



IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON AGGRESSION AND EMPATHY AMONG ADOLESCENTS

Social Science

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a challenging and dynamic period due to hormonal, physical, emotional, cognitive and social changes. Aggression in any form, if present or its manifestations is linked to various psychosocial maladjustments or mental disorders and is negatively associated with pro social behavior and adaptive social functioning, especially during adolescence. It may also be a red flag sign for development of mental disorders. It has been reported in many studies throughout the world that, aggressive behaviors are common in schools. One factor that buffers against aggression during adolescence is empathy. Emotional intelligence and empathy are considered key components of emotional education by developing young people's capacity to successfully cope with the pressures of life and demands of their stressful environment. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is one such interventional program that focuses on these issues and helps in improving empathy and decreasing aggression in adolescents. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2012) defines SEL as the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively. Effective SEL programming begins in preschool and continues through high school. SEL improves student attitudes and beliefs about self, others, school and community. There is a growing awareness in the U.S. and European countries among educators and policymakers about the importance of social and emotional development for successful student performance. Also many studies and research on SEL intervention in school curriculum has reported that that SEL intervention has decreased anger, aggression and has improved empathy. In a way to sum up SEL helps in the holistic development of a student and prepares them to become responsible adults.

KEYWORDS

aggression, empathy, adolescents, social emotional learning.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are young people between the ages of 10 and 19 years as defined by World Health Organization (WHO). Children and adolescent are the future of a nation. They pose as one of the strongest assets of any society and can contribute enormously for the development of a society and community. As reported by UNICEF Globally 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10-19 years today make up 16 per cent of the world's population. Children aged between 0-14 years of age contribute to 26% of the world population. A WHO report stated that in some countries, adolescents comprise a quarter of the population and in fact the number of adolescents is expected to rise through 2050, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The world youth data stated that in India, adolescents form a major chunk of population (>20%) or approximately around 362 millions.

The transition from a child to an adolescent is one of the most challenging and critical periods in any person's life. A plethora of physical, hormonal, social, and emotional and neuro cognitive changes takes place during this transition period. It is a period of tremendous learning, exploration, and opportunity. Yet it's also a time when behavioral and health problems can emerge or worsen, with negative consequences that last long into adulthood. Some refer to this stage as the period of physical and emotional turbulence as academic demands, peer pressure, parental expectations and demands, relationship issues, family issues all come into the forefront of an adolescent life. According to psychologist Eric Erickson adolescence (ages 12-18), children face the task of identity vs. role confusion. According to Erikson, an adolescent's main task is developing a sense of self. Adolescents struggle with questions such as "Who am I?" and "What do I want to do with my life?" Along the way, most adolescents try on many different selves to see which one fits; they explore various roles and ideas, set goals, and attempt to discover their "adult" selves. Adolescents who are successful at this stage have a strong sense of identity and are able to remain true to their beliefs and values in the face of problems and other people's perspectives. When adolescents are apathetic, do not make a conscious search for identity, or are pressured to conform to their parents' ideas for the future, they may develop a weak sense of self and experience role confusion. They will be unsure of their identity and confused about the future. Teenagers who struggle to adopt a positive role will likely struggle to "find" themselves as adults. Bradford Brown, a developmental psychologist at the University of Wisconsin, wrote in a report for the National Academy of

Sciences that adolescents have four developmental tasks: 1. To stand out: to develop an identity and pursue autonomy; 2. To fit in: to find comfortable affiliations and gain acceptance from peers; 3. To measure up: to develop competence and find ways to achieve, and 4. To take hold: to make commitments to particular goals, activities and beliefs.

One has to adjust and adapt to these changes in life. Adolescents must learn certain ways of behavior or skills to cope with the situation by which he/she can attain harmony with his/her environment around his/her. When adolescents believe they have the necessary resources to deal with difficulties, they are more likely to make wise choices. If, on the other hand, they feel that they cannot face a problem, they may make poor choices. When coping mechanism fails and an adolescent cannot adjust with the growing demands or challenges, emotional tension and stress creeps up in an adolescent's life. Craig and Bushman stated that most common way to release tension from any stressors is anger. And anger is most often expressed by aggression. Aggression is behavior which causes harm to another person. The nature versus nurture controversy has been a continuing debate in explaining the origin of aggression. Among the different theories about the nature and cause of aggression, two theories stand out, namely, those who believe that aggression as innate and those that see it as a learnt behavior. Glassman et al reported that according to Sigmund Freud's Psychodynamic theory, human aggression is an instinctive drive, related to the person and not the situation, and therefore an unavoidable part of human life. Freud believed that all humans possess two basic drives from birth that contribute to personality development and behavior: the drive for aggression (*Thanatos*) and the drive for pleasure (*Eros*). Thanatos, or destructive energy, expresses itself in aggression to others, as well as self-destructive behavior. Moreover, the two primitive forces, life and death instincts, seek constant expression and satisfaction, while at same time, opposing one another in our subconscious. This conflict is the origin of all aggression. Dinkes et al reported that aggression in any form, if present or its manifestations is linked to various psychosocial maladjustments or mental disorders and is negatively associated with pro social behavior and adaptive social functioning, especially during adolescence. It may also be a red flag sign for development of mental disorders. Aggressive behavior and interpersonal conflicts among children and youth continue to be common problems in educational systems across the globe. According to Furer et al aggressive behavior in high school settings leads to a significant decline in education and, consequently, reduces the quality of teaching and learning.

Many Studies and research on psychological health has focused on the risk factors that may have a negative impact on emotional well-being and the beginning of mental illness in adolescents. If we can protect the emotional well being of our children and adolescent then we can also prevent the onset of psychopathology. In this regard, life skills intervention and prevention programs have been developed throughout the world to promote emotional wellbeing. Emotional intelligence and empathy are considered key components of emotional education by developing young people's capacity to successfully cope with the pressures of life and demands of their stressful environment. Hence, it is of utmost importance that we give impetus on the development of life skills that will help our adolescent have positive effects on social-emotional skills, communication skills, interpersonal relationships, and coping strategies. According to Singh and Menon a number of related terms are used in this context and some of these include

- Life skills by WHO
- 21st century skills
- Non-cognitive skills
- Non-academic skills
- Character skills
- Soft skills
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

SOCIALEMOTIONALLEARNING

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is strongly influenced by Daniel Goleman's theory on Emotional Intelligence (1995) which argues that in order to be successful in any given environment, humans need to be able to understand and effectively navigate social norms and networks. The website of CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning 2012 defines SEL as "the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively. In sum, SEL may best be defined as "how we learn the basic skills needed to work effectively with other people, manage our own emotional concerns, and be effective in our lives". According to CASEL social emotional learning consists of five core competencies self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. SEL is critical to developing competencies besides academic content knowledge that are necessary to succeed in school, college and in careers. Effective SEL programming begins in preschool and continues through high school.SEL improves student attitudes and beliefs about self, others, school and community. It provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, improves the grades, improves caring and concern for others, establishes and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, handle interpersonal situations effectively, increases empathy and improves emotional quotient in a student. All these put together helps as a buffer against anger, aggression and also help a student to better handle any challenging situation in life. There is a growing awareness in the U.S. and European countries among educators and policymakers about the importance of social and emotional development for successful student performance. As Payton and Weisberg sums up that SEL helps in the holistic development of a student and prepares them to become responsible adults .

Problem Statement

It has been reported in many studies throughout the world that, aggressive behaviors are common in schools. Studies by Aluede et al and Shekarey et al have stated that violence in schools was an issue that had become more prominent in the last few years. Research conducted in 2010 by Omoteso et al showed that prevalence of aggression among students was 67.2%. The level of aggression was found to be high among adolescents as stated by Celene et al. It ranged from 17.7% overall to 66.5% for physical aggression. Studies conducted in different parts of the world show that prevalence of behavioral and emotional problems in adolescents range from 16.5% to 40.8%and in India as reported by Kumar et and Kumari et al it is in the range of 13.7% to 50%.

Impact Of Social Emotional Learning In School Curriculum

There is a growing literature supporting the effectiveness of programs that promote emotion-related abilities among youth. These initiatives are commonly called Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) interventions and appear to offer promising benefits, including the reduction of

aggressive behaviors and the fostering of socio-emotional skills and mental health. A meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students. Compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance Study done by Celene et al reports that social emotional learning reduces aggressive behaviors in school students and promotes positive behavior Meta analysis done by Rebecca et al reported that School-based SEL represents an important set of approaches to promote the positive academic growth, behavior, and development of youth. A metaanalysis by Merrell et al was done on SEL studies that used SEL as universal interventions in schools with students in kindergarten through high school. Findings of this study support the use of SEL interventions in schools to promote healthy development.

Using these five skills as a framework, school-based social and emotional learning curriculums target specific social and emotional learning skills to teach and promote healthy social-emotional development. For example, the Strong Kids/Teens social and emotional learning program by Merrell, Carrizales, Feuerborn, Gueldner, and Tran was designed to focus on the teaching of social and emotional skills, promoting resilience, strengthening assets, and to improve coping skills As reported by Feuerborn et al, Gueldner et al, Harlacher et al, Isava, Marchant et al , Nakayama et al the Strong Kids curriculum program for SEL has consistently been found effective at increasing students' knowledge of healthy social-emotional behavior. Several studies have been conducted using the various SEL programs created by Dr. Merrell and colleagues (e.g., Strong Start, Strong Kids, Strong Teens). However, limited research has been done specifically with high school students. Studies, led by Dr. Merrell, implemented these programs at their respective grade levels. These were conducted at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels, using within groups, pre-post treatment designs. The research results from these and other studies done by Castro Olivo and Merrell(2008) show that: Participation in [these programs] consistently results in significant and meaningful increases in students' knowledge of curriculum-related concepts: emotional knowledge and management strategies, problem-solving skills, coping strategies, self-management skills, cognitive change techniques to enhance optimism and reduce negative thinking errors, and the ability to set goals and plan for positive behavior change. The improvement that is being demonstrated in students with internalizing disorders will help school educators move forward more confidently with Strong Teens. Durlak in his study reported that while the study's results showed statistically significant improvement for student with internalizing symptoms, there is still a need for more research to be done in additional high schools with larger sample sizes.

Clearly, research Overall, much of the research conducted on Strong Kids/Teens curricula has indicated it is an effective SEL intervention. Studies done by Pellegrino et al on the core curriculum and the use of follow up procedures to test maintenance effects show that the intervention could be used as a preventative, universal intervention

LACUNAE IN THE PRESENT KNOWLEDGE:

There has been growing scientific evidence that developmental resilience concerns the ability of an individual or an adolescent to cope successfully with adversity, risk factors and severe life stressors to develop into a competent and happy adult. Central to the notion of this developmental resilience is the ideas that some characteristics of resilience like the cognitive, behavioral and affective skills that enable one to cope effectively with adversity may be systematically taught and learnt through social and emotional learning.

Brackett et al stressed that although the primary mission of educational system has traditionally been perceived as promoting the development of academic skills, there is growing support and advocacy for the systemic inclusion of skills that may be considered non academic but are in fact key in supporting the overall growth of an adolescent or student. Critical thinking, problem solving, emotional regulation, creativity, communication, responsible thinking are in fact necessary for a student to succeed apart from his education. Again there is a growing body of evidence as reported by Olivo et al that social and emotional learning helps in the acquisition of these skills that plays a important key for the development of an adolescent. However, unfortunately, social and emotional learning is believed to be a "missing piece" in our educational system particularly in India more so in Assam. Most SEL evidence is based on American studies (83% of

the existing literature), which makes it difficult to test their generality worldwide. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 2003, Introduce life skill education as an integral part of the curriculum through continuous and comprehensive Education for class six to ten. Sarva Shiksha Aabhiyan (SSA) also has under its agenda life skills training in for upper classes. However Geeta Shinde in her report stated that there are certain challenges in imparting these skills in India till date. Many schools are still not clear which life skill intervention curriculum to follow (whether WHO or CASEL). So there is lack of proper definition and understanding of life skill curriculum in India. There is limited evidence in developing countries about life skills text. Also there is very less evidence based on research and less documentation on these intervention programs. There is lack of proper guidelines so practical implementation of these curriculums becomes difficult in India. Many a time teachers in India lack the proper training to teach these skills in school. Also our education system or syllabus puts much impetus on the academic curriculum that at times these intervention programs take a back seat. However the New Education Policy of India 2019 in its draft again has laid emphasis on social emotional skills. It states that curriculum and pedagogy are transformed by 2022 in order to minimize rote learning and instead encourage holistic development and 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, scientific temper, communication, problem solving, ethics, social responsibility, and digital literacy. It is based on the principle that education must develop not only cognitive capacities - both the 'foundational capacities' of literacy and numeracy and 'higher-order' cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving - but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions. Teachers will also focus on socio-emotional learning - a critical aspect of any student's holistic development. Recently as reported in the website of teachers foundation the Indian Social & Emotional Learning Framework (ISELF) was developed in 2019. It is a research-based educational resource developed by The Teacher Foundation to foster social emotional development of Indian children, using a carefully age-banded approach, from 6 years to 18 years. ISELF will help teachers, counselors; facilitators develop 5 vital social-emotional competencies in children.

WAY FORWARD

There is a lack of SEL evidence outside of the US and western countries; most SEL evidence is based on American studies (83% of the existing literature), which makes it difficult to test their generality worldwide. Moreover, there is lack of SEL intervention studies in India. To fill these important gaps in SEL initiatives my PhD thesis titled "Effectiveness of Social-Emotional Learning Intervention on Aggression and Empathy among Adolescents" would aim to test the effectiveness of a SEL intervention in high school settings to reduce aggression and enhance empathy. The study is hypothesized that the SEL intervention would contribute to the reduction of various indicators of aggression; including instrumental and emotional components of aggression and also that the SEL intervention would enhance the empathic abilities. In the pilot study by Jayashree et al 80 students from an English medium school were taken. Using three questionnaires, aggression and empathy of students were measured pre SEL intervention. After twelve sessions of SEL intervention, the aggression and empathy was again measured using the same questionnaires to find out if there is a difference between the pre and the post scores. Most of the aggression and anger came down post SEL intervention. It was also found to have significant difference in pre and post intervention ratings of empathy. The significant difference in pre and post intervention ratings of aggression as well as empathy led to conclude the efficacy and effectiveness of the SEL intervention.

FUTURE DIRECTION FOR MAIN STUDY

Since the pilot study was confined to only eighty subjects from the intervention group where Social-emotional learning (SEL) was facilitated, the control group data is yet to be processed. With the current outcome of the study made on the basis of this eighty sample of the intervention group, it is hope that it would be feasible to establish the objectives of the study and that the final outcome would explore many more psychological correlatives hidden in the data set.

Conflict Of Interest: None

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