ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to examine the concept of spirituality as perceived by youth, to understand their spiritual experiences in various contexts and to investigate the effects of involvement with Art of Living (AOL) organisation on several personal variables. The sample consisted of 55 youth (27 Males and 28 Females) involved with AOL. The sample was taken by using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. A detailed semi-structured interview schedule was formulated to investigate the given objectives. The standardized measures used for assessment were; Spirituality and Resilience Assessment Packet by Kass & Kass (2000), Levenson’s Multidimensional Locus of Control Inventory (1981) and Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Motivation Scale by Hodge (1972). Other self designed quantitative measures involved self-ratings on current level of Happiness, Satisfaction, and Perceived States of Improvement in Physical Health and Stamina, Self Confidence, Leadership Skills and Self-Awareness after involvement with AOL. Rapport Formation formed to be the first step of engaging with the participants. The data collection began with the semi-structured interview. The first part of semi-structured interview was basically the demographic data of the participants which further enhanced rapport formation. The semi-structured interview was recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of analysis. The major themes of semi-structured interview were: religious and spiritual background of the participants, perception of religion and spirituality by youth, involvement and spiritual experiences in various AOL courses and the impact of involvement with AOL on various aspects of their psychosocial variables. Standardized measures were administered after the semi-structured interview was completed. The enormous qualitative data was analysed using multi-stage thematic analysis. The multistage thematic analysis was carried out for participants undergoing different AOL courses, and on variables significant in lives of youth. The master charts were prepared for each question and all the responses were tabulated. Further generalizations and abstractions were made till the time crystallized themes emerged. The findings revealed that spirituality was understood in terms of spiritual practices, personal connection with something bigger than themselves (guru, divine or the supernatural powers), belief in supreme/universal
or divine consciousness, an experience and expression of universal love, realisation of inner self, self-growth and enhancement, emotional equanimity and non entanglement with people, desires and situations, enhancing qualities of the true spirit like naturalness, simplicity, blissfulness and happiness, seeking answers to existential questions and understanding the purpose of life. The spiritual experiences predominantly fell under the themes of universal love, realisation of self and its connectedness with humanity, Guru, Divine and the Supreme Consciousness. Role of Guru as a mentor/Guide/God was another core theme of spiritual experience of youth. A significant improvement in all domains (physical, cognitive, affective, social and spiritual) was reported by youth both quantitatively and qualitatively. Increased eagerness for civic engagement emerged as an important outcome of involvement with AOL. Inter-correlations were obtained between Extent, as well as, Duration of Involvement with AOL and other psycho-social variables. Youth exhibited strong positive correlations between Extent, as well as, Duration of Involvement with AOL and Resilience, perceived level of Happiness and Satisfaction and Improvement in Self-Awareness, Leadership Skills and Self-Confidence. Thus, involvement with AOL significantly contributed to positive physical, mental and spiritual experiences of youth and meaningfully enhanced their well-being.