

Kishori Awareness Program- Reflections of the Teacher-Resource Persons

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Abstract: Broderick and Blewitt (2010) have held that, teachers and school play a significant role in the psychosocial, intellectual and vocational development of adolescents. Teacher, being an ideal person in the school, ameliorates adolescents self, knowledge and skills through holistic educational program. Teachers' earnest involvement and contribution in school based educational program enhance personality among adolescents. The paper has probed and evaluated teachers' opinions about the Kishori Awareness Program-a school based Life Skills Education for adolescent girls in the Kannada Medium Government schools in Hubli-Dharwad. This study is based on the premise that for effectiveness of such programs, dedication and commitment of teachers is vital. The findings revealed that commitment and allegiance of teachers was rather low as they were not involved in any other phase of developing or evaluating the program, except its implementation. It is therefore recommended for the teachers' involvement at all levels of program formulation or a thorough preparatory training to achieve their active participation and keen monitoring of their participation.

Keywords: Teacher's opinions, School based Life Skills Education, Intervention.

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of intense and rapid development, characterized by numerous development tasks of gaining new and more mature relationships, adapting to masculine / feminine social roles, emotional independence from parents and other adults and onset of sexual maturity. It is a psychosocial-biological stage of development between childhood and adulthood and a complex, challenging and confusing transformation (Hazen, Schlozman, and Beresin, 2008; Kumar 2010; Kalaimathi 2012). It is a critical transition especially for females in a gendered society. That is obviously because, the differential socialization of boys and girls often subjects girls to emotional challenges, issues of sexuality, risks of unwise partnership, early motherhood, and losing their rights in the development of children (Rabindra 2004), thus rendering them weak and subjugated. This ultimately results in the non-use or loss of their potentialities.

Charlebois, Gowrinathan and Waddell (2012) say during adolescence stage go by many behavioral patterns established that affect their likelihood of developing mature and respectful relationships. School is considered as an ideal setting for implementing interventions to develop healthy behaviors among children. Today, a greater part of children's life is spent in school, outside the home. The school, therefore, should provide an established infrastructure, a safe, supportive physical environment, policies and curricula facilitating fuller growth and development of adolescents. A strong foundation for donning adult roles and carrying them responsibly, a vital necessity, can be provided by the school, more so by the responsible teachers. School staff can offer continuous, intensive contact to address the unmet needs of adolescents in comprehensive manner with youth-friendly and appropriate setting for overall development.

The government of Karnataka, in an attempt to attain the objective of improving the quality of life of adolescent girls between 9-14 years, by sensitizing them to issues of vital importance during adolescent phase, introduced a unique school based educational awareness camp. Further Sarvashikshan Abhiyan Karnataka and District institute of Educational

Training (DIET) took initiative in 2002 to implement a holistic school based educational programme. With the help of experts proficient in adolescents' issues, from different fields, a program was designed for female adolescents in government Kannada medium schools in Dharwad district, and the same was tested through a pilot study. The results of the Pilot study were encouraging as they gave affirmative outcome from the beneficiaries. Accordingly, the programme manual was revised and modified, and the programme was ultimately implemented under the title "Kishori Awareness" programme, in 2011. Its main objects were:

1. To help the adolescent girls to understand the significance of female education, nutrition and health, child sexual abuse and safeguarding self from sexual abuse, evil of child trafficking, women trafficking, child rights, HIV/AIDS, menstruation and its hygienic management, superstitious beliefs, gender issues and discrimination, physical changes and reproductive health, yoga and physical activities, vocational education, and Life Skills Education.
2. To enable the teachers to comprehend the unmet needs of female adolescents.
3. To introduce girls to available educational facilities and reduce gender discrimination
4. To develop self-respect among girls through vocational facilities, etc.

This program demanded from the teachers, besides a positive inclination, an in-depth comprehension of the issues of adolescents, commitment and dedication about imparting knowledge and preparing adolescent girls to face the adult roles satisfactorily. This responsibility was to be shouldered by them in addition to their routine work.

Initially this program was though introduced as a three days residential program, eventually it was transformed in to a concurrent program provided alongside the regular curriculum program. At present, the informal discussion held with the authorities of the Department of Public Instructions in Dharwad and some of the teachers involved hinted that the program was not taken up with the same vigor as it evinced when introduced as a residential program. This is because the programme has now been diluted and limited only to the discussion about reproductive health by inviting a health professional hence, the researchers have attempted to relook in to this program and evaluate the same from the teacher-resource persons' perspective, in order to determine the validity, feasibility and essentiality to reintroduce it.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of the education and teachers in students' life is underscored by Jagdeesh (2014), who stated that they were the instruments of a social change. According to him, teaching was an activity, designed and performed to change the pupils' behaviour by fulfilling their needs, modifying their mind and nurturing their capabilities.

Next to family, school is the important learning and social environment for children and adolescents, as from their early age they spend considerably more time in schools-which bear distinct potentiality and responsibility in developing children and adolescents in cognitive, social-emotional and behavioral domains. The schools therefore have to aid adolescents in channelizing their energies and ideas in proper direction, or else adolescents might end up with unwelcome problems (Rogers 1962; Roeser 1999; Velez and Gillham 2013).

Teachers and schools through educational programmes play a note worthy role in the lives of adolescents by imparting knowledge, offering safe space to explore and test their emerging ideas on identity formation, the emergence of cognitive changes, identity conflicts, and changing role expectations in adolescents' progress through school. Teachers can help adolescents to manage their learning experiences through active listening, authoritative management style and regulate their emotions to be successful peers. Their support also assists them in coping with their psychological adjustment problems, reduces depressive symptoms and builds strong self esteem (Lavoie 2002; Jitendra 2016; Mathew, Jolly and Prema 2017). They also play a role of shaping relationships through interactions on their needs. However, effective teachers are generally endowed with five basic capabilities namely, acquaintance with oneself and others' feelings, temper, empathizing with the emotional status of students, motivating, and developing social skills in them. Only such of the teachers can really mentor their pupils and help them to develop healthy personality. School based programme, meant for the holistic development of the students' can be successful when pupil and teacher have healthy relationship especially for young adolescents who are vulnerable to disengagement from school (Eccles 2004; Rogers 1962; Seth.2006).

Behrani (2016) in his study carried out with an objective of examining the Life Skills Education Programs in CBSE schools, detailed the problems experienced by the teachers and administrators in implementing program. Based on the

data, he concluded that proper training to the teachers and developing interest in the respondent's parents, implementing proper rules and regulations will build a strong evidenced school based programme.

3. METHODOLOGY

Problem Formulation:

The review of literature confirms that school and the teachers can exert profound influence on adolescents and assist them in shaping themselves up as mature and responsible adults. Today the adolescents are often exposed to many distractions and influences which are likely to affect them adversely, either because of their ignorance or because of the lack of proper guidance. This is practically true in case of vulnerable girls. Taking cognizance of this situation efforts are made to build the capacities of the adolescent girls through Life Skills Education intervention program in the school. In Karnataka one such experiment was made through a program entitled 'Kishori Awareness Program'. For its success the key persons who had to implement it were the teachers. Unless these teachers were adequately trained, sufficiently motivated and fully convinced that their contribution would enable the adolescents to grow with the requisite knowledge, the program would not be a success. Initially the program was implemented as a residential program. But now it is though supposed to be run as concurrent program, it is not being taken up seriously in many schools. Hence the researchers attempted to evaluate teachers' opinions and satisfaction about this program as a whole, with an intention to see if it can be reintroduced with new vigor. The results of this enquiry have been detailed in this article.

Objectives of the study:

- To know the demographic profile of the teacher-resource persons who were involved in the Kishori Awareness Program.
- To assess the knowledge level among Teacher-Resource Persons about the Kishori Awareness Program.
- To understand the opinion of the Teacher-Resource Persons on the implementation, feasibility, comfortableness, duration during teaching the components, facilities provided, schedule preparation for the Kishori Awareness Program for the students and the outcome of the program.

Universe and Sample:

Present study is carried out in Dharwad city covering Government Kannada medium High Schools teachers, who were part of the Kishori awareness program. In all there were 48 teachers who served as the resource persons in this program. Out of these 48 teacher-resource persons, only 21 persons, who were available at the time of data collection, could be included in this study, as 50 per cent or more of them had either been transferred or retired. These respondents were identified by visiting each government Kannada medium High school in Dharwad. Thus the sampling method qualifies to be a non-probability-purposive sampling method.

Research Tools used for data collection

For the present study, data were collected through self structured questionnaire, which covered all the aspects needed to be evaluated to deduce the impressions of teachers about this program, viz., the feasibility, comfortableness during teaching the components, duration of sessions, adequacy of facilities provided, schedule preparation to students' responses. Besides, the personal problems experienced, if any, in balancing the family and work life during the conduct of this program.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of the teachers:

The Kishori program of Life Skills Education was implemented for the Girl-Student adolescents in the Kannada Medium Government Higher-Primary and High Schools through female teachers. The rationale behind this being, female teachers can substitute mothers and exert effective influence on adolescents. More over middle aged (the average age being 45.93 years), married teachers were opted to disseminate the requisite information to the adolescents with an intention of avoiding the likely inhibitions- themselves or the adolescents might experience in discussing some of the taboo topics incorporated in the training module.

Further, these resource persons were selected considering their age and experience by the department. This shows that, the decision to be the resource person or not was not by their volition. However, the religion and caste composition of the respondents showed that while the Hindu teachers were in preponderance, the Mohammedans were a minuscule minority. There were no Christian respondents at all.

As regards their literacy level, all most all the resource persons were well educated, a majority of them being under graduates (76.2%) and post-graduates (19%). With this educational status, it was expected that, they would be enlightened and open for new ventures. Moreover, the average experience of the teachers (18.64 years), which was one of the criteria while selecting them as resource persons, showed that, it was quite high, as a majority (66.7%) of them were found to have put in 16 or more number of years of service.

Result also showed that, 90.5 per cent of the respondents were permanent full time teachers, who were supposed to be having job security. These characteristics rendered them most suitable for disseminating the life skill education to the young girls and mentoring them to be responsible adults.

Teacher-Resource Persons' Opinions about Kishori Awareness Program:

The success of any education or otherwise the service oriented program certainly depends on the enforcement functionaries' commitment toward it. The commitment in turn comes from their knowledge about and the comprehension of the objectives and goals of that program. Keeping this in mind the researchers first and foremost attempted to assess the respondents' knowledge about Kishori Awareness program.

The probe revealed that a number of teachers though were aware of the general details of the program, they were practically ignorant about the rationale behind and the efforts which had gone in to the development and designing of it. As regards its implementation, they were aware that it was regulated by the State Government, which took an initiative to empower adolescent girls in general, and that the Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan was the sponsor for the three days residential program-which was to be usually conducted every year in the months of January to April, as per the direction issued by it.

The logistics provided for the training was appreciated by all the teachers. They confirmed that during the program, the beneficiaries and the resource persons were treated well. The accommodation was provided in the schools itself. Yet the hospitality was good. The participating students and their parents were given prior intimation about the program and were apprised about the necessary rules and regulations to be followed while undergoing his training.

Effective teaching material was distributed in the form of booklets about the components and the teaching methodology used lecturing as well as audio-visual aids, role plays, skits, flash cards, etc. The capacity building training was imparted in Kannada, so as to make it easy for the teacher-resource persons to reach out to the beneficiaries effectively and to make it tangible to the learners. Away from the usual teaching methods, all the respondents confirmed of having used lecturing method, group discussion and role plays during the sessions, to make students understand the issues at hand easily and effectively.

None the less, quite a few grey areas in the implementation of this program seem to have been there and affected the success of the program adversely. First and foremost, the program seems to have evinced a lukewarm response from the teacher-resource persons. This was evident from their scanty knowledge about the initiation and the date/year of commencement of this program, the accurate objectives of it, etc., (majority of the 50 per cent of them were ignorant about the exact year of initiation of this program). A majority of the teachers seemed to be unclear about the efforts which had gone in to the preparation of the training manual, the stake holders involved, the administrative set-up, the budget allocation, etc. Moreover, the discussion with the teacher-resource persons also revealed that, for a majority of them (95.2 %) this assignment was first of its kind as they were not associated with any other such school based capacity building educational program prior to this assignment.

It was also evident from their discussion that, they looked at this involvement more as a burden imposed and a threat to their comfortable routine, than seeing it as an opportunity offered. Such approach in them could be because of their unpreparedness to associate with this program. When initially the Department of Public Instruction sent a circular seeking voluntary participation by the teachers, it is informed that none of the teachers volunteered. Hence, the Department then had to choose teachers who were better educated and had put in more years of service and impose on them this responsibility of being the resource persons for this program.

As regards the TOT (Training of Teachers) which occupies a very important place in the success of such programs seems to be missing here, as a majority of the teacher-resource persons stated that they were not adequately trained to handle this training effectively, except that the cluster resource persons disseminated some information to them about the modules to be covered. Some of them (9.52%) were quite vocal, though a majority chose to be silent, and stated that the contents of the training manual were too heavy, besides some of the topics were so complex that even the resource persons found it difficult to open up without inhibitions, viz., Human Anatomy, Sexuality, Reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, etc. Though there were pictorial presentation, flash-cards, charts, etc., they were uncomfortable handling these topics. Therefore they suggested that these were the topics which had to be dealt with by experts such as the health professionals. They also stated that the time allocated for these topics was inadequate. According to them these topics were of paramount importance, because, children generally have many doubts about them and experience anxiety. But they do not reveal their anxiety or discuss about their questions either with their family members, or the teachers. Quite often therefore they gather information from wrong sources and develop many misconceptions.

Despite this view about the essentiality of the program, the teacher-resource persons (100%) were averse to it as they opined that it resulted in unduly heavy additional workload as they neither were relieved of any of their usual workload entrusted to them for having been entrusted with this responsibility of imparting life-skill education, nor was there any strong motivation, to take up additional workload, in the form of incentive-monitory or otherwise.

One another area where some flaw was found was about the feed-back. Though collecting feedback is important for any program to assess its effectiveness, to further modify it and make the program or service more useful to the end users, the examination by the investigators revealed that only 57 per cent respondents collected feedback at the end of the day. Thus, 43 per cent of the teacher-resource persons did not seem to have either comprehended the need to evaluate the impact of the program or that they considered it as a nuisance and therefore were indifferent to collecting the feed-back.

When enquired about children's reactions to the program, a majority though confirmed that children evinced sufficient interest in all the components of training, and that they cooperated while teaching-learning process, almost 86 per cent of teachers were of the opinion that there was no need to replicate this program and extend it to children of higher classes. Minuscule minority of the teacher-resource persons (4.77%) also stated that there was no change in the awareness level of the children after the training. They also sought changes in the program from residential to regular concurrent program. This view might not be because teachers were concerned about the children, but because they viewed this program as an additional burden-demanding them to be away from their home and family for three days for every batch of students, which disturbed their comfort zone.

This remark finds endorsement in their reply, for the question 'Did this program mean additional work load to you?' All the respondents (100 %) have replied affirmatively, and have said 'Yes'. Moreover, as this was a government program, 85.70 per cent respondents found the traces of corruption and pilferage of funds in the name of this program. Some of these aspects seem to have been responsible for development of negativity among the teacher-resource persons about this program and responsible for the fading enthusiasm for its continuation. The lack of motivation among the teachers could also be because, the program would always exceed the time allocated to it, putting teacher to further hardships. Yet another grey area was related to the evaluation, documentation of the program implementation, and its modifications. Since there was no regular well devised follow-up and monitoring of the teacher-resource persons, many of them often neglected the evaluation and documenting their observations. This might have left the program administrator without concrete data to emphasize for the continuation of this program.

These were some of the moot points which seem to have worked against the teacher-resource persons' evincing requisite commitment toward this program which was ultimately vital for its success.

5. CONCLUSION

Indeed, teacher's contribution in disseminating information on different issues and problems girls are likely to experience during their adolescence and prepare them to confront and cope satisfactorily was considered as a vital part of this Kishori Awareness program. They were the link and catalysts between the program and the beneficiaries and the effectiveness of the program as a whole. Despite their hectic workload, they appear to have given their sincere service to beneficiaries by creating a comfortable environment.

As students are no longer interested in traditional teaching methods, program implementers had instructed teachers to adopt different teaching methodology, such as, lecturing, group discussion, role play, simulations and life skill Methodology. This methodology helped beneficiaries to connect with the components easily. Nonetheless, since teachers collected feedback from beneficiaries orally, there was neither any uniformity in the evaluation process nor any systematic documentation. This was one of the major lacunae which appear to have hindered the program.

Nonetheless, the changes in beneficiary-children's attitude, secure feeling, coping strategies, life skills development, higher grades in school, lower drop out, improved social and academic skills, cleanliness, hygiene, good peer relation, improved behavior showed that program, etc, though not observable but obscurely sensed by teachers other than the teacher-resource persons proved that this program had benefited the beneficiaries. The Government of Karnataka though provided good logistics for this program, their failure in evaluating it seriously and documenting the progress both from teacher-resource persons' and beneficiaries' perspective seems to have affected the provision of conclusive evidence in favour of this program.

The researchers therefore suggest for reintroduction of and conducting this program in schools for Kishori at regular intervals for achieving sustained development of them. However, empowering teachers' participation and active involvement needs to be addressed with special inputs and greater efforts. The teachers should be provided with adequate training to handle the gender issues, sexuality and reproductive health issues, without inhibitions so as to enable the adolescent girls to open up freely and clarify their doubts from them. Skillful trainers enable beneficiaries to relate their own problems of their life to the issues discussed in the training and develop coping strategies. Such a program can be a holistic initiative to empower adolescent girls, so as to enable them to take charge of their life. Further, for success of the initiative, collaborating with Community, Parents and different Non-Governmental Organizations can be seriously thought about. To evaluate the program effectiveness, regular evaluation and documentation should be a priority at each level. Follow up should be made mandatory to the interventional programmes to see the sustenance of the capacities in the beneficiaries.

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