

Empowering the Young Minds with Life Skills: Impact of Life Skills Education Programme at Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), Bhubaneswar, Odisha

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ABSTRACT

Ever since WHO made a strong pitch for the inclusion of Life Skills Education for adolescents there has been a continuous growth in the interest among academicians and psychologists in the field. Tribal communities in India have traditionally been one of the most economically and socially deprived sections of the society. While there have been numerous programmes for the betterment of tribal communities by the Central and various State Governments, the gap between the desired outcomes and actual outcomes has always existed. In the field of Life Skills Education the positive role of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences has been very effective for the tribal girls. With the support of UNFPA, KISS has been implementing a project on “Empowering young people with life skills” through Life Skills Education (LSE) based Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health to enable them to deal with the demands and challenges in their life effectively. This programme is implemented through a multi- pronged strategy with not only course transaction but also counselling and peer education. This paper is an attempt to study the impact of the Life Skills Education Programme organised by the institute for adolescent Tribal Girls. The researcher has conducted a survey of 300 respondents who had attended this programme and their responses have been noted through a questionnaire prepared by the researcher. The researcher also had one to one unstructured interviews and some focus group discussions to collect data for qualitative analysis. This paper is a primary analysis of the findings of the survey.

Key Words: Life Skills Education, Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health

Introduction

The last two decades have seen an increased interest for Life Skills (LS) among academicians, psychologists and medical professionals who specialize in mental health issues. Way back in 1993, for the first time the World Health Organisation (WHO) made a serious attempt to give a proper explanation for the term Life Skills in the form of a well-structured definition. It defined Life Skills as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. Though this definition was conceived about 25 years ago, its relevance has not been lost over all these years, and the core idea of “adaptive and positive behaviour” is as relevant today as it was in 1993. Yet another important International organisation and one of the most trusted

organisations the world over, The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has given a functional definition of Life Skills. It defines Life Skills as the “psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. In this definition the word psychosocial deserves further explanation. The term psychosocial is to be treated as the combination of not only the psychological make-up of a person but also the surrounding environment that influences the behaviour of an individual.

The common perception among people is that Life Skills are a set of well-defined skills. We need to understand that life skills are much more than a list of well-defined set of skills. The arena of life skills is very broad and encompasses not just certain personal attributes

but also methods and practices. Life skills can be described as capabilities that facilitate a person to be adapt oneself to the changing situations in a way so as to deal with the day-to-day challenges effectively. Various studies have established beyond doubt a positive relationship exists between the way a person behaves and Life Skills. In their study Nair, Subasree and Ranan (2010) have established that positive behaviour by a person in the face of adverse situations is a direct result of the skills acquired by a person. Their study has found that the strength of positive behaviour is directly proportional to the range of the life skills learnt by the person, in other words the time and effort spent by an individual in attaining deep knowledge about various life skills increased the levels of positive behaviour traits in an individual (Nair, Subasree and Ranjan, 2010).

While some skills are specific to a certain situation, others are specific to a particular country or a geographical location. While some skills are specific to a particular age group others are specific to a particular time period. While some skills are applicable to men, there are others that are applicable to women.

In the year 2015, all the member states of the United Nations adopted a blueprint for peace and prosperity now widely known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it was proposed to achieve the targets by the year 2030. Goal 5 of the SDGs declares, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." Though there has been a thrust on gender equity by governments across the globe, after the adoption of the SDGs it has become a priority area for all countries. Goal 5.6 of the SDGs specifically mentions that "universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights" that has been agreed upon as per the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences are ensured for all girls and women. There is a general agreement among the international organisations working in the field of gender equity that Life Skills Education programmes for adolescent girls will surely improve their "sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights". This is emerging as a

key priority area for many organisations and governments.

In their research, Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016), came to the conclusion in the life skills education programmes for adolescent girls there were four main competencies for their empowerment namely- Critical thinking, personal competencies, social competencies, and productive competencies (Murphy-Graham and Lloyd, 2016). In any life skills education programme for adolescent girls these categories are considered for conceptualizations of life skills for adolescent girls.

Tribal communities have historically been the deprived sections of the Indian society. Since India's independence in 1947 various developmental projects have been taken up by the central and state governments for the welfare of tribal communities, there is a lot that needs to be done. Tribal girls are at a greater disadvantage because they have to face the bias against tribals in general and overcome gender bias within their own community. It is extremely essential to prepare the tribal adolescents especially girls with the required life skills to broaden their horizon of their knowledge. Having said that, it is equally important to not only understand but also embrace those traditional beliefs which are rational and practical. Generations to come need to be made aware of and sensitized regarding tribal culture and belief systems. Future generations need to feel proud of their tribal identity and should not hesitate to carry forward traditions and at the same time discard ill practices in the tribal society. In order to bring the tribals to the mainstream of society, tribal youth need to come forward and life skills education is the vehicle which can prepare tribal adolescents to rise up to this challenge. We need to identify a proper starting point for life skills education of tribal adolescents and the first steps in that direction is to have a proper needs assessment, There is a need to identify the life skills needs of tribal students as a starting point. It is only when the needs are properly identified, effective programmes can be designed and implemented. Nicholos (2002) is of the opinion that in order to address problem directly, it is essential to identify its need to address the problem.

Bharath and Kumar (2005) conducted a study to investigate the impact of an intervention provided in the form of life skills education among a group of providing life skill education to economically backward school going tribal adolescents in Bharuch district in the state of Gujarat. On the completion of the intervention programme participants reported positive changes in them with regard to self-awareness. After the programme the participants were in a better position to understand the physical changes in them due to the onset of puberty. It also helped in building their self-confidence and they reported a better understanding of gender related issues. At the end of the study, it was concluded that in sustained and greater efforts were needed in the areas like gender socialization. It was strongly felt by the researches of that study that if life skills programme can be embedded into the school curriculum, it would be of great help in bring about a positive and meaningful difference in the lives of the adolescents.

In their studies Evans, Mullett&Frans (2005), have come to the conclusion that adolescents have been greatly influenced by the rapid changes in the society with regards to the social, moral, ethical and religious values. In the absence of proper support systems to deal with such rapid changes adolescents, in their urge to copy certain 'life styles' find it unsustainable in the long run and experience psychological disorders. Though most of these are diagnosable, a majority of adolescents do not receive proper intervention and the situation worsens. Disruptive behaviour and tendency to cause self-harm are found to be greater in such adolescents.

It has been established beyond doubt in various studies that Life Skills Programme which is intended as an intervention that is provided to vulnerable adolescents have been effective. Such interventions are more effective where there is a need to induce an element of positivity in adolescents. In their studies, Gomes and Marques (2013) have reported that when an intervention was provided to a group of students they confirmed an awareness of greater satisfaction from life and demonstrated a stronger tendency to show a positive attitude for life. Life Skills Programme that is intended as

an intervention to promote academic achievement can be very effective particular among adolescents who do have a positive attitude for academics. In their studies, Prajina and Premsingh (2015) investigated the effectiveness of Life Skills Programme as a means to promote academic excellence found that the life skills and academic achievement are positively correlated.

The government of India has many programmes especially for the adolescents. The most widely implemented programme is known as a Adolescent Education Programme jointly by the MHRD and NACO. Since AIDS awareness can be seen an important step to prevent this deadly disease adolescents school going boys and girls are targeted in this programme. This programme aims at building life skills of adolescents especially with reference to making vital choices that concern their own life It also aims at bringing about a significant improvement in interpersonal communication among the adolescents. One of the key features of the programme is to nurture egalitarian gender role attitudes.

One of the most important areas for the development of adolescents is to bring about an improvement in their self-esteem. Financial independence is sure shot way to bring about a positive change in self-esteem. Several programmes of the central government aim at building financial independence through teaching vocational skills so that adolescents can become self-sufficient and develop mastery in a skills. The Kishori Shakti Yojana is one such scheme

Odisha Scenario

The State of Odisha has a sizeable tribal population, in fact the state ranks at the third place when it comes to the concentration of the tribal population in the country. The state of Odisha has a sizable tribal population. As per the census of India 2011, the tribal population of Odisha stands at 9,590,756. Tribals constitute 22.8 % of the total population of Odisha. Odisha has 62 Scheduled tribes and out of this 13 communities have been identified as primitive or Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). The rate of literacy among the tribals is

52.24 % as against the overall literacy rate of 72.87 %. The tribal male literacy rate stands at 63.70 % and the female literacy rate stands at 41.20 %. The data shows that tribals are a deprived lot as far as education is concerned and the condition of tribal girls is even worse. Therefore, interventions are required in the form of life skills education especially for tribal girls so that they are at par with the other sections of the society.

Available literature on Life Skills Education confirms that schools have an obligation to address intricate social complications faced by children and adolescents. Schools have various ways to address these challenges. Alternatively, schools can aim at promoting the physical health and psychological wellbeing of an individual particularly those from vulnerable groups. It can also be done with the aim of promoting the psychosocial and physical health of individuals, or child protection issues.

Life Skill Education at KISS

With the support of UNFPA, KISS has been implementing a project on "Empowering young people with life skills" through LSE and ARSH to enable them to deal with the demands and challenges in their life effectively.

Life Skill of KISS can be divided into three broad categories:

- Social Skill: Self-awareness, Empathy, Inter-personal Relation and Effective Communication
- Thinking Skill: Critical Thinking and Creative Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making.
- Negotiation Skill: Dealing with emotion and Coping with Stress.

The Approaches Adopted for Life Skill Education at KISS are:

- Course basis transaction
- Counselling
- Extra-Curricular Activities
- Peer Education

These above-mentioned approaches to life skill education are intended for the overall personality development, sense of social

responsibility and life of opportunities of tribal boys and girls. It is specially designed for the adolescents who have negative impacted behaviours due to lack of awareness. Life Skill Education programme and ASRH integrated with the formal education have helped in restricting the tribal children and youths from engaging themselves in the bad habits like smoking, consumption of alcohol, unprotected sex etc. Tribal children have a natural tendency towards sports and KISS has encouraged all these extracurricular activities. Peer education approach is one of the strategies adopted since 2011 to train the students and promote life skill education in the campus as well as in their respective villages during summer vacation. Generally, the tribal students face language problem, adjustment in the campus, social customs, taboos etc. Counselling and guidance approach is a part of LSE and ARSH which help the tribal adolescents to overcome from many such barriers faced by them. It helps them for their self-development, career development and competencies for dealing with day to day situations. Priority was given to the importance of youth friendly counselling in the campus. Life skill-based course basis transaction across a variety of different disciplines taught by leading scholars in their respective fields was also followed.

Objectives of the Paper

- To study the nature of problems faced by the adolescent tribal girls
- To find out whether LSE program addresses those problem areas.
- To explore the overall impact of LSE program on adolescent tribal girls.

Methodology Adopted

In order achieve the various objectives of the paper, the researcher adopted mixed methods research approach. As is the practice in social-sciences research, for this study, both qualitative and quantitative method were adopted by the researcher. A broad definition of mixed methods research has been proposed by Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) as "research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences

using both qualitative and quantitative approaches”

This study deals with the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, Bhubaneswar, of Odisha. Present study tried to find out the impact of the LSE programme and difficulties faced by the adolescent girls while implementing the life skills education curriculum. Attempt was made to evaluate the life skill education on the academic performance of the adolescent tribal girl students. The study was a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative approaches based on primary and secondary data sources by use questionnaire, face to face interview and observation methods for data collection.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the present research was analysed using MS Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0 version) to determine the status of the implementation of Life Skill Education curriculum. The researcher personally digitalised the data from the questionnaires and rechecked the entered data with the responses of the respondents given on paper. This was done to ensure accuracy of the data entry. Once the researcher was fully satisfied with the accuracy of data entry, further procession was done.

Key Findings and Suggestions

- A majority of the respondents did not attend any Life Skills Education programmes before joining the institute.
- A very high percentage of the respondents feel that the LSE programme at KISS has enabled them in their growth and self-awareness in a positive manner.
- Most of the respondents completed only the mandatory Life Skills Education programme at the institute in the first year and did not show much interest in join the programme in the subsequent years.
- 63 % of the respondents felt that a good LSE programme must be focussed on self-awareness, conflict management and decision making.

- 31.3 % of the respondents felt that it should be about learning about their own body parts, process of puberty and mensuration.
- 57% of the respondents felt that the Life Skills Education programme helped them to deal with stress.
- A whopping 81% of the respondents fell that such Life Skills Education programmes are necessary.

The researcher is of the belief that LSE programmes about knowing about their body parts, puberty and mensuration are extremely important for adolescent girls and the girls must be made to understand that all these topics are a part of their self-awareness. A better understanding of their own body parts, the process of puberty and mensuration would sure help them to evolve as better ladies and better individuals

The researcher believes that the data is a warning bell to initiate methods whereby young girls are given knowledge about puberty so that they are prepared for the onset of mensuration with a positive frame of mind.

The data reveals that after joining the mandatory programme in the first year, a majority of the respondents do not show any inclination to join the programme in the subsequent years of their study at KISS.

During the focus group discussions with the respondents the researcher found out that since the course content was the same, the respondents did not get motivation to join the programme in the subsequent years.

The policy makers should take a cue from this and organise various programmes on LSE and try to cover different skills sets for each programme.

This shows that 63 % of the respondents felt that a good LSE programme must be focussed on developed on self-awareness, conflict management and decision making. 31.3 % of the respondents felt that it should be about learning about their own body parts, process of puberty and mensuration. The researcher is of the belief that LSE programmes about knowing about their body parts, puberty and mensuration are extremely important for adolescent girls and the girls must be made to understand that all these topics are a part of their self-awareness. A better understanding of

their own body parts, the process of puberty and mensuration would sure help them to evolve as better ladies and better individuals.

The data reveals a serious problem prevalent among the adolescent girls in India especially in the deprived sections of the society. Puberty and mensuration are taboo in the society. These topics are never discussed openly. The researcher took note of this and raised the point with the respondents during focus group discussions. The researcher specifically pointed out the since all the respondents were girls and having experienced mensuration why was not it mentioned as a most specific change by most. In the focus group discussions it was revealed by the girls that they have been taught not to discuss about it with others and they were shy to talk about it openly.

The researcher believes that the data reveals that as a society we need to evolve to be able to talk openly about mensuration and girls should not be shy about it or feel guilty about it. This is also a indicator to the policy framers of LSE programmes to include in that modules that would focus on telling adolescent girls not to feel shy about mensuration and acknowledge it as a necessary natural process for growth of the human race.

The researcher is of the strong belief that mensuration should be discussed with the pre-adolescent girls so that they are well prepared for an important natural change.

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