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THE BENEFITS OF LIFE SKILLS TRAINING: ANALYSIS BASED ON GENDER

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to test the effects of life skill training on emotional distress based on gender differences. The sampling was based on 160 adolescent students who participated in this study. These students were enrolled in various classes in city of Kabul, Afghanistan. The study was based on experiment design where we administered life skill training on experimental group and control group was excluded from such life skill training. The findings of the study based on pre and post test administered on both groups shows that as individuals received the life skill training, it influenced positively on their positive state of mind and reduced negative emotions.

Keywords: Emotions, Life Skill Training, Mind, Adolescent, Psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are part and parcel of human nature and our life. Emotions can be positive state of blissfulness and desirability or negative state such as aversion and distress. Mostly, if someone remains under negative emotions influence for long time, it can have negative effects on that person physical and psychological health (Fredrickson, 2000). The reason for this negative effect is that emotions represents the key pathways linking psychological stress to disease and disorder (Cohen & Pressman, 2006). Emotions among adolescence is important since it is at this stage, that individuals are learning emotional control and management. Adolescent is expected to be a heightened stage where individuals become emotional aware, face maturity, autonomy, and regulation. If an individual develops emotional competence in adolescence stage, it is considered as a protective factor for the personal and social growth of individuals. According to Broderick

and Jennings (2012), emotional competence is a good predictor of life success. This is because, it enables individual to take perspective, establish coherent sense of identity, establish fact-based understanding, develop strong and healthy relationships, and learn how to overcome stress and manage various emotions (APA, 2012). An individual who is transiting from childhood to adolescent stage, may experience volatile, frequent, and intense emotions. This stage along with the result of socio-cultural pressure in this age along with emotional intensity can cause individuals to become 'impulsivity' and 'heightened emotionality'. This is accompanied with heightened limbic reactivity, hormonal changes, and emotional restructuring can make individuals to exhibit exaggerated emotional response (Curtis, 2015). Often adolescents do not possess suitable emotional management tools, a situation which can cause individuals to become hyper-emotional (Guyer, Nelson, & Silk, 2016).

The outcome of emotional distress during the adolescence age can lead to several maladaptive behaviors and difficulties such as academic failures, proneness to mental disorders, poor physical health, addictive behaviors, and interpersonal difficulties (Knopf, Park, & Mulye, 2008; Suris, Parera & Puig, 1996; Roeser, Eccles & Sameroff, 1998; WHO, 2014). Both gender experience this emotional distress and the resulting outcomes; however, some studies shows that both genders respond slightly differently to this situation. For example, a study by Soloski and Berryhill (2016) shows that adolescent boys deal with situation by displaying deviant behavior, while, girls internalize the distress and suffer with it.

The problem of adolescent experiencing emotional distress is becoming very common as one study by National Adolescent Health Information Center (2008) stated that almost 20% population of adolescent experience emotional distress. Furthermore, same study suggests that almost 25% of young people possess the symptoms of emotional distress; while, almost 21% population of teenagers between ages 12 to 17 have received some type of mental health treatment.

In response to such situations, government are trying to develop such programs for youngsters which enable them to overcome such problems. For example, 'Life Skills Education' is one of such programs which is used to develop life skills among youngsters (Khera & Khosla, 2012; UNICEF, 2012). Though essential to all throughout life, life skills are usually taught to adolescents who are venturing into life, having to deal with real time issues.

Studies about life skills shows that these skills can be beneficial for teenagers since it improves their skills and help students overcome problems such as emotional one. The benefit of these programs is that these programs empower individual through constructive knowledge, skills, and attitude, and enable making informed choices. Life skills projects are found to be helping teenagers overcoming some of the antisocial behavior (WHO, 2009). The benefit of these programs are that the enable individual to develop stress resilience and emotional maturity (Shwetha, 2015); dealing with transition (Kumar & Chhabra, 2014); emotional health and self-esteem (Mohammadzadeh, Hayati, & Ismail, 2017); reduced psychological distress (Ghasemian & VenkateshKumar, 2017); and emotional competence and improved levels of functioning

(Chhadva & Kacher). Thus, life skills have been advocated to address a variety of issues pertaining to adolescence, and in each case their effectiveness has been ascertained.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Details

The sample of the study consisted of 160 adolescent students who participated in the study. Their age range was between 10 to 19 years and average age was 16.67. All of the participants were from different schools in the city of Kabul, Afghanistan. There were 60 male and 60 female who participated in the study.

Survey Measure

For measuring the emotional distress, we used the scale developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegan (1988) called ‘Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)’. There are 20 items in this measure out of which 10 items are designed to measure positive affect; while, the other 10 items are designed to measure negative affect. Our results based on test-retest shows that the measure had good reliability as all Cronbach alpha for both positive and negative affect and before and after testing were above 0.70 which states good reliability of the measure adapted.

Study Procedure

The study is based on the following three phases as provided below.

Phase I is about screening or pre-testing the assessment. In this stage, a large number of adolescent students were administered PANAS to measure their emotional distress. For data collection, we selected 80 male and 80 female students who had higher score on negative emotions and less score on positive emotions. We selected these students and assigned them to the experimental and control group respectively. In both groups, there were equal male and equal female i.e. 40 each.

Phase II is about intervention with life skills: in this stage, we trained the participants who were in experimental group with 6 out of 10 core life skills. Participants in control group did not receive any training. This training intervention was based on 12 sessions with 90 minutes for each session.

Phase III is about post-test evaluation: In this stage, post-test evaluations were done on both the control group and the experimental group based on the same measurement tool as discussed in phase I.

RESULTS

The results based on mean score is presented in the following table.

Table 1

Mean pre- and post-test score on Emotional Distress (Positive Emotions) of male and female adolescents belonging to experimental and control groups

Group	Gender	Pre test		Post test		Change
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Experimental	Male	14.08	4.77	49.64	1.19	15.55
	Female	11.41	4.79	41.44	4.79	19.91

	Total	14.15	4.46	40.98	4.40	17.74
Control	Male	14.94	4.77	17.70	4.41	1.77
	Female	11.84	5.48	17.48	4.81	4.55
	Total	14.88	5.11	17.54	4.55	4.66
Total	Male	14.50	4.40	44.66	6.91	9.16
	Female	11.64	5.11	44.85	8.67	11.11
	Total	14.56	4.80	44.16	7.84	10.70

The results show that for the life skills in experimental group for positive emotions, based on pre-test we observed moderate level of life skills among male (M=14.94, SD=4.77); and female (M=11.84, SD=4.77). While, in post-test, we observed higher change in male (M= 17.7, SD=4.41); and female (M=17.48, SD=5.48) group. On the other hand, for control group, we observed moderate range of life skills in pre-test in male (M=24.50, SD=4.40); and female (M=11.64, SD=5.11); while, results did not change for post-test situation for male (M=44.66, SD=6.91); and female (M=11.64, SD=5.11). Thus our results pointed out that life skills improved the adolescent positive state of mind.

Table 2

Results of repeated measure ANOVA on mean pre and post test score on Emotional Distress (Positive Emotions) of male and female adolescents belonging to experimental and control groups

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F value	P value
Between subject effects					
Change	8248.505	2	8248.505	855.047	.001
Change * Group	5855.078	2	5855.078	560.245	.001
Change * Gender	287.578	2	287.578	27.082	.001
Change * Group * Gender	55.255	2	55.255	5.028	.084
Error(change)	2725.287	256	20.882		
Between subject effects					
Between groups	5285.205	2	5285.205	222.227	.001
Gender	8.455	2	8.455	.552	.554
Groups x Gender	60.578	2	60.578	2.246	.136
Error	4285.858	256	26.884		

Repeated measure ANOVA revealed a significant increase in positive emotions of the sample selected irrespective of the groups (F=855.047; p=.001). In pre-test the sample had a mean score of 23.56 irrespective of the group, which has increased to 34.26 in post-test. The increase of 10.76 scores from pre- to post-test situation is found to be statistically significant. Further, when group wise increase in the scores was verified, experimental group gained significantly higher than the control group (F=560.245; p=.001). The experimental group has gained 17.73 scores (pre 23.25, post 40.98), whereas control group has gained only 3.66 scores (pre 23.88; post 27.54). Gender-wise also a significant difference was observed (F=27.082; p=.001), where we

find that female students gained more from life skills training than male students (mean gains 12.22 and 9.16 respectively). Lastly, the interaction effect between group and gender was found to be non-significant. The analysis of data for Negative Emotions has been presented under the following tables:

Table 3
Mean pre and post test score on Emotional Distress (Negative Emotions) of male and female adolescents belonging to experimental and control groups

Group	Gender	Pre test		Post test		Change
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Experimental	Male	31.38	3.95	18.08	5.02	13.30
	Female	34.78	4.42	15.30	4.86	19.48
	Total	33.08	4.51	16.69	5.11	16.39
Control	Male	30.80	5.03	28.50	5.48	2.30
	Female	36.10	6.04	32.45	4.81	3.65
	Total	33.45	6.13	30.48	5.50	2.97
Total	Male	31.09	4.50	23.29	7.40	7.80
	Female	35.44	5.30	23.88	9.88	11.56
	Total	33.26	5.37	23.58	8.71	9.68

The results show that for the in experimental group for negative emotions, based on pre-test we observed higher level of negative emotions among male (M=31.38; SD=3.95); and female (M=34.78, SD=4.42). While, in post-test, we observed decreases in male (M= 18.08, SD=5.02); and female (M=15.30, SD=4.86) group with a change of 13.30 for male and 19.48 for female and 16.39 in total. On the other hand, for control group, we observed higher level of negative emotions in pre-test in male (M=30.80, SD=5.03); and female (M=36.10, SD=6.04); while, results did not change for post-test situation for male (M=28.50, SD=5.48); and female (M=32.45, SD=4.81); with difference of only 2.30 for male and 3.65 for female. Thus, our results pointed out that negative emotions decreased in individuals after they received life skills intervention.

Table 4
Results of repeated measure ANOVA on mean pre and post test score on Emotional Distress (Negative Emotions) of male and female adolescents belonging to experimental and control groups

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F value	P value
Between subject effects					
Change	7498.128	1	7498.128	399.363	.001
Change * Group	3597.903	1	3597.903	191.630	.001
Change * Gender	283.128	1	283.128	15.080	.001
Change * Group * Gender	116.403	1	116.403	6.200	.014
Error(change)	2928.938	156	18.775		

Between subject effects					
Between groups	4011.528	1	4011.528	129.498	.001
Gender	487.578	1	487.578	15.740	.001
Groups x Gender	371.953	1	371.953	12.007	.001
Error	4832.488	156	30.977		

Repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant decrease in Negative Emotions of the sample selected irrespective of the groups ($F= 399.363$; $p= .001$). In the pre-test the sample had a mean score of 32.62 irrespective of the group, which has been decreased to 23.58. The decrease of 9.68 scores from pre to posttest situation is found to be statistically significant. Further, when group wise decrease of scores was verified, experimental group obtained significantly lower scores than the control group ($F= 191.630$; $p= .001$), were we find that experimental group has gained 16.39 scores (pre 33.08 , post 16.69), were as the control group has gained only 2.97 scores (pre 33.45 , post 30.48). Gender-wise also, a significant difference is noted between adolescent boys and girls ($F= 15.080$; $p= .001$). This shows that female students gained more from life skills training than male students (mean gains 11.56 and 7.80 respectively). Lastly, the interaction effect between group and gender is found to be significant ($F= 6.200$; $p=.014$).

Discussion

The focus of the study was to test the influence of life skills training or intervention on adolescent students in terms of any change in their emotional distress. We hypothesized that as adolescent students receive life skill training, it reduces their negative emotions and improve positive state. The study was based on two groups i.e. control group and the experimental group. The findings of the study based on pre and post test administered on both groups shows that as individuals received the life skill training, it influenced positively on their positive state of mind and reduced negative emotions. These results were supported by previous studies (Subasree, 2012; Chhadva & Kacher, 2013; Shwetha, 2015; Mohammadzadeh et. al., 2017; Ghasemian & VenkateshKumar, 2017). Overall, our results support this notion of life skill training.

CONCLUSION

Life skills are important capabilities enable individuals to live a normal life and cope with every day or incidental stress and negative affection. These skills include coping, adaptive, management, negotiation, organization and functional capabilities. Based on our study findings, we conclude that life skills are important building block and should be provided using some intervention such as training or coaching. The benefit of these interventions are that they better equip adolescents for managing their emotions while at the same time improving positive state of mind and reducing negative emotions. Our findings also support this view that best time to provide life training is the adolescent stage as individuals are more receptive in terms of learning and also it is this stage when they need this type of help the most.

Conflict of Interests: The author declared no conflict of interests.

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