

Effect of Life Skills Training Program on Psychological Well-being of Rural Adolescents

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The objective of the study was to investigate the effect of life skills training program on psychological well-being of rural adolescents from two villages in Maharashtra. Life skills training program covering ten life skills as given by WHO (1997) was conducted for one academic year on students from 8th and 9th grade (13-15 years of age) belonging to two schools. Students were screened on intelligence using Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices and only those above 25th percentile were selected for the intervention. Students were tested on psychological well-being at the beginning and end of the training program. Psychological well-being was measured using the scale of psychological well-being by Kulkarni (2015). Paired t test was used to analyse the data. Results revealed that there was a significant increase on total psychological well-being ($t=-6.63$, $p<.001$) of students after the intervention as compared to their pre-test scores. Significant differences were also found on all the dimensions of psychological well-being. Results indicated a positive impact of such training on rural adolescents.

Keywords: Life skills training, Psychological Well-being, Rural adolescents

Adolescence is a vital stage of growth and development. It is considered as an important milestone in a person's life as the attainment of various developmental tasks lays the foundation for an individual's personality and identity for the rest of his life. Adolescence is also marked by several vulnerabilities which require awareness and attention. Indian teenagers are constantly exposed to various challenges and stresses posed due to rapid globalization and urbanization. The lives of current youngsters are more complicated than ever because of exposure to social media, academic stress and easy availability of addictive substances. For many mental health disorders, the age of onset is adolescence. Data available from many community based mental health studies in India depicts a high prevalence rate among adolescents. Two studies have shown prevalence of severe and extreme levels of depression with 11.2% in school dropouts and 3% among school going adolescents aged 13 to 19 years (Nair, John & Paul, 2004; Bansal, Goyal & Srivastava, 2009). According to reports, the age specific rate of suicides among 15-29-year olds is on the rise

from 3.73% to 3.96% per 1,00,000 population per year from 2002 to 2011 (National Crime Records bureau, 2012). From these studies, it is evident that mental and emotional needs of adolescents should be catered to. These studies also point towards the need of various mental health and related interventions for the prevention of possible mental health issues and for promotion of psychological well-being. One such way to prevent the occurrence of psychological disorders and to promote well-being can be life skills training. If this training is given at the right age, it can go a long way in terms of making the person more adept at handling various challenges in life. Life skills education can also lead to holistic growth of adolescents as it caters to their social, emotional, interpersonal and psychological needs.

Life skills as defined by WHO (1997) are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour, which enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of day-to-day life. The 10 core life skills given by WHO are as follows-

Decision making- Involves dealing with decisions constructively as problems with decisions making can lead to harmful consequences for mental and physical health.

Problem solving- This factor means solving problems productively. Unresolved problems can create mental stress which can also affect a person physically.

Creative thinking- This domain is also related to decision making and problem solving. Creative thinking means brainstorming and applying novel and useful alternatives and using available resources effectively to solve problems. Creativity also helps in responding to environmental demands adaptively and flexibly.

Critical thinking- Includes analysis of any situation in an objective way. This type of thinking helps in identifying factors which influence our attitudes and behaviors.

Effective communication- Means culturally appropriate ways of understanding and expression of thoughts and feelings verbally and non-verbally. It also involves asking for support and help.

Interpersonal relationship skills- Includes establishing and maintaining healthy and positive relationships which contribute largely to mental well-being.

Self-awareness- Involves recognition of one's strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes etc. Self-awareness is fundamental for other domains of life skills like effective communication, interpersonal relations and empathy.

Empathy- Understanding what others might be going through by imagining ourselves in the situation, not only cognitively but, also emotionally. Empathy helps to develop positive and harmonious attitude towards ethnic and cultural diversity.

Coping with emotions- Being aware of emotions in self and others, knowing how emotions influence behavior and learning to respond to emotions appropriately.

Coping with stress- Includes identifying sources of stress, how it affects us and findings

ways to manage stress. It also involves learning relaxation techniques and other cognitive-emotional tools of stress management so that stress does not take a toll on one's physical and mental health.

The concept of life skills is an all-encompassing one and its effects can be seen on many aspects of a person's life. Many studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between life skills and factors like academic achievement, self-confidence, awareness etc. In a study by Balasundari and Benjamin (2014), a significant and positive relation was found between life skills and academic achievement of high school students. In a study by Khera and Khosla (2012), a significant and positive relationship between core affective life skills (Coping with stress, Empathy, Interpersonal relationships and Coping with emotions) and self-concept of adolescents was found. Life skills also seem to be effective in fostering 'connectedness' in students' lives. Connectedness can be defined as an individual's perception, which make him feel comfortable, valued, accepted and free to contribute in each environment or relationship (Yuen, 2011).

Life skills have also been studied with respect to various environments in which adolescents live and grow. Especially in India, the rural and urban set-up differ significantly from each other in terms of culture, exposure to media and technology, education and employment opportunities, etc. Currently, rapid urbanization has taken its toll on the village life and, so it is important to study its effects on rural adolescents. So, many researches have tried to study the differences among rural and urban adolescents on their life skills, their problems and various coping mechanisms used to deal with them.

In a study by Ramaswamy and Kumar (2012), rural adolescents were found to be having significantly higher levels of problems in areas like health and physical development, finance, living conditions and employment, social and recreational activities, social-psychological relations, personal-psychological relations,

moral and religion, home and family and curriculum and teaching procedures. Gender differences showed that males (both rural and urban) had significantly higher problems in most of the areas. Rural adolescents were highest in problems pertaining to areas like social and recreational activities, moral and religion, vocational and educational future as compared to the rest of the groups.

A study examined the effect of life skills on subjective well-being (SWB), neurosis, stress-depression, vitality and life determination. Amongst all these variables, SWB showed the highest impact from pre-test to post-test due to life-skills training followed by neurosis, stress-depression, vitality and life determination respectively (Sadr-Mohammadi, Kalantari & Molavi, 2014). A study by Yadav and Iqbal (2009) conducted in Delhi, studied the impact of life skills training program on self-esteem, adjustment and empathy of high school adolescents in Delhi. Results revealed that after five months of training, students improved significantly on empathy, emotional adjustment, educational adjustment, total adjustment and self-esteem. The results might suggest that life skills' training creates a positive change in students' attitudes, behaviour and thoughts by creating a supportive and conducive environment for growth. Lolaty, Ghahari, Tirgari and Fard (2012) studied the effect of life skills training on the emotional intelligence of first year students of Medical Sciences. Experimental (n=20) and control group (n=19) were matched on gender, experience of stressful life events in the past six months, level of interest in the field of study, and level of emotional intelligence. Results indicated significant improvement in experimental group as an effect of life skills training, but no significant increase was found in control group.

A massive effort to study the effectiveness of NIMHANS model of life skills training was done in rural Karnataka. The aim of the research was to study the efficacy of this program on various parameters like coping, self-esteem, adjustment (with peers, friends etc.) and psychopathology among 1028 students residing in Bangalore (rural) and Udupi, Karnataka. At the end of one-

year training in life skills, there was a significant change in the way adolescents perceived themselves in various social situations. There were no significant differences in the area of students' adjustment with peers though the qualitative feedback from teachers reported otherwise. Significant differences were found on perceived self-efficacy, self-esteem and general adjustment. Overall, it was observed that life skills training was instrumental in making students take responsibility of their actions (Bharat & Kumar, 2010). Life skills training was conducted for adolescent girls in tribal community in Gujarat by Chaudhary and Mehta, (2012). The effect of the program was seen in increases in self-confidence and understanding related to gender issues.

The studies conducted exclusively for rural students have a special relevance for the current study. It is a fact that rural adolescents get much less exposure to opportunities like life skills training as compared to their urban counterparts. So, the aim of the research was to study the effect of life skills training program on rural adolescents' well-being. To measure well-being Ryff's scale of Psychological Well-being was considered appropriate as it is based on the eudemonic perspective. As per this perspective, human beings are inclined to lead lives congruent with their deeply held values and always seek meaning to fulfil their true potential. Ryff and Keyes (1995) have posited that PWB is different from Subjective Well-being and have proposed a multi-dimensional model of PWB. This model believes in the life-span theory of human flourishing and not just human happiness. The dimensions based on eudemonic perspective like purpose in life, personal growth, and autonomy were suitable for the content of the intervention, which is based on ten life skills given by WHO. Considering the main objective of measuring the impact of intervention and specifically the developmental needs of adolescents, Ryff's model of PWB was more appropriate.

Objectives

To develop life skills development program for adolescents.

To study the effect of life skills development program on psychological wellbeing of adolescent students.

Method

Sample

A total of 104 students participated in the study out of which 48 (Boys-24, Girls-24) students belonged to a school from a village named 'Naygaon' and 56 (Boys-41, Girls-15) from a school in a village named 'Wing'. Students were studying in 8th and 9th Grade. Age range of the sample was 13-15 years.

Tools

Personal Data Sheet

Personal information like birth date, information about family members, education of family members, occupation of mother and father etc. was collected through Personal data sheet.

Intelligence: Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM)

This is a figural test of intelligence measuring general intelligence along with the ability of reasoning and problem solving (Raven, Raven, J. C., & Court 2000). Test-retest reliability ranged from .55 to .84. Concurrent validity ranged from .54 to .86.

Psychological Wellbeing: Scale of Psychological wellbeing

This test is developed by Kulkarni (2015) for Adolescents. This test is based on the model given by Ryff (1989). It included 61 items (26 positive and 35 negative). It consists of six dimensions: -Self acceptance (SA), Positive relations with others (PR), Autonomy (AU), Purpose of Life (PL), Environmental Mastery (EM) and Personal Growth (PG). This is a four-point Likert scale with options ranging from 'totally agree', 'agree', 'somewhat disagree', 'totally disagree'. Cronbach's α coefficient for the total scale is .88 and for subscales, it ranges from .56 to .67. Test-retest reliability is .79 after the duration of three months.

Content validity of the test is established by five experts. Concurrent validity with parents'

rating scale of children's Psychological Wellbeing is .43. Also, the scale is moderately negatively correlated ($r = -.53$) with 'Child and Adolescent Scale of Irrationality' (CASI).

Procedure

The present study started with the selection of schools participating in the study. Two schools from villages namely Wing and Naygaon (Tahasil-Khandala, District-Satara, Maharashtra State) were considered. The schools are 40 and 50 kilometres away from Pune respectively. Personal meetings with the principals of both the schools were held in which all the details regarding the nature and structure of the intended 'life skills training program' were explained. Both the principals gave official permission for conducting the program and all the details regarding the program were finalized. Thereafter, students of 7th and 8th grade (going to 8th & 9th grade) were screened on the intelligence test before the training program. Only those students who scored above the 25th percentile were selected for the intervention.

Students were informed about their selection and a written consent was obtained from students. Later, pre-testing was conducted for the selected students with the scale measuring Psychological Well-being. After pre-testing, the life skills training program started in both the schools. The training program was conducted for one academic year starting from July 2016 to March 2017. Sessions were conducted on every Saturday during school hours excluding holidays and exams. Parallel sessions were conducted in four groups and four trained facilitators conducted the training program in groups of 12 to 15 students approximately. Each session lasted for two hours. Sessions included activities which were conducted for all the 10 dimensions of life skills. Activities were designed keeping in mind the needs of rural adolescents. At least 4-5 activities were conducted for each life skill area. Each session included methods like group discussion, role plays, debates, games etc. Along with these life skills areas, two full day workshops were conducted on sexuality and study skills. These two topics were included in

the training program considering the current, age specific needs of these students.

After the last session of the training program, post-testing was conducted with the same variable Psychological Well-being.

Results

A total of 104 students attended training activities, but students who were present for both pre-post sessions were considered in the analysis (n = 78).

Normality of the psychological wellbeing (total) data was checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality ($p = .326$), which was non-significant showing that distribution of the sample was not significantly different from normal. Therefore, the assumption of normality has been met for this sample.

Paired t test was conducted to study the efficacy of the program on psychological wellbeing.

Table 1 indicates that total score on Psychological Wellbeing is significantly higher than the pre-test score of participants ($t = -6.63$, $p < .001$, $d = .60$) with medium effect size. Significant differences were found on all six dimensions of psychological wellbeing viz. Self-Acceptance ($t = -3.47$, $p < .001$), Autonomy ($t = -5.34$, $p < .001$), Positive Relations with others ($t = -6.34$, $p < .001$), Environmental Mastery ($t = -2.85$, $p < .01$), Personal Growth ($t = -4.07$, $p < .001$) and Purpose in Life ($t = -3.14$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

In the present study, significant differences were found on the total psychological well-being of students ($t = -6.63$, $p < .001$) and on all the dimensions of well-being. Results indicate that life skills' training has been significantly effective in enhancing psychological well-being of rural adolescents. Many studies have shown the effectiveness of such training especially for the group of rural adolescents. A study conducted by Parvathy and Pillai (2015) has revealed a significant enhancement in all the ten life skills areas owing to the training. The study included girls and boys aged between 14 and 18 years from rural areas. Another study by Pujar, Hanshal and Bailur (2014) echoed similar findings for rural adolescent girls. As a result of three months training, there was a significant and positive impact on the life skills of these students like problem solving, coping with stress and empathy. Results of these studies support the current research as they show that rural adolescents can benefit tremendously from the exposure given through life skills training program.

Effects of life skills training also seems to be permeating to other psychological variables like emotional intelligence, self-awareness (Baskaran, 2012) and self-esteem. A study by Joseph and Vasanth (2012) has shown enhancement in self-esteem and psychological well-being because of life skills training.

Interpersonal relations and communication are two important themes included under life

Table 1: Comparison of Pre-and Post- test means on Dimensions of Psychological Well- being (N=78)

	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post test Mean (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d
Psychological Wellbeing (Total)	169.23 (21.33)	184.42 (19.21)	-6.63***	<.001	.60
Dimensions of Psychological Wellbeing					
Self-Acceptance	31.49 (5.26)	33.54 (5.22)	-3.47***	.001	.37
Autonomy	29.04 (5.18)	32.27 (4.71)	-5.34***	<.001	.52
Positive Relations with others	24.28 (4.48)	27.71 (3.83)	-6.34***	<.001	.59
Environmental Mastery	26.12 (4.07)	27.72 (3.25)	-2.85**	.006	.31
Personal Growth	30.23 (5.10)	33.03 (4.90)	-4.07***	<.001	.42
Purpose in Life	28.08 (4.95)	30.17 (4.53)	-3.14**	.002	.34

skills, so training focusing on these two areas seems to be helpful in increasing students' interpersonal awareness and interpersonal management (Subasree, 2012). These two factors are responsible for establishing and maintaining healthy, harmonious relations with others. Ryff's model of Psychological Well-being also has 'positive relations with others' as one of the factors contributing to well-being. This factor is defined as positive interactions with significant others as characterized by peer acceptance, cooperative and empathetic attitude and rational expectations towards others (Ryff, 1989). A significant difference has been found on the factor of positive relations with others ($t=-6.34$, $p<.001$) due to focusing on interpersonal relations, communication and empathy in the training program. The highest mean difference was found for this dimension owing to giving more attention to the above-mentioned dimensions of life skills.

Students have also shown a significant increase in autonomy ($t=-5.34$, $p<.001$), which is characterized by a sense of independence and internal locus of control. Results indicate that as an effect of training, students feel more in control of themselves and their surroundings and feel that they can independently and voluntarily oversee the completion of important tasks and can make decisions. Study by Ghasemian and Venkateshkumar (2017) indicated similar findings. They conducted life skills training designed by World Health Organization (WHO) and effectiveness was seen on development of autonomy among adolescent students. The results revealed that after life skills training, significant increase in autonomy was seen in experimental group as compared to the control group who did not receive training. Significant differences were also observed in sub-components of autonomy-attitudinal, emotional and functional autonomies as an effect of life skills training.

Purpose in life is one of the dimensions of Ryff's (1989) model of Psychological Well-being. This dimension indicates that one's life is meaningful, and one is having life goals and working for it by engaging into goal setting, goal

directedness and prioritization of goals. Results showed that after life skills training, significant improvement ($t=-3.14$, $p<.01$) on this dimension was seen. This result is consistent with a study by Kulkarni (2015) who conducted psychological wellbeing facilitation program for adolescents and significant increase was seen owing to the training.

Life skills training is also beneficial for enhancing students' self-esteem (Yadav & Iqbal, 2009; Maryam, Davoud & et al., 2011). Such constructive changes in self-concept might be related to increased self-awareness, which is a fundamental aspect of the concept of life skills. In the current study, students' self-acceptance ($t=-3.47$, $p<.001$) has increased significantly because of training.

Significant differences were also found on the dimension of environmental mastery ($t=-2.85$, $p<.01$) as a result of training though the mean difference has been the least for this factor as compared to other factors. Environmental mastery is defined as the ability to manage one's life responsibilities and one's surroundings through taking responsibility, management skills and effective problem solving. At this stage of their life, students don't exert much control on their life at home and school. Still, the training program has made them capable of handling their lives effectively. This growth might be partly due to the sessions focusing on problem solving. Training in life skills has been effective in improving adolescents' sense of self-efficacy, which is related to their belief in the ability to complete important tasks or achieve goals (Sumayya, 2012).

Conclusion

Training in Life Skills has been effective in enhancing adolescent students' overall Psychological Well-being and on all the six dimensions as well. However, in the current project, certain difficulties were encountered. The training program had to follow academic calendar of school and so larger gaps between two sessions due to Diwali vacation, school exam etc. could not be controlled. The program was conducted for only 8th and 9th Grade

students though it can be used for other high school grades also.

The present study has a social significance as it was conducted for rural adolescents and, so it has wide implications. A similar training program can also be conducted with tribal and under-privileged students from rural/ urban set up. This module can be conducted in schools and can be made a part of the curriculum. The trainer's training can be conducted for high school teachers so that they can conduct the program in their respective schools.

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Appendix: Sample Items

Psychological Wellbeing Scale for Adolescents (PWBSA)

Sr. No.	Statements	Totally agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally disagree
1)	If any task is to be completed alone, I can easily complete it.				
2)	I choose day to day things (e.g. clothes, toys) according to my wish.				
3)	I feel confident that I can handle responsibilities very well.				
4)	While performing daily tasks if things do not go well, I find options to complete it.				
5)	In the beginning of the year I make resolutions of what I want to do in the year.				
6)	I specifically plan my weekends and leisure time activities.				