

The Need for Life Skills among Adolescents

SEEMA AWASTHI* AND CHANDRA KUMARI**

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a crucial phase in human life. It is a critical period of rapid physical, mental and social development. They face numerous challenges in their life such as adjusting to changing body growth and achieving a satisfactory sexual identity, self-identity (self-concept and self-esteem) and choosing a vocation, which leads to the establishment of economic independence. Adolescents have diverse need but their needs are not fulfilled by our education system and they experience gap between school and out of school reality. There is lacuna in education that seems to be getting more obvious as in the form of drug abuse, suicides, depression, violence, declined value system, stressful competition, materialism, and crimes. There is need to understand adolescents' diverse need and efforts should be made to meet their unmet need. Present study attempts to assess the need for life skills among adolescents of secondary school. The data were collected from a sample of 264 adolescents from Classes IX and X of public and private schools of Etawah city with the help of self-administered questionnaire. Results of study revealed that 38.25 percent had low knowledge level of life skills and only 18.18 per cent showed high knowledge level of life skills and remaining 43.57 per cent were in the category of moderate knowledge of life skills. Students' socio-economic status was significantly associated with their knowledge level of life skills. There is strong need to relate the education with the sensible aspect of life where student can be skillfully made responsible for his/her behaviour or actions and life skills education should become an integral part of education so an individual can operate effectively in society in an active and constructive way.

* Research Scholar, Human Development, Banasthali University, Rajasthan.

** Assistant professor, Department of Human Development, Banasthali University, Rajasthan

Introduction

Adolescence is a dynamic period of growth and development. The term adolescents refers to individuals in the age group of 10 to 19 years and are understood in different ways in different cultural contexts. In India, adolescent comprises of 22.5 per cent of total population and their number according to 2001 census is over 225 million and this number is growing with a definite possibility of making this country the youngest in the world in near future. This period needs a special consideration because it is a period of increased risk taking and therefore, susceptibility to behavioural problems at the time of puberty and new concerns about reproductive health. (UNEP 1995).

The present condition of adolescents clearly shows that our youths' quality of life has significantly deteriorated. Researches show that significant rise in the problems faced by the adolescents for example, serious emotional disturbances has increased (WHO,2001), along with increased sexual activity, rise in AIDS cases in India and greater use of alcohol consumption. Studies have found that one-third of one-half of adolescents struggle with low self-esteem, especially in early adolescence (Harter, 1999;Hirsch & Dubois, 1991). The result of low self-esteem can be temporary, but in serious cases can lead to various problems including depression, delinquency, self-inflicted injuries, suicide and anorexia nervosa (Battle, 1990; Bhatti 1992). There is high prevalence of suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, death wish and deliberate self harm in adolescent population (Tanuj Sidharta and Shivanada Jena, 2006). The host of factors that promotes high risk behaviour such as alcoholism, drug abuse and casual relationships are boredom, rebellion, disorientation, peer pressure and curiosity. The psychological factors such as the inability to tackle emotional pain, conflicts, frustrations and anxieties about the future are often the driving force for high risk behaviour. Narayanan, S. (2003) found that it is shocking to note that almost 80 per cent of students feel that they cannot talk to their parents about personal problems. Nearly 40 per cent also said that they feared examinations and suffered from fear of failure.

There is a need for adolescent-friendly services, programmes, policies and interventions to meet their needs and psychosocial well-being. Many interventions have focused on addressing specific risk factors and health problems rather than using a combination of mutually supportive activities. Combination of mutually supportive interventions that promote psycho-social development impart skills that would strengthen adolescent abilities and also enhance their

quality of life, which is the need of the hour. One of the best practice models for contributing to psycho-social well-being of adolescents is development of life skills. Life skills are problem-solving behaviours appropriately and responsibly used in the management of personal affairs. Life skills play an indispensable role in one's health with respect to physical, mental and social well-being. It enables an individual not only to develop a sense of well-being but also the ability to cope with oneself, others and the general environment.

WHO (1997) rightly points out life skills "a group of psycho-social competence and interpersonal skills that help people to make informed decision, solve problems, think creatively and critically, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. These abilities help in the promotion of mental and social well being and competence in adolescents to face the hard realities of life". Further UNESCO (2001) conceptualised life skills as person's ability to maintain a state of mental well-being and to demonstrate the same in adaptive and positive behaviour while interacting with others or his environment. It has been widely recognised that the development of life skills should be the primary concern of education. UNICEF defines life skills as a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude, and skills.

Adolescents with low level of life skills are known to develop high risk behaviours which lead to long-lasting health and social consequences. Life skills development is a key to facilitate this process of transforming information into healthy behaviour. Many countries across the world have introduced life skills education in the school curriculum or for adolescents in special situations. Life skills have been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". WHO and UNICEF agree that life skills are generally applied in various aspects of life such as in the context of health and related problems. It can be utilised in many content areas, issues or topics such as preventions of drug abuse, sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS/STDs prevention, suicide prevention, etc.

Life skills education approach is an interactive educational methodology that not only focus on transmitting knowledge but also aim at shaping attitudes and developing interpersonal skills. The important goals of the life skills approach are to enhance young people's abilities to take responsibility for making healthier choices,

resisting negative pressures and avoiding risk behaviour. Teaching methods are youth centred gender sensitive, interactive and participatory. The most common teaching methods include working in groups, brainstorming, role-playing-storytelling, debating, and participating in discussions and audio-visual activities. Therefore, Life-skills are the building blocks of one's behaviour and need to be learnt well/adequately to lead a healthy, meaningful and productive life.

Objectives

- To assess the socio demographic profile of the adolescents.
- To assess the need for life skills education among adolescents.

Method

Selection of locale and sample

The area selected for the present study was the Etawah District, Uttar Pradesh. The subjects included in this study were 264 students of government and private schools between the age group of 13 to 15 years.

Data collection and instrument

Socio-economic status scale developed by Dr. Bhardwaj was used to measure individual's socio-economic status and it includes items from different aspect of socio-economic status. The answer have to be elicited on five point scale and subjects are asked to give responses for father, mother and himself (case) separately in the scale. For the assessment of need for life skills, a structured questionnaire was developed by the investigator. At preliminary state, a careful study of the relevant literature and other questionnaires/inventory was done by the investigator. The tool was pretested on small number of adolescents to ascertain its comprehensibility as well as feasibility of administration under the field conditions and to remove any ambiguity in questions. Questionnaire comprises of questions related to three fundamental dimensions of life skills –

- A. Cognitive Skills: Problem-solving, Decision-making, Critical thinking, Creative thinking
- B. Social Skills: Empathy, Effective Communication and Interpersonal relationship
- C. Self Management: Self-Awareness, Coping with emotions and Coping with stress

Results

On the basis of the data analysis and interpretation, the following main findings have emerged out of the present investigation:

Table 1
Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic characteristics	Frequency (N=264)	Percentage	
Age	13-14	150	56.81
	15-16	114	43.18
	Boys	130	49.24
	Girls	134	50.75
Grade	IX	144	54.54
	X	120	45.45
School	Government	132	50.00
	Private	132	50.00
Socio-economic Status	Upper class	85	32.19
	Middle class	120	45.45
	Lower class	59	22.34
Parents' education	Fathers' Education		
	Illiterate	18	6.81
	Primary	31	11.74
	Secondary	70	26.51
	Graduation	61	23.10
	Postgraduation	84	31.81
Mothers' education	Illiterate	27	10.22
	Primary	44	16.66
	Secondary	87	32.95
	Graduation	66	25.00
	Postgraduation	40	15.15

The study was conducted on 264 adolescent's boys and age group of girls in the age group 13 to 16 years. Respondents in the age of 13 to 14 years were highest in number (56.81 per cent) followed by 15 to 16 years (43.18 per cent). They were studying in Class IX and X in government and private school of Etawah city and they belonged to different socio-economic classes. Out of 264 adolescents, majority of them (45.45 per cent) were from middle socio-economic status followed by upper socio-economic status (32.19 per cent) and low socio-economic status (22.34 per cent).

In the analysis of parents education, it has been found that majority of fathers were post-graduates (31.81 per cent); 70 (26.51 per cent) fathers had secondary and higher secondary education and only 6.81 per cent fathers were illiterate. Mothers of these adolescents had lower education than fathers, majority of them completed secondary education and only 15.15 per cent had post-graduation.

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents
on Life Skills Knowledge Scores

Score Range	Categories	Frequency (N = 264)	Percentage
293-400	High knowledge	48	18.18
186-293	Moderate knowledge	115	43.56
80-186	Low knowledge	101	38.25

Table 2 exhibits the respondents' knowledge of life skills. Out of 264 respondents majority of them, i.e., 43.56 per cent fell in the category of moderate level of knowledge of life skills. Whereas, 38.25 per cent respondents fell in low level of knowledge of life skills and only 18.18 per cent showed high level of knowledge regarding various life skills.

Table 3
Gender Wise Distribution of Study Population on Life
Skills Knowledge Scores

Score Range	Categories	Boys (N = 130)		Girls (N = 134)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
293-400	High knowledge	27	20.76	21	15.67
186-293	Moderate knowledge	58	44.61	57	42.53
80-186	Low knowledge	45	34.61	56	41.79

Table 3 reveals that among boys respondents majority of them i.e., 44.61 per cent fell under the category of moderate level of life skills. Apart from this 20.76 per cent were in the category of high knowledge level of life skills and 34.61 per cent respondents had low level of knowledge, whereas, 41.79 per cent girls respondents had low level of knowledge regarding different life skills and only 15.67 per cent were in the category of high level of knowledge.

Table 4
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Government and Private
School Respondents on Life Skills Knowledge Scores

Score Range	Categories	Boys (N = 132)		Girls (N = 132)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
293-400	High knowledge	19	14.39	29	21.96
186-293	Moderate knowledge	60	45.45	55	41.66
80-186	Low knowledge	53	40.15	48	36.36

Table 4 indicates the knowledge of life skills among government and private school respondents. Among government school respondents 45.45 per cent were in the category of moderate level of knowledge whereas 40.15 per cent respondents had low level of knowledge and only 14.39 per cent showed high level of knowledge regarding life skills. Among private school respondents, majority 41.66 per cent were in the moderate level of life skills, 21.96 per cent respondents showed high knowledge of life skills and 36.36 per cent fell under the category of low level of knowledge regarding various life skills.

Table 5
Mean and SD Scores of Respondents on Life Skills Knowledge Scores

Dimensions of life skills	N=264		
	Mean	SD	M+_SEM
Cognitive skills			
Decision making	23.47	6.10	0.375
Problem solving	25.89	5.86	0.368
Critical thinking	28.13	5.04	0.310
Creative thinking	23.88	5.37	0.330
Social skills			
Empathy	28.57	4.81	0.296
Effective communication	23.90	6.13	0.377
Interpersonal relationship	27.28	5.17	0.318
Self-management			
Self awareness	26.71	5.27	0.324
Coping with emotions	24.09	5.30	0.326
Coping with stress	23.31	4.58	0.282
Overall	255.23	15.37	0.9464

Table 5 depicts the knowledge scores on life skills among adolescent and the overall knowledge mean score is 255.23 and SD is 15.37. Respondents obtained higher knowledge mean scores in the dimension of empathy (28.57) followed by critical thinking (28.13); interpersonal relationships (27.28) and self-awareness (26.71). Out of the three dimensions of life skills (cognitive skills, social skills and self-management skills) respondents scored high mean on social skills (empathy, interpersonal relationships and effective communication) in comparison to other dimension of life skills. The low scores knowledge areas are coping with stress (23.31), effective communication (23.90), creative thinking (23.88) and decision-making (23.47).

Table 6
Mean and SD Scores of Boys and Girls Respondents
on Life Skills Knowledge Scores

Dimensions of life skills	Boys (N=130)		Girls (N=134)		't' value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Cognitive skills					
Decision-making	24.81	3.75	23.07	2.57	4.393**
Problem-solving	26.77	3.18	25.61	3.40	2.871**
Critical thinking	28.42	3.26	28.53	3.06	0.393
Creative thinking	23.69	4.57	23.50	5.21	0.315
Social skills					
Empathy	28.53	3.64	29.88	2.45	3.878**
Effective communication	24.87	4.85	23.77	4.72	1.867
Interpersonal relationship	26.72	3.70	27.95	3.04	2.946**
Self-management					
Self-awareness	27.61	3.77	26.04	3.16	3.691**
Coping with emotions	23.20	2.53	22.80	2.26	1.602
Coping with stress	23.76	4.20	21.89	4.58	3.462**
Overall	258.94	13.28	252.85	11.52	3.980**

** Significant at 0.01 level of significance

Table 6 presents the gender wise knowledge scores on different dimension of life skills. The overall mean score obtained by boys is 258.94 and girls is 252.85. The calculated t value is higher than the table, which clearly shows the significant difference between the knowledge of life skills among boys and girls respondents. Girls obtained higher knowledge scores on empathy (29.88), interpersonal relationship (27.95) than boys and there is significant difference in these areas. Apart from this boys scored higher knowledge mean scores in coping with stress (23.76), self-awareness (27.61) decision making (24.81) and problem-solving (26.77) in comparison to girls' respondents and t values indicate Significant difference between the knowledge level of life skills among boys and girls respondents.

Table 7
Mean and SD Scores of Government and Private School
Respondents on Life Skills Knowledge Scores

Dimensions of life skills	Government		Private		't' value
	schoo	(N=132)	schoo	(N=132)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Cognitive skills					
Decision-making	24.58	3.92	23.20	4.23	2.76**

The Need for Life Skills among Adolescents

Problem-solving	25.21	3.19	26.22	3.41	2.48*
Critical thinking	27.79	3.56	28.23	3.28	1.10
Creative thinking	23.43	3.22	24.31	3.54	2.11*
Social skills					
Empathy	28.37	3.40	28.72	3.11	0.360
Effective communication	22.20	3.51	24.19	3.43	4.73**
Interpersonal relationship	27.09	3.68	27.73	4.06	1.36
Self-management					
Self-awareness	25.81*	4.26	27.17	3.51	2.83**
Coping with emotions	24.72	3.63	24.35	3.09	0.902
Coping with stress	23.97	3.12	22.89	3.76	2.54*
Overall	252.88	14.17	257.36	12.02	2.788**

** Significant at 0.01 level of significance

* Significant at 0.05 level of significance

In the analysis of Table 7, it has been found out that there is significant difference between the overall knowledge mean scores among respondents of government school (252.88) and respondents of private school (257.36). Respondents of government school scored higher knowledge mean on decision-making (24.58), followed by coping with stress (23.97) than private school respondents. Whereas, the knowledge scores obtained by private school respondents on problem solving (26.22), effective communication (24.19), self-awareness (27.17) are higher in comparison to government school respondents.

Table 8
Association of Life Skills Knowledge with Socio Economic Status of Adolescents

Socio-economic Status	Life Skills Knowledge			Total
	Low knowledge	Moderate knowledge	High knowledge	
Low SES	40	37	8	85
Middle SES	50	51	19	120
High SES	11	27	21	59
Total	101	115	48	264

Table 8 shows the association of life skills knowledge with respondents' socio-economic status. The chi-square value as calculated is found to be 15.33 (d.f. = 4, $p > 0.05$) at four degree of freedom, which is higher than the table value at 0.05 level of

significance. This analysis signified that socio-economic status of individual significantly affects their knowledge and skills.

Discussion

Adolescents across the world face many changes and challenges during this phase of life. It is important to equip the adolescents with the necessary skills to adopt the developmental changes and deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills refer to the knowledge that is essential for each and every member of the community to lead a healthy life. The present research was an effort to identify the knowledge level of life skills among adolescent boys and girls. The results of the study clearly illustrate the need for planning life skills intervention to target such youth towards developing their life skills and strengthening capacity of adolescents to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily human life.

The rapid pace of transformation in the social, economical, political and cultural set-up has shudder our youth at large. It is not only the expectations or the pressure from parents and teachers to excel in life but also the inability of adolescents to measure up to their own expectations that is worsening their situation. There is growing vulnerability of these young people to suicides, depression, drug abuse, violence, declined value system, stressful competitions, materialism and crimes which is distressing. Development of life skills means improving the personal effectiveness of young people, particularly those who are at risk. Our traditional education system is unable to fulfill needs of our adolescents and only focuses on intellectual development of students. Today's youth requires life skills to solve the mysteries of life enthusiastically and there is also a strong need to relate the education with the sensible aspect of life where adolescents can be skillfully made responsible for his/her behaviour or actions. Learning a variety of life skills prepare adolescents for a more successful life at home, school, in their communities and in the workforce. Now, schools are expected to impart life skills that are needed for the socialisation of young people and to prepare them for a productive and prosperous life.

We can conclude that for the all-round development of the adolescent life skills education should be compulsory and the school system needs to realise the importance of life skills education and provide slots in the school curriculum for the development of these skills. The use of the term life skill is at the initial phase of recognition in India and needs the support of various educationists,

administrators, policy makers and non-governmental agencies. So there is a need of a basic life education curriculum which along with educational/vocational training equips adolescents with the necessary skills and information to cope with the real problems, they face in real life. Life skills are effective tools to empower adolescents to act, take initiative and charge of their lives and life skills education should be designed to put together knowledge and expertise about how education can best support healthy human development.

REFERENCES

- BATTLE, J. 1990. *Self-Esteem: The New Revolution*. James Battle and Associates, Alberta, Canada.
- BHATTI, B., DEREZOTES, D. SEUNG O. AND SPECHT, H. 1992. Association between child maltreatment and self-esteem : *The Social importance of self-esteem*, Berkeley
- HIRSCH, B. & DU BOIS, D. 1991. Self-esteem in early adolescence: The identification and prediction of contrasting longitudinal trajectories. *Journal of youth and Adolescence*, 20, pp. 53–72.
- LEENA M. AND CHERYL VINCE WHITMAN & MARC POSHER. 2001. Life skills approach to Child and Adolescent Healthy Human Development, <http://www.paho.org/english/HPF/ADOL/lifeskills.pdf>
- GILBERT J BOTVIN & LAWRENCE M. 1998. Relation of social skills, personal competence and adolescents alcohol use. *Journal of Adolescence*, 18(1) pp.77–114
- MAHESH O. 2003. Identification of life skills essential for school students: M.Ed. *Dissertation*, M.D.S. University, Ajmer.
- MEENA. 2010. The need for life centered education via life skills paradigm, *University News*, 48 (17) pp.1–8.
- MISHRA, U. 2004. Preference of life skills for school students, *Ajmer: M.Ed. Dissertation*, M.D.S. University, Ajmer.
- MELISSA TAYLOR AND TRICA J. DOMSCHKE. 2007. *Social skills and psychological well-being, Anxiety, Stress and Coping*, 20(3), pp.321–329
- NAIR M.K.C. 2005. Family life and life skills education for adolescent: Trivandrum experience. *Journal of Indian association for child and adolescent mental health* 1(2) 3 ISSN 0973–1342.
- NAIR M.K.C., MINI K. PAUL AND RAMAANY JOHN. 2004. Prevalence of depression among adolescents, *Indian Journal of Pediatrics*, 71 pp.67–72
- NARAYANAN, S. 2003. Life skills – master key to employment. *In employment Newspaper*, 8–14, nov.2003, India.
- RAJESH. 2005. Goal setting and career planning for youth: life skills building in the university system. *University News*, 43(35) 12–13.
- TANUJ SIDHARTHA AND SHIVANDA JENA. 2006. Suicidal behaviour in Adolescents , *Indian Journal of Pediatrics*, 73 , 783–788

The Need for Life Skills among Adolescents

- UNESCO. 2001. www.portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php_URL_
- UNICEF. Life skills, which skills are life skills www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_whichskills.html
- VASHISTHA AND BHARADWAJ. 2006. An empirical exploration of life skills relevant to science and technology. *Indian Educational Review*, 42 (2), pp. 26-50.
- VERMA. 2006. Life skills for psychosocial competence in youth: Intervention initiatives in India: *International society for study of behavioural development*, 50 (2). pp.7-11
- WHO 1999. Programme on Mental Health, www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/30.pdf
- Yadav,S. 2002. Skills building: The focus of Adolescent education in schools. *Journal of Indian Education*, 7. pp.59-71.
- UNFPA. 1994. *Educating adolescent girls*. Allied Printers, New Delhi.