

EFFECT OF PSYCHOSOCIAL EDUCATION ON INTIMACY AND AUTONOMY AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Adolescence is a period of exploration, transition, and also a period of solidifying ones personality. During this period development of autonomy and need for close relationships occurs naturally. The present study aims at understanding the effect of psychosocial education on the level of intimacy and autonomy among late adolescents. In the study one group pre test post design is adopted. Level of need for intimacy and autonomy was assessed by using The Intimacy Attitude Scale – Revised (IAS-R) by Amidon, E., Kumar, V. K., & Treadwell, T and Adolescent Autonomy Questionnaire by Noom, M.J. Psychosocial education was given in the form series of programs including guest lectures, workshops, video shows on the topics related to intimacy and autonomy for a period of four months at the rate of one program per week. Results indicated a significant effect of psychosocial education on autonomy where as significant effect of psychosocial education on intimacy was not found. There was no significant relationship between intimacy and autonomy.

Key words: autonomy, intimacy, psychosocial education

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For most adolescents, establishing a sense of autonomy is as important a part of becoming an adult as is establishing a sense of identity. Becoming an autonomous person or a self governing person is one of the fundamental developmental tasks of the adolescent years (Steinberg, 2002). Though autonomy is an issue of great interest than intimacy, attachment and intimacy's role in the healthy development of autonomy is significant. Though adolescents' quest for autonomy and sense of responsibility creates puzzlement and conflict for many parents, observations indicate that psychologically healthy families adjust to adolescents push for independence by treating the adolescents in more adult ways and including them more in family decision making (Santrock, 2007). The autonomy given to the adolescents by encouraging expression of individual viewpoints or in behavioral terms as allowing them to participate in family decision making benefits the them. It allows them to assert a moderate degree of influence within the context of a positive parent-adolescent relationship (McElhaney & Allen, 2001) which is important in the healthy personality development.

Though there are different types of autonomy like emotional autonomy, behavioral autonomy, value autonomy, and functional autonomy, one type of autonomy may develop more quickly than the other type (Russel & Bakken, 2002). Emotional autonomy is the capacity to turn down childlike dependencies on parents or being emotionally less dependent on parents. Even when both parents and peers exert pressure on the adolescent to comply with their wishes, they need to maintain a feeling of confidence in their own goals, while also showing consideration for the goals of others. During this process, adolescents increasingly deidealise their parents, perceive them as people rather than simply as parenting figures, and become less dependent on them for immediate emotional support (Santrock, 2007). A longitudinal research study conducted by Parra and Oliva (2009) on the development of emotional autonomy during adolescence showed

that over the course of adolescence some dimensions of emotional autonomy increase, meanwhile others decrease, so the global level of emotional autonomy remains stable. The study also revealed that emotional autonomy is associated with negative family relationships, so emotional autonomy, more than a necessary process to become adult, could be indicating an insecure attachment to parents. Behavioral autonomy or attitudinal autonomy is the capacity to make independent decisions and follow through with them or it is the ability to specify several options, to make decision and to define a goal. This idea of attitudinal autonomy is most closely related to the concepts of beliefs about one's capabilities and efficiency (Bandura, 1977). The cognitive changes of adolescence also play an important role in the development of autonomy. Part of becoming autonomous involves being able to make our own decisions (Noom, Dekovic and Meeus, 1999). Fleming (2005) study on adolescent autonomy indicated that narcissism, separation from family, and cognitive aspects were found to be important elements in adolescent's perception of autonomy. Desire for autonomy was present since the start of puberty, achievement lagged behind desire, and the capacity to fight for autonomy was a key mediator for the achievement of personal autonomy in the transition to adulthood. The cognitive changes of adolescence also provide the logical foundation for changes in young person's thinking about social, moral, ethical problems. These changes in thinking are important fundamentals to the development of system of values that is based on the individual's own sense of right and wrong and not merely on rules and regulations handed down by parents or other authority figures (Mazor & Enright, 1988). Functional autonomy is the regularity dimension referring to the different approaches like awareness of competence, responsibility and control taken to achieve a goal. The perception of competence refers to the availability of different strategies to achieve a goal and the perception of control refers to the ability to choose a specific strategy which is

effective enough to succeed. Perception of responsibility can function as an incentive for adolescent behavior. Functional autonomy is achieved when adolescents are able to develop their way in how to reach their goals. Value autonomy refers to the set of values carried out by an individual or having a set of principles about knowing what is right and wrong, about deciding things as important or not. In this way, teens come to their own independent conclusions and about their values than simply accepting the values of their friends or the values with which they are brought up (Russel & Bakken, 2002).

Intimacy as a psychosocial developmental issue among adolescents

Intimacy is an important concern throughout most of the life span as making friendship with others is a natural desire of a human being whether he is young or old (Chaube, 2002). Friends and confidants provide support when we are feeling emotionally vulnerable, assistance when we need it, and companionship in a variety of activities and contexts (Weiss, 1974). People who have others to turn to for emotional support are less likely to suffer from psychological and physical disorders (Myers, Lindenthal, & Pepper, 1975). It is not until adolescence that truly intimate relationships characterized by openness, honesty, self disclosure, and trust first emerge (Steinberg, 2002). A study conducted by Buhrmester (1990) revealed that intimacy of friendship was consistently and reasonably correlated with adjustment and competence among adolescents and it also supported the view that the ability to establish close, intimate friendships becomes increasingly important during early adolescence. Though relationships between parents and children continue to be important, adolescents emotions may become more involved with people outside the family, and most often with friends (Santrock, 2007). Adolescents friendships are more likely to have a strong emotional foundation built on the sorts of bonds that form between people who care about and know and understand each other in a special way (Newcomb &

Bagwell, 1995). Intimacy during adolescence is of important concern also because of changing nature of social world. During early adolescence the importance is more for peers and during mid and late adolescence the importance is more for opposite sex peers. Early adolescent friendships have often been assumed to be especially intense and especially significant for psychological development (Berndt, 1982). adolescents friendship serves the functions such as companionship, stimulation, physical support, ego support, social comparison and affection (Gottman & Parker, 1987). These functions play a significant role in developing trustworthy relationships throughout the life. Levy-Tossman, Kaplan and Assor (2007) in a study mentions that mastery goals were positively associated with mutual sharing of difficulties, trust, and adaptive social problem-solving between friends, whereas performance-approach goals were negatively associated with intimacy and friendship. Moreover, both performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals were associated with mistrust, inconsideration, and tension between friends. A person-centered analysis, suggested that profiles with a higher level of mastery goals relative to both types of performance goals were associated with less mistrust among friends in comparison with profiles with a higher level of performance goals relative to mastery goals.

Relationship between intimacy and autonomy

A good deal of research has indicated that there exists a relationship between the different psychosocial issues. Because both intimacy and autonomy gets shaped during adolescence there is a significant effect of each variable on the other. Autonomy is thought to emerge parallel with intimacy (Selman, 1989). Intimacy is a prominent feature of adolescents relationship with others, hence autonomy to choose people for intimate relationship occurs naturally (Taradash, Connolly, Pepler, Craig & Costa, 2001). Across all environments, parental responses to adolescent's selection of friends and being in an intimate relationship have set limit to adolescents strive for

autonomy. Though it is required to provide adolescents with sufficient freedom to try out new company and learn from mistakes parents have suggestion for their teenagers about what should be done, whom should they go out with and what should they do when they are with friends. If parents do this in a more authoritarian mode, it hinders healthy development of intimacy among adolescents. Secure attachment with parents is related more positively to adolescents peer and friendship relations. Sandhu & Kaur (2012) conducted a study on adolescent internalizing and externalizing problem behavior in relation to emotional autonomy and parent child relationship. The study revealed that deidealization of parents and nondependency on parents, and mothers' overprotection are positively correlated with adolescent problem behavior. Changes in the social roles and activities during adolescence are bound to raise concerns related to independence, as the adolescent moves into new positions that demand increasing degrees of responsibility and self reliance (Steinberg, 2002). Becoming involved in new roles and taking up new responsibilities place the adolescent in situations that require and stimulate the development of independent decision making abilities and the clarification of personal values. Parents understanding about their growing children's need for autonomy serves a good cause in the healthy progress of autonomy.

Psychosocial education for adolescents

The challenges for adolescents are many in the positive attainment and experience of these psychosocial aspects such as intimacy and autonomy. Some adolescents adjust successfully to the changes where as some find it difficult to cope with, because the type of information provided to them lacks clarity most of the times. Thus if an adolescent engages in substance abuse it may be due to a combination of biological, psychological and social factors. Hence psychosocial education which addresses the issues specific to adolescents is very much

beneficial in helping them to cope with the changes and demands. The information related to the biological causes behind desire for romantic and intimate relationship or social cause behind detachment from the parents should be made clear to them in the way they can understand. Instead of telling them about the don't's it's always better to tell them about the do's. It would give them a clarity about the freedom they have and the limits set. That objective can be met in schools and colleges by providing psychosocial education programs. Theories have shown that there is a link between the development of intimacy during adolescence and the biological, cognitive and social changes of the period (Berndt, 1982). The growth of social cognition during adolescence is reflected in the young person's more sophisticated conceptions of social relationships and in improvements in interpersonal understanding and communication. These changes permit adolescents to establish and maintain far more mature relationships that are characterized by higher levels of empathy, self disclosure and responsiveness to each other's thoughts and feelings (Selman, 1980). Improvements in social competence and gains in intimacy during adolescence are partly attributable to improvements in social cognition (Ford, 1982). By providing sufficient scientific information about the changes, benefits in the form of psychoeducation will help several adolescents from taking wrong path like addiction, suicide attempts, indulging in demeaning activities, violent behavior etc. Intimacy in adolescent does not have a physical connection, rather true intimacy is characterized by honesty, self disclosure, openness, and trust between two people (Shree, 2014). Schools that promote autonomy seem to be able to improve the quality of experiences for adolescents (Hektner, 2001). In several states in India, school mental health and psychosocial education programs have proved to be effective in terms of its preventive and promotive value. Due to paucity and as well as absence earmarked funds for school mental health programs in the country, such initiatives are scanty and sporadic

in nature. Often implementers experience challenges and difficulties in maintaining the stability of such initiatives (Nayar, 2012).

Hence the present study was undertaken to understand the effect of psychosocial education on the need for autonomy and intimacy among adolescents.

Hypotheses

- There is no significant effect of psychosocial education on the need for autonomy and intimacy among adolescents.
- There is no significant relationship between need for autonomy and intimacy among adolescents.

Research design: The design adopted for the study is one group pre test post test design

Sample: Purposive sampling method was followed for data collection. Sample for the study consisted of 81 college going adolescents studying in first PUC belonging to the age group 15 to 16 years. Out of 81 adolescents 45 were males and 36 were females. Only one college was selected for the study as it helped in planning the intervention.

Inclusion criteria

- Adolescents of age range 15 to 16 years
- Who can communicate in English and Kannada
- Adolescents studying in commerce stream

Tools

The Intimacy Attitude Scale – Revised (IAS-R): The Intimacy Attitude Scale – Revised (IAS-R) by Amidon, E., Kumar, V. K., & Treadwell, T (1983) measures feelings and attitudes that

people have toward others and relationship with others. Specifically, the items are concerned with attitudes of closeness, level of intimacy and trust.

Adolescent Autonomy Questionnaire developed by Noom, M.J (1999) measures the level of autonomy experienced by the adolescents. This scale measures three types of autonomy such as attitudinal autonomy (ability to specify several options, to make a decision and to define a goal), emotional autonomy (the perception of emotional independence from parents and peers) and functional autonomy (the different approaches taken to achieve a goal). The three dimensions can be examined separately or as one general concept of autonomy.

Procedure: A detailed explanation of the purpose of the study was given to the principal of the college and permission was sought. After obtaining the permission from the principal, participants were met and the objectives of the study were explained to them clearly. A written consent was taken from the participants. After that demographic data was collected. Pre intervention assessment was done for variables of study like need for autonomy and intimacy. This was followed by training program on every Thursdays August 2014 to December 2014. Training program on the topics like stress management, communication skills, responsible usage autonomy, friendship, need for intimacy, decision making, career opportunities, sexuality education, problem solving were given by experts in the field. The training program consisted of discussions, role plays, activities, video shows and guest lectures on each topic. The duration of training program was one and a half hour during each visit. Post intervention test was conducted after all the training programs.

Results

Table 1

t for correlated means on autonomy

Variable	Pre intervention	Post intervention	N	df	t	p value
Attitudinal autonomy	M- 16.09 SD- 3.226	M- 18.28 SD- 3.123	81	80	4.362	0.001
Emotional autonomy	M-14.74 SD-2.876	M-16.60 SD-3.865	81	80	3.266	0.002
Functional autonomy	M-17.02 SD-3.045	M-18.59 SD-3.449	81	80	2.936	0.004
Total Autonomy	M-47.85 SD-7.230	M-53.48 SD- 8.033	81	80	4.410	0.001

Table 2

t for correlated means on intimacy

Variable	Pre intervention	Post intervention	N	df	t	p value
Intimacy	M- 157.02 SD- 12.525	M- 156.94 SD- 14.562	81	80	0.042	0.966

Discussion

Before psychosocial education the level of autonomy among the participants was less compared to the level of autonomy after psychosocial education. It indicates that psychosocial education has significant influence in developing the sense of autonomy among adolescents. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted which states that there is

significant effect of psychosocial education on autonomy among adolescents. The mean scores on the level of need for intimacy indicates no significant effect of psychosocial education on need for intimacy among adolescents. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted which states that there is no significant effect of psychosocial education on autonomy among adolescents. Adolescents who achieve the feelings of autonomy recognize and accept both the similarities and differences between them and their parents while still feeling a sense of love, understanding, and connection with them. Confidence about ones unique point of view and ability to express opinions and beliefs may differ among individuals. Hence one of the challenges to parents or teachers is to teach the adolescents the ability to be autonomous and also maintain good relationship with peers and others. Correct and realistic information which could make adolescents challenge their own responsibilities and goals is found to be beneficial.

The hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between need for intimacy and autonomy among adolescents was tested using Pearson coefficient of correlation. The obtained r for intimacy and autonomy is 0.107 which is not significant. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted which states that there is no significant relationship between need for intimacy and autonomy among adolescents. The result is supported by the study conducted by Noom, Dekovic and Meeus (1999), which found no evidence for an extra positive effect of being both autonomous and strongly attached.

Conclusion: Intervention based programs which focuses on drug prevention, healthy food habit, conduct problems are found to be effective in most of the schools to bring in desirable changes and healthy development among adolescents. Similarly addressing the psychosocial issues as a part of psychosocial education is also beneficial in improving the efficiency of adolescents. Well informed adolescents about the basic yet important issues like autonomy and intimacy can take

more clear and right decisions about different aspects of their life such as career, romantic relationship, higher studies, habits etc. Present study provides important information about the significant effect of psycho education on intimacy and autonomy among adolescents. Psycho education in the form of various programs has helped in improving the sense of autonomy among adolescents. And also these training programs have been helpful in teaching them how to reach their goals, and support and encourage them to continue even when it gets tough.

Limitations of the present study and the scope for further research : If the researcher had considered a control group the results of the experimental group would have been compared. It would have provided more information to understand the real effect of psychosocial education on the adolescents. The demographic limitation is that the study was conducted in the rural area; hence study cannot be generalized to urban adolescents whose relationship with parents and peers would differ from rural population. The development of psychosocial issues during adolescence is not primarily focused only on the adolescent but also on other factors such as parenting, hobbies, habits, socio economic status etc which are not considered in the study.

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