ABSTRACT

The present study has been carried out to investigate the effectiveness of life skills training on psychological distress, balanced emotional empathy and autonomy among adolescent students.

Adolescence is considered as a vital stage of growth and development and it is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescent period is characterized by rapid physiological changes and psychological maturation. The adolescents are bound to show variation for the duration of this period till the attainment of complete maturity. Furthermore with the changing in lifestyle and culture in the modern times, there is an emerging recognition of the fact that young people are not sufficiently equipped to deal with the increased demands and stresses of everyday life they experience. Comprehensive training program to manage life events during this period is very important. Life skill training is one such program in the present study in focus. It has a sound theoretical foundation and participatory teaching methods which provide them an opportunity to shape their behavioural attitudes. Life skills enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into actual abilities. It also helps them behave in healthy ways, which make them to desire to do so and gives the scope and opportunity to do so. Effective acquisition and application of life skills can influence the way we feel about others and ourselves and will equally influence the way we are perceived by others. They contribute to our perceptions of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. Therefore life skills play an important role in promoting one’s psychological health. This has a contribution towards the motivation to look after oneself and others as well, and towards the prevention of mental disorders, and behaviour problems.
There is an urgent need to make an initiative to enhance the quality of lives of the adolescents. The introduction of life skills education in schools should be a priority in countries where significant proportions of children do not complete their schooling. Experience gained in countries, where life skills programs have been developed, suggests 6-16 years as a critical age range for life skills training (WHO, 1993). Life skill training is highly relevant to the daily needs of young people; it helps to promote psychological health and competence in people as they face the realities of life. Adolescents are sure to get benefitted by this program when this becomes part of the school curriculum. With life skills they can safely explore alternatives, weigh pros and cons of their behaviour and make rational decisions in solving each problem or issues encountered.

Hence, the present study has been carried out to examine the effectiveness of life skills training intervention that would help the adolescents to overcome the problems they face. This is not only helps them to meet the present situation but also strengthens them to face the various changes and challenges in future. In this context the present study focused on the effect of life skills training intervention on adolescents, in reducing the psychological distress and enhancing emotional empathy and autonomy among adolescent students.

The primary objective of this intervention study was to examine the effect of life skills training on psychological distress, balanced emotional empathy and autonomy among adolescent students. The secondary objective was to explore the effect of life skills training on gender differences in psychological distress, balanced emotional empathy and autonomy among adolescent students.
Based on the above objective the following hypotheses have been formulated in the present study:

1. Life skills training will have significant effect in reducing psychological distress among adolescent students.

2. Life skills training will have significant effect in increasing emotional empathy among adolescent students.

3. Life skills training will have significant effect in increasing autonomy among adolescent students.

4. Life skills training will have different effect on adolescent boys and girls.

5. There will be a significant correlation between psychological distress, balanced emotional empathy and autonomy among adolescent students.

For the purpose of the present study 400 adolescent students were screened with the help of questionnaires to assess the psychological distress, balanced emotional empathy and autonomy. Based on the scores, finally 200 students who had scored high on psychological distress and low on emotional empathy and autonomy were chosen and they were divided into two groups namely experimental group (N=100, Males=50, Females=50) and control group (N=100, Males=50, Females=50). The participants of experimental group received 8 sessions of life skills training intervention. Every session lasted for 120 minutes with a frequency of one session per week. A total of eight sessions were administered to the experimental group and no intervention was given to the control group. After two months intervention, post assessment was carried out on both the groups with the same questionnaires that were used for initial screening. To assess the effectiveness of life skills training
intervention, test results of both experimental and control groups, before and after the intervention were compared.

After making detailed analysis of the results with appropriate statistical methods, it has been found that life skills training were highly effective in reducing the psychological distress of adolescent students. It was also found to be effective in increasing the emotional empathy of adolescent students including suffering, positive sharing, responsive crying, emotional attention, feel for others, and emotional contagion. Life skill training was found to be highly effective in increasing the autonomy of adolescent students, including attitudinal, functional and emotional autonomies. The present study also found that gender did not have any significant influence over decreasing psychological distress and increasing emotional empathy and autonomy. Finally, the results of the study have shown that autonomy and emotional empathy were significantly related to each other.