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A life skills approach to adolescent development

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Abstract

This study was conducted to find out the level of life skills of adolescents particularly in late adolescence. The sample comprised of 544 college students studying in I and II year, including 292 girls and 252 boys. Life skills Assessment Scale (LSAS) developed and standardized by Dr. R. Subasree, and Dr. A. Radhakrishnan Nair was used to assess the levels of life skills. The result revealed that majority of the adolescents were average in all the dimensions of life skills and global life skills score.

Key words: Life skills, Adolescence, self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, Interpersonal relationship, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, coping with emotions, coping with stress

Keywords: life skills, adolescent development

Introduction

Adolescence is derived from Latin verb “adolescere”; the literal meaning is “to grow to maturity”. Adolescence, as a concept, varies from culture to culture and from society to society. It is a transition period where many physical, social, emotional and psychological changes take place. Stanley hall described this stage as a period of ‘Storm and stress’. He saw adolescence as a period of intense, fluctuating emotions (Nair, R. 2010) [9]. Sigmund Freud identified the element of conflict in mind during the period of physical changes in adolescence. Anna Freud considered the adolescent years more important for development of personality. The term adolescence meaning “to emerge” or “achieve identity” is a relatively new concept, especially in development thinking.

Adolescence is a time of increased self-awareness, self-identity, self-consciousness, pre-occupation with image, and concern with social acceptance (Slater & Tiggemann, 2002) [12]. It is a period marked by severe psychological and emotional stresses (Durham, 1999) [4]. Individuality, identity, autonomy, independence seems more important to adolescents. The whole world appears to be changing for an adolescent, including his/her own body; it can be confusing and unsettling time for them. They tend to question and appreciate the values of the adult world and try to assert their identity and their role in society. They dislike interference, instructions and suggestions. This exploration of self and new found independence at times, results in feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. However, most of the adolescents want to liked and accepted by all around them. Since they are in a confusing and changing phase, they need help and guidance in this crucial stage of transition.

Life Skills Approach To Adolescent Development

The way human beings, and specifically adolescents grow, learn and behave provide the foundation of a life skill approach. Life skill approach develops skills in adolescents, both to build the needed components for healthy development and to adopt positive behaviors that enable them to deal effectively with the challenges of everyday. World Health Organization (1997) [17] defined life skills as, “the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life. Whereas UNICEF (2002) defines life skills as psychosocial and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop the coping and self-management skills needed for a healthy and productive life. By emphasizing adaptation and a positive orientation, this commonly used definition is consistent with the skills-based, positive approach to youth development (Benson, 2007) [2]. Positive adolescents’ development is a process that helps the adolescents to meet the challenges of adolescence through a series of

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experiences, that help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent (Benson *et al.*, 2006). Life skill approach sometimes referred to as skills based education, builds skills in the particular areas to strengthen an adolescents' protective factors, promotes the competencies necessary to make a healthy transition to adulthood, and promote his/her adoption of positive behavior. Life Skills based education enables adolescents to obtain knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills which support the adoption of healthy behaviors. Research has found that life skills development can: delay the onset of drug use, avoid high risk sexual behaviors, improve academic performance, enhance anger management skills, enhance positive social interactions (Mangrulkar, Whitman, & Posner, 2001). Research shows that it is a necessity for adolescents to learn life skills through out their child and adolescent years to facilitates a complete and integrated development of individuals to function effectively as social beings.

Life skills enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitudes and values in actual abilities. It has been found that whether adolescents are planning on attending college, or entering the workforce fulltime, some children leave high school unprepared for the challenges and responsibilities adults face. Since the 'individual' rather than the 'system' is recognized as the basic unit of the society, it is essential that the adolescents be helped to develop skills for their holistic growth and development. Adolescents need help and guidance in all arena of their life, like in taking a career decision, solving day to day problem, managing stress etc. There is a great wealth of research that identifies the need for life skills in many areas of young people lives.

Reviews On Importance Of Life Skills For Adolescents

According to Rosen, 2003, Life skills must be learned for success in society. Life skills enable people to adapt and master their life situations at home, school, work, and any other context in which they find themselves. They give individuals tools for perceiving and responding to life situations and achieving goals. According to a study, adolescents need to be equipped with self-knowledge, social and emotional skills, study skills, decision-making and problem-solving skills, time management skills, and career planning skills to cope with rapidly changing social conditions (Gysbers, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Shea *et al.*, 2005; Yuen, Lau, *et al.*, 2003) [5, 6, 14, 18]. Through the development of life skills, children develop a higher sense of self-worth and competence by learning to work with others, express their feelings, problem-solving, and welcome new experience (Manglallan, 2003) [7].

Teaching life skills as generic skills in relation to everyday life could form the foundation of life skills education for the promotion of mental wellbeing and healthy interaction and behavior. The research study shows the place of life skills as a link between motivating factors of knowledge, attitudes and values, and positive health behavior and in this way contributing of the primary prevention of health problems (Weisen, Orley, & Evans, 1997) [16]. According to Asheeda Nash (cited by Naseeda, 2008) [10], Life skills education can result in: "Enabling young people to handle stressful situations effectively without losing one's temper or becoming moody, learning to disagree politely with use of appropriate "I" messages and assertive skills are important for development of self esteem, positive attitudes, making a firm stand on values, beliefs and cultural differences. When an individual learns all

the basic skills to cope with challenges, individuals will feel more confident, motivated and develop a positive attitude toward life, thus, make more mature and adult like decision, starts taking responsibility for their actions and in turn refrain from risk taking and risky behaviors and become more useful people for the next generation (Naseeda, 2008) [10]. Children whose behavior leads to social rejection often need to learn new interpersonal skills. In such cases, specific instruction on ways to make peer interactions mutually satisfying and productive can be effective in improving the children's peer relations (Asher *et al.*, 1982) [11].

Life skills contribute to our perceptions of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. Life skills therefore play an important role in the promotion of well-being (Weisen, Orley, & Evans, 1997) [16]. The promotion of mental well-being contributes to our motivation to look after ourselves and others, the prevention of mental disorders, and the prevention of health and behavior problems.

Rapidly changing social, moral, ethical and religious values have ushered in certain 'life styles' in the present society especially among the adolescents. Adolescents have easy and almost instant access to a wide variety of information. Certain inbuilt buffers of the society (both as support and control) are no longer available to the adolescents of today (for example: extended family system). The stress faced by the adolescent in such a current situation is enormous. This is reflected by raising suicide rates and growing crime among young persons. There is an urgent need to provide today's adolescents with a new set of ways and systems to deal with the demands of life.

Methodology

The present research study titled "A Life Skill Approach to Adolescents Development" aims to find out level of various dimensions of life skills in the day to day life of adolescents. So by taking this specific nature of problem and objectives into consideration, ex-post-facto research design was adopted for conducting this study. Simple random sampling procedure was used to collect sample for this study from various degree colleges of Kurnool town. Sample comprised of 544 students studying in I and II year which includes 292 female and 252 male.

Life skill Assessment Scale (LSAS) developed and standardized by Dr. R. Subasree, and Dr. A. Radhakrishnan Nair to assess the levels of life skills among Indian adolescents was used for the study. Based the conceptual frame-work of World Health Organisation, this scale measure the life skills of the adolescents in the ten dimensions: 1. Self-Awareness, 2. Empathy, 3. Effective Communication, 4. Interpersonal Relationship, 5. Creative Thinking, 6. Critical Thinking, 7. Decision Making, 8. Problem Solving, 9. Coping with Emotion, 10. Coping with Stress

Results & Discussion

The Investigator measured the level of life skills of the adolescents studying in I and II year Degree colleges by using the Standardized Life Skills Assessment Scale (LSAS). The level of life skills means the total score on all the items (100) of the LSAS. The LSAS is a 5 point Likert scale with five alternatives ranging from- Always true of me (5), Very true of me (4), Sometimes true of me(3), Occasionally true of me (2), Not at all true of me (1). The minimum and maximum scores on the LSA Scale are 100 and 500 respectively. The frequency distribution of level of life skills score for the whole group (N=544) is presented in Table-1.

Global Life Skills Score among Adolescents

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of level of Life skills (Global score) among Adolescents

S.no	Class Interval	Limits	Mid-point	Frequency	Cumulative frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
1	231-284	230.41- 283.69	257.04	16	16	3.3	3.3
2	285-311	283.69 - 310.3	297.00	62	78	11.3	14.5
3	312-364	310.32 - 363.6	336.96	392	470	72.05	86.5
4	365- 390	363.59 - 390.2	376.91	66	536	12.13	98.5
5	391- 417	390.23 - 416.88	403.56	8	544	1.5	100

Mean	336.98	Variance	709.534
Median	338.00	Skewness	-.537
Mode	330	Kurtosis	1.048
Std. Deviation	26.637	Range	167

It is observed from the above table that the mean life skill score is 336.98. There are 100 items in the LSAS. The average value of the LSAS is 300 (100 x 3 = 300). The mean life skills score is greater than the average value. Hence it is concluded that the adolescents have above average Life skills. The values of Skewness (Sk) and Kurtosis (Ku) are -0.537 and 1.048 respectively. For the normal distribution, the values of Skewness and Kurtosis are 0.00 and 3.00 respectively. Hence, the frequency distribution of life skills Scores for the total sample is slightly negatively Skewed and Lepto Kurtic. The Bar diagram for the distribution of Life skills Scores for the whole group is given in the Figure-1

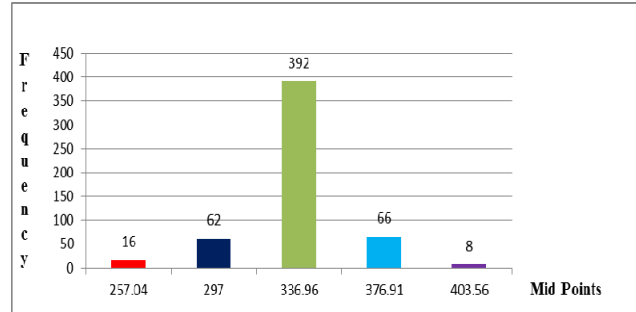


Fig 1: The Bar diagram for the distribution of Life skills Scores for the whole group is given in the 1

5.2 Life Skills Score of Adolescents on Various Dimensions

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Life Skills scores of Adolescents on various Dimensions (N-544)

S no.	Dimension	Category	Class interval	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
1	Self-Awareness	Very low	0-28	14	2.6	2.6
		Low	29-32	57	10.5	13.1
		Average	33-42	397	73.0	86.0
		High	43-46	65	11.9	98.0
		Very High	47-55	11	2.0	100
2	Empathy	Very low	0-27	13	2.4	2.4
		Low	28-32	64	11.8	14.2
		Average	33-42	375	68.9	83.1
		High	43-47	81	14.9	98.0
		Very High	48-55	11	2.0	100
3	Effective Communication	Very low	0-20	16	2.9	2.9
		Low	21-24	49	9.0	11.9
		Average	25-34	401	73.7	85.7
		High	35-38	62	11.4	97.1
		Very High	39-45	16	2.9	100
4	Interpersonal Relationship	Very low	0-26	16	2.9	2.9
		Low	27-31	51	9.4	12.3
		Average	32-42	400	73.5	85.8
		High	43-47	68	12.5	98.3
		Very High	48-55	9	1.7	100
5	Creative Thinking	Very low	0-19	15	2.8	2.8
		Low	20-24	92	16.9	19.7
		Average	25-32	355	65.3	84.9
		High	33-36	71	13.1	98.0
		Very High	37-40	11	2.0	100
6	Critical Thinking	Very low	0-27	18	3.3	3.3
		Low	28-32	64	11.8	15.1
		Average	33-44	389	71.5	86.6
		High	45-49	59	10.8	97.4
		Very High	50-55	14	2.6	100
7	Decision Making	Very low	0-27	13	2.4	2.4
		Low	28-32	82	15.1	17.5
		Average	33-41	351	64.5	82.0

		High	42-46	87	16.0	98.0
		Very High	47-55	11	2.0	100
8	Problem Solving	Very low	0-23	20	3.7	3.7
		Low	24-28	74	13.6	17.3
		Average	29-38	366	67.3	84.6
		High	39-43	79	14.5	99.1
		Very High	44-45	5	.9	100
				Very low	0-24	8
9	Coping with Emotions	Low	25-29	84	15.4	16.9
		Average	30-39	380	69.9	86.8
		High	40-44	62	11.4	98.2
		Very High	45-55	10	1.8	100
				Very low	0-13	13
10	Coping with stress	Low	14-18	68	12.5	14.9
		Average	19-29	376	69.1	84.0
		High	30-34	73	13.4	97.4
		Very High	35-40	14	2.6	100

The above table categorized the sample on different dimensions of life skills.

Self-awareness is the awareness about oneself, one's character, strengths, weaknesses, desires, like and dislikes. In the dimension of Self Awareness it is interesting to find that nearly 3/4th (73%) of the adolescents were average, while 11.9 and 2 percent were high and very high respectively, where as 10.5 percent were low and only 2.6 percent very low. This shows that Empathy is the ability to understand what life is like for other person. It helps us to understand and accept others even if they are different from us. In Empathy majority of adolescents (68.9%) were average, 11.8 percent were low and only 2.4 percent very low whereas 14.9 and 2 percent scored high and very high respectively.

Effective Communication is the ability to express both verbally and non-verbally in appropriate to the culture and situations. In the dimension of Effective communication nearly 3/4th of adolescents (73.7%) were average, 9 percent were low and only 2.9 percent very low whereas 11.4 percent high and 2.9 percent were in the category of very high. The mean value of Effective communication is 29.58 which fall in the category of average.

Inter Personal Relationship is the survival skills important for establishing and maintaining social relationships. It is an efficient tool for the establishment and maintenance of good social and working relationships with people. In interpersonal relationship dimension nearly 3/4th of adolescents (73.5%) were average, 9.4 percent were low and only 2.9 percent very low whereas 12.5 percent high and 1.7 percent were in the category of very high. The mean value of interpersonal relationship is 36.92 which fall in the category of average.

Creative thinking involves original thinking. It is ability of producing new ideas, approaches or actions. In this dimension majority of adolescents (65.3%) were average, 16.9 percent were low and only 2.8 percent very low whereas 13.1 percent high and 2 percent were in the category of very high.

Critical thinking is defined as logical thinking and reasoning including skills such as comparison and classification. In the dimension of Critical thinking majority of adolescents (71.5%) were average, 11.8 percent were low and only 3.3 percent very low whereas 10.8 percent high and 2.6 percent were in the category of very high.

Decision Making is the ability to choose the best amongst the various alternatives or options. In this dimension majority of adolescents (64.5%) were average, 15.1 percent were low and only 2.4 percent very low whereas 16 percent high and 2 percent were in the category of very high.

Problem Solving skills enable us to deal constructively with problem that arises in our live. In the dimension of Problem Solving majority of adolescents (67.3%) were average, 13.6 percent were low and only 3.7 percent very low whereas 14.5 percent high and 0.9 percent were in the category of very high. Coping with emotions helps the individual to understand feelings of themselves and others and accepting it. It enable individual to learn healthy, positive and safe ways to express these feelings. In this dimension majority of adolescents (69.9%) were average, 15.4, were 1.8 percent were low and very low whereas 11.4 and 1.8 percent were high and very high.

Coping with stress enable the individual to recognize the sources of stress, understanding its effects and relax without making the situation worse. In the dimension of Coping with Stress majority of adolescents (69.1%) were average, 12.5 and 2.4 percent were low and very low whereas 13.4 and 2.6 percent were in the category of high and very high. The Bar diagram for the distribution of Adolescents on dimension of life skills is given in the figure -2

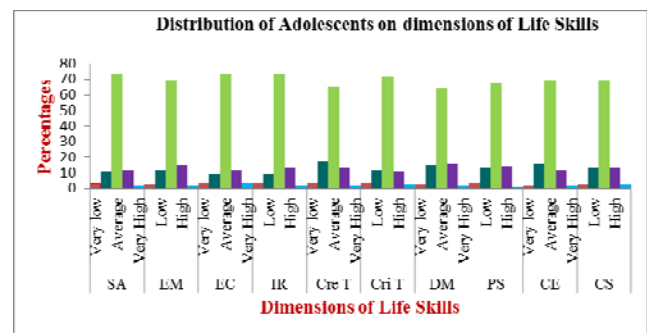


Fig 2: The Bar diagram for the distribution of Adolescents on dimension of life skills

Conclusion

Adolescence is a time of intense physical, psychosocial, and cognitive development. This is the period, when an adolescent is expected to prepare for adulthood by developing the skills necessary for socially responsible behavior. The adolescent's transition from childhood to adulthood can be a smooth process by imparting necessary life skills. This study was an attempt to find out the level of life skills of adolescents particularly in late adolescence. It can be concluded from the findings of the study that adolescents were average in all the dimensions of life skills and global life skills score.

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