Original paper

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A life skills intervention for developing psychological capital among college students in India

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Abstract

Background

Life skills programmes focus on teaching individuals how to make responsible decisions and healthy choices in life. However, in the current Indian context, importance and priority are given mainly to the academic achievement of young people rather than developing both hard and soft skills.

Aims

The current study aimed to look into the impact of a life skills intervention programme on psychological capital and its components namely resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope among college students in Punjab, India.

Methods

A quasi-experimental design was used to conduct the study on a sample of thousand first-year college students. The study was conducted among consenting first-year students attending the constituent colleges of Punjabi University, Patiala, India. The experimental and control groups comprised 498 and 502 college students respectively. The Punjabi version of the Psychological Capital Questionnaire was used to assess psychological capital in four dimensions; resilience, hope, self-efficacy, and optimism.

Results

The results of the analysis of covariance revealed that life skills training plays a significant role in developing psychological capital and its dimensions among college students.

Conclusions

The results of this study point towards the need to integrate life skills programmes into the higher education curriculum for ensuring positive youth development.

Keywords: life-skills interventions, optimism, psychological capital, resilience, self-efficacy, youth.

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Introduction

It has been observed that self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience at the workplace, interact into a higher-order construct that enhances the commitment, satisfaction, and performance of the individual at his/her workplace (1). The above areas as a whole are termed "psychological capital", and this construct indicates the positive psychological state of development of an individual (1). Psychological capital also includes resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope (1).

Life skills help the youth to assess risky situations and to deal with day-to-day life challenges by making "wise" choices. Research indicate that formal education in life skills plays an important role in socio-emotional and personal development across varied population groups including the youth (2-8). The World Health Organization suggests that by internalizing core life skills, the youth will be able to handle the issues and concerns in life effectively and that will ensure their success in various pursuits of life (4). In addition, positive attitudes and optimism have been associated with mental well-being among secondary school students (9). However, most studies conducted in India regarding life skills focus on substance abuse, and suicidal behavior (10-12).

We aimed to study the impact of a short programme on life skills intervention on psychological capital and its dimensions among college students.

Methods

The study was conducted via a quasi-experimental design. The Punjabi version of the Psychological Capital Questionnaire was used in the present study and it has 24 items that assess an individual's level of psychological capital in four dimensions; resilience, hope, self-efficacy, and optimism (13). The total of the four dimensions gives the total psychological capital.

A life skills training module was developed for this research and it included ten core life skills (14-16). These skills include self-awareness, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, empathy, coping with emotions, and coping with stress. The content validation of the life skills training module was established by ten experts from the disciplines of education and psychology. All the selected activities were assessed by these experts for their suitability as per the level of the college students.

We used group discussions drawings, drama, mime, and demonstrations to develop logical thinking, self-esteem, communication, empathy, critical thinking, and problem-solving among the participants.

The other method we used was the question box activity where students placed questions in a box in an anonymous manner. The box was opened after certain intervals of time and the investigators answered the questions without being judgmental.

The study was conducted among consenting first-year students attending the constituent colleges of Punjabi University, Patiala, India. Ten colleges were randomly selected from the list of colleges. The students were randomly allocated to the experimental and control groups. The two groups were matched for intelligence using Standard Progressive Matrices (17). Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Education, Punjabi University, India, and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principals of the respective colleges.

We conducted an informal session with the students before the pre-testing to explain the program. The study was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, the pre-testing was conducted using the Psychological Capital Questionnaire among a randomly selected group of students from the above sample.

During the second phase, life skills training sessions were conducted for the experimental group for 40 working days and each session was 40-60 minutes. The control group was provided general orientation regarding various aspects of life, without life skills training.

The third phase included the post-experimental testing. Analysis of covariance was used on the mean post-test psychological capital and its dimensions scores of college students.

Results

The experimental group consisted of 498 students (mean age 20.5 years, 260 males, 238 females) and the control group included 502 students (mean age 20.1 years, 200 males, 302 females). Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of psychological capital and its dimensions among college students at the pre-test and post-test stages.

Table 1. Means and SDs of psychological capital and its dimension scores of college students at the pre and post-test stage

Variable	Stage	Control Group			Experimental Group		
		N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Hope	Pre-test	502	15.83	2.26	498	16.10	2.08
	Post-test	502	17.97	2.14	498	16.26	2.09
Optimism	Pre-test	502	16.03	1.91	498	15.79	2.24
	Post-test	502	18.27	1.92	498	16.09	2.03
Self-efficacy	Pre-test	502	15.88	1.88	498	15.75	2.02
	Post-test	502	18.16	1.79	498	15.85	1.64
Resilience	Pre-test	502	15.87	1.92	498	16.04	1.62
	Post-test	502	18.14	1.68	498	15.95	1.77
Psychological capital	Pre-test	502	63.62	3.23	498	63.69	3.47
	Post-test	502	72.54	3.90	498	64.16	3.15

The F-values testing the impact of life skills training on adjusted mean scores of hope, optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and overall psychological capital was significant at 0.01 (Table 2). The adjusted mean scores of psychological capital and its dimensions are shown in Table 3.

Discussion

We found a significant difference in the adjusted mean values for hope, optimism, self-efficacy, resilience and total psychological capital scores in the experimental group when compared with the control group. Our results indicate a possible positive impact of life skills intervention in enhancing psychological capital after a 40- day intervention programme. Previous studies done elsewhere report similar findings among student populations (5, 18). It is our opinion that life skills will enable these students to function optimally in society by helping with stress management, enhanced positivity, and their ability to work effectively in a team.

Limitations

The present study was conducted among first-year college students and therefore one should be cautious in generalizing the results to the wider student population. In addition, our study was of 40- days and the results were measured immediately after the intervention. Therefore, results from a longer-term study and or results measured several weeks after the intervention may vary from that of ours.

Table 2. Summary of analysis of covariance for psychological capital and its dimension scores of college students

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F-value
Hope	Pre-test	2460.63	1	2460.63	120.50**
	Treatment	903.69	1	903.69	442.52**
	Error	2035.98	997	2.042	
	Total	1573.32	999	1025.25	
Optimism	Pre-test	2149.31	1	2149.31	122.10**
	Treatment	1009.20	1	1009.20	573.39**
	Error	1754.77	997	1.760	
	Total	5092.77	999		
Self-efficacy	Pre-test	1361.45	1	1361.45	854.75**
	Treatment	1242.98	1	1242.98	780.37**
	Error	1588.03	997	1.59	
	Total	4278.77	999		
Resilience	Pre-test	1328.62	1	1328.62	797.76**
	Treatment	1310.54	1	1310.54	786.90**
	Error	1660.447	997	1.665	
	Total	4181	999		
Psychological capital	Pre-test	4383..39	1	4383..39	531.00**
	Treatment	17747.60	1	17747.60	215.00**
	Error	8230.219	997	8.255	
	Total	30165.87	999		

** pd ≤ 0.01

Table 3. Adjusted mean psychological capital and its dimension scores of college students in experimental and control goups

Variable	Group	N	Pre-test (Mx)	Post-test (My)	Adjusted Mean (Myx)	t-value
Hope	Experimental	498	15.83	17.97	18.07	11.93**
	Control	502	16.10	16.26	16.16	
	General Means		15.96	17.11	17.11	
Optimism	Experimental	498	16.03	18.27	18.19	16.83**
	Control	502	15.79	16.09	16.17	
	General Means		15.91	17.18	17.18	
Self-efficacy	Experimental	498	15.88	18.16	18.13	22.40**
	Control	502	15.75	15.85	15.89	
	General Means		15.81	17.00	17.01	
Resilience	Experimental	498	15.87	18.14	18.19	22.90**
	Control	502	16.04	15.95	15.90	
	General Means		15.95	17.04	17.04	
Psychological capital	Experimental	502	63.62	72.55	72.58	38.36**
	Control	498	63.69	64.16	64.14	
	General Means		63.65	68.37	68.38	

**p ≤ 0.01

Conclusion

The 40-days life skills module appears to have a positive outcome among the student group. Longer-term studies of this nature need to be conducted to confirm the findings of our study.

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Conflicts of intertest

None declared.

Author contributions

JK conceptualised the research work. DS carried out the experimental work of the study. Both authors approved the final manuscript.

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