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At the turn of this century, the greatest needs of the society were in the fields of health, education and resolution of social conflict. But now two other needs have been identified. One is the right of all children to the opportunity for optimal development not only in the physical realm but in the intellectual, emotional and social ones as well. The other is the right of children to be treated as changing individuals with increasing autonomy with age. This shift from health needs to the wider developmental areas shows that science can provide solutions to problems.

Many changes in society such as the development of educational opportunities, the development of methods for measuring human behaviour have contributed to the focus on normal development and problems of children. Some studies have focussed on specific skills and skill deficits in the areas of learning disability as well as social development and cognitive aspects of growth which help in tackling the problems of school children.

However, at present there is a growing concern for intervention with normal children to enhance their cognitive and social development as a step towards primary prevention of mental illness. One of the strategies along these lines which is extensively being researched upon in the West is social skills training.
A skill is the capacity to respond flexibly to circumstances in order to achieve a goal with maximum efficiency. According to Argyle (1967), social skills include everyday activities such as greeting, asking questions, explaining, encouraging, discouraging, persuading, resisting and the like both in verbal and non-verbal forms. A long list of skills has emerged now to include some of the types of social skills like listening skills, assertion skills, conflict resolution skills, problem-solving skills, self-expressive and enhancing skills, and communication skills.

In the course of development children learn self-control and acquire positive social skills which enable them to exert control over their own behaviours and make them attractive companions and friends. However, in many situations children also exhibit selfishness, aggressive or impulsive responses which are socially inappropriate.

The complex social skills necessary for confident, responsive and mutually beneficial interaction with other people are certainly among the most important skills a child must learn. A lack of social skills may lead directly to problems in interpersonal relationships or interfere indirectly with optimal functioning in school, occupational and recreational activities.
Social problem-solving skill is one of the specific social skills which include skills such as asking a peer for help or responding to a peer's misbehaviour in a particular situation. These skills refer to the ability of children to solve increasingly complex interpersonal problems over the growing years.

Deficit of these skills lead to a cyclical patterns of increased levels of both peer rejection and inappropriate social behaviour. Hence, social skills training not only correct inappropriate behaviour in problem children but also improve lives of all children. Children can be taught to recognise problems in situations and to utilize effective ways of solving these problems.

The social problem-solving skills training procedures are designed to help children who have problems in social functioning; children may be excessively shy, unassertive or they may lack the skills necessary to engage in meaningful social interactions. This is one of the recent verbal - cognitive approaches that make more explicit use of the child's cognitive and verbal facilities.

Learning about social problem-solving skills may be crucial for preadolescents since social cognition emerges as an important dimension of development during preadolescence. At about age eleven, children begin to be able to evaluate the world around them without relying on information
gathered from concrete objects. Children at the stage of formal operation gradually develop the capacity to reason through the use of hypothesis. When information is given, they can start making logical deductions without first turning to concrete examples (Piaget 1952, 1960).

Along with these cognitive changes a number of social changes also take place during the transitional period. The dependency on adults give way to developing individuality, with its normal desire for self-direction. This self-independent period entails a number of changes—physical, emotional, psychological, behavioural and social. The changes include development of intellectual ability, the capacity and desire for independence, the need for close peer relations, moral values and awareness of self and sexual identity. (Debrun R. and Susanne, 1981). Acquisition of those skills that will make children acceptable to their peers is crucial at this stage and most children need guidance in this regard.

Many researchers highlight the significant areas of development during this phase. Socialization agents beyond the family influence preadolescents in their formation of self concept, their moral values, their cognitive abilities and personal social development. Piaget (1932) and Sullivan (1953) have noted that the free and egalitarian relationship with peers permits a new kind of interpersonal
experimentation and exploration and particularly a new kind of sensitivity, which will serve as one of the cornerstones of the development of social competence. Children spend large periods of time each day in school. Hence, thinking and problem-solving in school-related tasks play increasingly important roles in development. Pre-adolescence is recognised as a significant stage for learning new social skills. Schools seem apt setting both for teaching skills that promote competence and for altering stressful environment which may otherwise lead to maladjustment.

Discussing about the need for assertive skills, Combs and Slaby (1976) observed that everyday children face situations that call for assertive behaviours, but they receive very little guidance in learning appropriate responses. Very few children know how to respond with verbal assertiveness when another child attacks, intrudes or takes objects. They react in ways that often have negative consequences for both themselves and for the aggressor by running away, focussing, retaliating physically or verbally or seeking an adult's assistance. Assertive skills aid children in finding their own solutions to potentially difficult problems.

Combs and Slaby (1976) believed that social skills cannot be trained, practised or researched effectively in isolation from the total "normal" peer group setting.
Continued effort by parents and teachers are clearly needed to help all children develop social skills. The training methods rely more explicitly on verbal and cognitive processes and involve the child more directly and actively in training. These include role-playing, coaching, rehearsal, guided practice, information exchange-feedback and teaching children to use behaviour management techniques on themselves.

Berlin (1975) has argued that the right to prevention of emotional, neurological and learning disturbance should be recognised as one of the most fundamental of children's right. The works that considered the child's perspective in this direction include the interpersonal cognitive social problem solving skills training programme (Spivack and Shure, 1974), the teaching of assertive skills (Slaby,D., 1976) and the teaching of behavioural management skills (Crowder, 1975). Several procedures and its systematic evaluation are being attempted with preschool children. However, studies with later age groups are few. Since many important behavioural patterns are established in the early and middle childhood, a delearning and acquisition of new patterns involve a whole restructuring of mental processes.

George Spivack and Myrna Shure (1974) pioneered the idea of "interpersonal cognitive problem solving" in the schools as a preventive measure for children.
This provides the problem-solving perspective with an emphasis on "dialoging". Elardo and Cooper (1978), in their AWARE program, introduced problem-solving through hypothetical stories. Similar work in this area was carried out by Roger Weissberg, Irving Sigel, Emory Cowen and Ellis Gesten. The latest and perhaps the most comprehensive compilation of practical procedures for conducting proven social decision-making activities at the elementary level and from which further work has been evolved are by Maurice J. Elias and John F. Clabby. Their work spreads over a span of more than a decade involving thousands of students and teachers.

Early instruction in SPS averts subsequent problem behaviours. It is hypothesized that problem-solving skills contribute to the development of an internal locus of control. This in turn builds a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem which ultimately strengthens resistance to substance abuse among other problem behaviour (B. Benard, B. Fafoglia, J. Perone, 1987).

According to the advocates of this method, decision making gives thinking a purpose. Decisions which are based on what we have learned both in and out of school, determine the course of our lives. We make decisions that effect both our success as workers and our success as people. Since this is the promise of education, the new paradigm should
be: schooling focused on decision making, the thinking skills that serve it and the knowledge base that supports it. (Wales, C; Nardi, A. and Stager, R., 1986)

The curriculum developed, implemented and refined by Clabby and Elias has one central mission - to begin early to build children's Social decision-making skills which according to them would prevent our children from becoming psychological casualties. In their opinion one should not wait until students are under peer pressure to do what others want them to do, but to give them the skills of thinking calmly, confidently and clearly. The results of children having deficiencies in problem-solving skills become noticeable when children become older and involve in more complex, ambiguous and challenging situations that require their independent judgement. Hence, the curriculum by Clabby and Elias (1989) was designed to provide children with a sound foundation of social decision making and problem solving in anticipation of the challenges of middle school years and beyond. Their study as they claim, is focussed on the ingredients of true excellence namely, building thoughtfulness, social awareness, responsibility and a positive sense of self worth and self confidence in children. The social decision-making skills help children understand what is going on around them and provide a frame of reference for dealing effectively with new or difficult social situations.
The social decision-making and problem-solving skills involve 1) core thinking skills such as the ability to understand signs of one's own and others' feelings, the ability to decide on one's goals, and the ability to think in terms of long and short term consequences for both oneself & others. 2) a set of readiness or learning to learn skills which include the main areas of increasing self-control and building social skills for group participation and social awareness and 3) Applying social decision-making skills in academic and interpersonal situations that occur throughout schooling. Studies in the area of social problem solving skills have led to an understanding that social problem solving is an important dimension of social cognition and an intervening variable in promoting psychological well-being.

However, the appropriateness of the concept remains to be tested in the Indian context. Perhaps, the excessive emotional reactions and the dependency often noticed in school children which hinder their social and emotional growth may be due to a lack of Social Problem-Solving Skills in children. Explorations along these lines are still on the way to be established in the Indian scenario. Hence, an attempt was made to investigate the Social Problem-Solving Skills, a dimension of cognitive process, among the preadolescents. This research was undertaken to study and evaluate Social Problem-Solving Skills as a measure to restore psychological well being among the local children.