary in education and counselling. In 2017, Carol Wilson, founder and programme designer at Culture at Work Ltd., authored a chapter for Culture at Work on the GROW model (10). It summarizes the most important aspects of Sir John Whitmore's GROW model. "On Terms: Behavioural Coaching" is an article written by Holly A. Seniuk, Benjamin N. Witts, W. Larry Williams, and Patrick M. Ghezzi regarding behavioural coaching. The article investigates Martin and Hrycaiko's (1983) work on behavioural coaching in sports. They cite the Oxford Advanced Dictionary to define mentoring as the training of an individual (11). "Building Successful Student-athlete Coach Relationships: **Examining Coaching Practices and Commitment to** 

the Coach" (2014) by Davar Rezania and Robert Gurney is an article on coaching practises, dedication, and the conduct of student-athletes (12). This article is based on a survey conducted between participants from two Canadian universities. In 2004, Michael Reinboth, Joan L. Duda, and Nikos Ntoumanis published the article "Dimensions of Coaching Behaviour, Need Satisfaction, and the Psychological and Physical Welfare of Young Athletes". The research paper was based on Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (13) and examined the relationship between coaching behaviour, need satisfaction, and the psychological as well as the physical health of adolescent male athletes. In her article "Bollywood Spectaculars" published in World Literature, Priya Jaikumar traces the trajectory and impact of Bollywood on the audience. Jaikumar discusses the division between mainstream and realist films in Indian cinema. Jaikumar also compares films released in the north and south and makes the following observation: The devoted fan base of Telugu and Tamil film stars and the rich filmmaking traditions of Kerala and Calcutta have always provided a counterpoint to Bombay cinema. As the dominant industry, Bombay has consistently drawn upon the creative talent of popular actors and directors working in Madras and Calcutta to increase its appeal to national audience (14). Somshankar Ray in the article "The Wood Magic: Cricket in India -A Postcolonial Benediction" (2008) analyses the reasons for the predominance of cricket in India over other sports. Ray concludes the article with the hope that in future when new sporting events bring medals to the country this obsession for cricket might get reduced and then there will be a new sporting future (1) for India. Amy J. Ransom's "Bollywood Goes to the Stadium: Gender, National Identity, and Sport Film in Hindi" (2014) discusses how Indian sports films were able to cultivate a national identity in the minds of the Indian audience (15). Ransom employs Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' to examine the immensely popular Bollywood sports films Chak de India. In addition, the article examines films such as Lagaan, Awwal Number (1990) Iqbal (2005), Say Salaam India (2007), Victory (2009), and Patiala House (2011), Hattrick (2007), Chain Kulii Ki Main Kulii (2007). Education is not necessarily formal; in sports instruction and

mentoring, informal education is the norm. It is frequently a personalized training in which the coach attempts to learn the student and then trains and mentors the student accordingly so as to bring out their best. Numerous Indian films focus on education, coaching, and mentorship. However, only a small number of these visual texts are selected for scholarly and analytic examination. The research study examines the film *Irudhi Suttru* as a visual text that stimulates reflection by presenting a theoretical coaching model for identification and discussion.

# **Results and Discussion**

Sir John Whitmore and his colleagues developed the GROW model of coaching. Whitmore's GROW coaching model is commonly used in the business sector to coach employees in corporate settings. However, if we consider the Tamil film Irudhi Suttru, we can discern that the master Prabhu, employs the GROW coaching philosophy to train his economically disadvantaged student Madhi. Her intense instinctive responses often resulted in altercations with others, which was noted by her coach, who shared her indignation towards social inequities. However, his life experiences have taught him that perseverance and intelligence are the only means by which a talented athlete can achieve their goals. As a mentor and a person with the same temperament, he recognizes that if his student is left to manage her sports on her own without developing a balanced or intelligent attitude, she will ruin her sports career. As a result, he is determined to train Madhi in accordance with her boxing ability. He was able to recognise Madhi's potential and train her accordingly so that she could realize her full potential. The coach was able to convince Madhi to invest her youthful spirit, vigor, fury, and resolve in her sports so that she could become a spirited sportsperson.

The first task that Prabhu (role played by actor Madhavan) undertakes as a coach is to align her with the objective he identified for her, which she was unaware of until she voluntarily participated in the training sessions he provided. Madhi initially did not take the training seriously until she discovered that her coach was devoted to his profession. Fareedth Bhai (shop owner): Don't break my bike! Leave my bike alone!

Madhi: It's not yours...It's his. I know that. Fareedth Bhai (shop owner): Now it's mine! He

splurged on equipment for you. That is why he gave me his bike as payment. Can you pay me? I don't know what that fool sees in you filthy pigs? Pay for the damage or I'll call the police. Prabhu: Fareedh Bhai! Let her go (gives some money) (16). Madhi's realisation of her master's dedication to instructing her, even though she did not fully perceive the method of instruction, occurs in the scene from which the above-quoted lines are taken. As soon as she realized that her boxing coach was mentoring her without ulterior motives, she decided to take the training seriously. As her coaching progressed, she realized that talent, dedication, and passion are more essential than expectations and rewards. Initially, she was only training in boxing so she could accompany her sister Luxmi, who desired a government position because she was a boxer. Initially, Madhi and her sibling Luxmi misunderstood Prabhu's intent in coaching her separately. Later, Luxmi becomes envious of Madhi, but Prabhu emphasises with evidence that Madhi possesses the ideal vigour, passion, and ferocity for a boxer, whereas Luxmi lacks these qualities because it is not her passion for boxing but rather her desire to earn a living through it that keeps her in the sport. Thus, a careful examination of the film reveals that the boxing coach identifies her foot movements and vigour as the two essential qualities of a boxer. Thus, he undertakes the tutelage of Madhi. initial response was hostile uncooperative. She was mocking, squandering time, and attending classes solely to receive the daily payment that Prabhu offered her for training. She barely realized that her coach had genuine faith in her abilities. The film also sheds light on the unsavory politics observed in the selection and appointment of Indian sportspeople. Therefore, the film is more representative of reality. Coach Pandian: I hate him more than you do. You think he is after your body. You're wrong. He can get a beauty for half the money he gives you. He always gave the best for you. He emptied his pockets for your training. We saw you as a foul fishmonger. But he saw your talent. He trusts you Madhi (16). A study on the status of women in sports in India was jointly carried out by Jatindra Kumar Sharma, Sushil Kumar Sharma, Ekta Sharma, and Sourabh Kumar. The research was documented in a scholarly article entitled "Status and Recognition of Sportswomen in India". This

paper details the challenges that women in India have encountered since the country's independence until the present day as they pursue careers in athletics. Alongside the governmental indifference, they deliberated on physical, psychological, physiological, economic, social, and familial obstacles that impede the success of women athletes in India. also They remarked on the insufficient sponsorship opportunities for women in sports.

Sportswomen in India should not at the end of a sentence, a mere add-on. They should not be considered to be as something seen vaguely from the corner of an eye. In fact, don't even look upon them as sportswomen but as sportspersons, individuals who deserve a better status in the world of Indian sports. Provide better benefits and sponsorship, hone their talents, inspire and motivate them. Then only can the status of women in sports go up a notch higher (17).

The ideas outlined in the cited passage underscore the importance of recognizing and valuing the athletic prowess of women, as opposed to imposing obstacles that impede their progress. The film *Irudhi Suttru* contains opening sequences that depict the subordinate and invalid status of women's sports realistically. Additionally, the social, economic, familial, and psychological barriers that prevent women from pursuing their passions are depicted in the film. Despite Madhi's socioeconomic background and the numerous obstacles she encountered, it was the GROW coaching model that enabled her to surmount all challenges and accomplish the objective set forth by her coach.

As soon as Madhi realizes that her instructor Prabhu was an honest individual who wanted to bring out the best in her, she resolves to accomplish the objective he had set for her. The movie also has moments of affection, jealousy, and emotion to meet the audience's expectations. Her destitution prevented her from realizing her actual potential. At a certain moment in the film, Madhi realizes the extent to which her teacher has gone to train her. Madhi was left without assistance when Dev Khatri, the antagonist, orchestrated her arrest by the police on false theft charges. She realized that without proper guidance, her life and sports career would come to an end. She promptly seeks assistance from her Master, who saves her from the trap laid by Dev Khatri. Her family no longer has to worry about her because of the money her coach gave them, allowing her to concentrate on boxing.

Madhi's hard work and performance were all that remained following her goal setting, exposure to the realities, development of alternatives, and determination of her will. As Sir John Whitmore's title of the book suggests *Coaching for Performance*, Prabhu chooses to mentor Madhi to help her achieve her optimal performance. Madhi was a problematic child, as evidenced by her arrogant behavior towards Prabhu. Although initially hesitant, she eventually began to refer to her coach as 'Master' after realizing the direction in which his instruction was taking her.

The character Dev Khatri, the national boxing instructor was portrayed by Zakir Hussain. He plays the role of the antagonist in the movie, embodying the stereotypical Indian film villain who interferes with the hero's goals and ambitions in a self-centered manner using his influential status. Such scenes in the film are a satirical depiction of numerous actual occurrences in Indian sports.

As the film reaches its climax, we discover an instance in which coach Prabhu had to satisfy the ego of Dev Khatri by resigning as the Indian Boxing coach so that his student Madhi could compete in the final match of the world championship. Despite being upset, Madhi processed all her alternatives and got ready for the big game. She stayed focused through her strong determination and will to win the game for Thus, upon Madhi's successful her master. completion of all four phases of coaching according to the GROW model, discernible transformations in her were evident, which facilitated the actualization of her passion and propelled her towards a career as a globally recognized boxer. She would have been confined to the coastal regions of Chennai had it not been for the revelation of her passion and aptitude, which powered her to extraordinary heights. Thus, through appropriate guidance mentoring, an athlete is inspired to perform at their highest level in their respective field. The authors of the article "Status and Recognition of Sportswomen in India" comment on this facet of society as follows:

On the positive side, things are looking up as far as achievements of sportswomen in India go. The

achievements of discus thrower Krishna Poonia, archer Deepika Kumari, Tintu Luka (PT Usha's protégé), boxer Mary Kom and others are something to be proud of. They inspire young ladies from smaller towns and rural backgrounds to take up a sport and have big dreams to achieve the best (17).

In the article "The Coaching Needs of High Performance Female Athletes Within the Coach-Athlete Dyad" Leanne Norman presents the observation that in order to bring out the best in an athlete a coach should tailor the practices according to the need (18). The film Irudhi Suttru's closing scene showed Madhi competing in a match without her coach by her side. Her perseverance in fighting was fuelled by the lessons she learned from her Master. Her strong desire to win the game and her unwavering resolve to overcome her opponent motivated her to persevere during difficult times when Dev Khatri deliberately isolated her from her coach. Herein lies the success of the GROW coaching model. Madhi recognized the seriousness of the situation and used her pragmatic approach to engage in the challenge despite the opposition from external forces. Her Master's anecdotes, life teachings, and unwavering determination inspired her to endure the conflict. The real life sports personalities like Mary Com, P.T. Usha, Deepika Kumari, Karnam Malleswari, Saina Newhwal, P.V.Sindhu Tintu Luka, Anju Boby George, Phogat sisters, Sakshi Malik, Mitali Raj are some of the famous women in India who could make history through their talent in spite of the challenging circumstances in their lives. The main reason for the success of these sportswomen is definitely the coaching they received through their trainers and

Thus the coaching model observed in the film can be identified as the goal-directed GROW coaching model. The coach, Prabhu, had already assisted the student Madhi in identifying her objectives. The next phase in the coaching model was determining the available options and understanding the realities, followed by establishing a desire to reach the desired objective. This literally enabled her to surpass the limitations that had restricted her growth.

## Conclusion

The film *Irudhi Suttru* portrays an athlete and her training in challenging social and psychological

circumstances. Madhi, the protagonist of the movie, receives coaching from her expert coach Prabhu, who employs the GROW coaching model, which is primarily a goal-oriented training method rooted in the desire to strengthen one's will or determination to accomplish a goal. Irudhi Suttru's cinematic depiction of the coaching technique resulted in the accomplishment of all objectives set by the coach and the student. In addition to achieving her objectives, Madhi the student transforms into a serious combatant who has decided to make boxing her career. This decision to follow her talent was possible only because of the GROW coaching model. The realization to target a championship and become a champion was indeed possible only after receiving proper training from her instructor. All the four stages of the GROW coaching model aided Madhi's transformation into an international boxing champion. Numerous coaching and mentoring models that are prevalent in modern society in which teaching and learning strategies are structured in accordance with the needs of the learner are exemplified in the Tamil film Irudhi Suttru. The GROW coaching model can also be identified in other Indian sportsfilms like Chak de India, Igbal and Ghoomer, wherein the individuals are trained to perform at their best by setting targets to achieve. The GROW paradigm of performance-based coaching assisted the athlete in the film Irudhi Suttru in becoming a champion and accomplishing every objective the athletes had ever desired.

#### **Abbreviation**

GROW: Goals, Reality, Options, Will

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## **Author Contributions**

Arya PJ collected the secondary sources and prepared the article; Bhuvaneswari R provided the guidance for writing and edited the article.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

## **Ethics Approval**

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