



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research
Vol. 10, Issue, 03, pp. 34345-34348, March, 2020



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

'HELP' IMPROVES SELF-ESTEEM IN ADOLESCENTS

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 19th December, 2019

Received in revised form

03rd January, 2020

Accepted 17th February, 2020

Published online 30th March, 2020

Key Words:

Heartfulness Meditation, Self-Esteem, Students, School, Curriculum.

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ABSTRACT

School is a place where an individual nurtures with knowledge & good personality. Students with healthy self-esteem are high spirited, optimistic and successful in academic & professional areas. Studies have suggested that meditation can be one of the tools which improve self-esteem. Hence, We had conducted a Prospective observational study on the Junior College Students' self esteem levels, who were willing to participate in the HELP (Heartfulness Experience Life's Potential) program (n=3084). HELP program contains Heartfulness meditation as its core component along with teaching of life skills. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) was used to assess the pre & post levels of self-esteem. Paired 't' test was used to compare the mean values between baseline and end-line data. Result indicated that overall student's self-esteem levels had increased significantly ($p < 0.05$) after the intervention of HELP program. Similar trend was observed even in Sub-group analysis. Heartfulness meditation facilitates a person to get rid of negative thoughts & aids in positive thinking. It brings interconnection with oneself which improves the self-esteem of a person. In our opinion, integrating HELP program in school's curriculum might help to enhance self-esteem of youngsters which aids them to lead a flourished life.

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Citation: Dr. Raja Amarnath, G., Bharath Madhavan, Aiswarya Ravichandran, Vishal Gautam and Visalatchy, N. R. 2020. "'Help' improves self-esteem in adolescents", *International Journal of Development Research*, 10, (03), 34345-34348.

INTRODUCTION

"Education is not just about going to school and getting a degree. It's about widening your knowledge and absorbing the truth about life" – Shakuntala Devi

A school is an educational institution designed to provide learning space and environment for bestowing knowledge to students under the direction of teachers. Most of the countries have schools and systems of formal education defined. School is where a child is grown, nurtured with confidence and self-esteem through knowledge assimilation, application and development of inter-personal skills. School guides the youngsters through the establishment of daily routine and grooming them to become productive members of the society.

A school can function as the center of a person's community and a second home. It provides a safe haven for the spread of ideas, opportunities to kindle talent and gives access to subjects which enable the children to grow exponentially in all spheres. But today, to survive in this quick world, many schools constantly emphasize on the literacy aspect of education, inadvertently neglecting the core ethical values necessary to shape a human's character. Nevertheless, academics must be taught for a student to be equipped as a professional to achieve feat in his/her career. Apart from academics, ethics has to be imparted in the young minds to face the real-world challenges ahead. Therefore, developing one's personality plays a crucial role in a student's life (Sharma and Patidar, 2018). During the school-hood period, the internal and external pressures test the student's capability from time to time and qualify them to cope with the given

situation (SathyaDevi and Mohan, 2015). Studies further indicate that adolescence is the most difficult phase to cross during an individual's walk of life where one is challenged to prove his/her identity as an emerging adult, face the heat of peer pressure to be accepted within social norms. For them, sources of stress are academic exams, interpersonal relations, life changes and career exploration. This may result in psychological, physical and behavioral problems (SathyaDevi and Mohan, 2015; Ramya and Parthasarathy, 2009). Self-esteem and Motivation - two pillars that provides phenomenal support to overcome stress and achieve excellence in academic and paves way for development (Körük, 2017; Tella, 2007) of an individual's personality. Students with healthy self-esteem trust their instincts and so are more stable emotionally. Under psychological parlance, self-esteem is described as a person's overall sense of self-worth and personal value (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). The traits of an individual such as abilities, skills, social relations, feelings and ideas about their academic or professional performance are the results of their self-esteem (Izgiç *et al.*, 2004). People with high self-esteem are high spirited, optimistic, successful in academic and professional areas can deal with stress seamlessly also establish social relations. On the contrary, people with low self-esteem lack confidence and they feel ashamed about themselves, pessimistic, experience sense of worthlessness and feel inadequate in terms of skills (Noronha *et al.*, 2018).

Self-esteem can be boosted by writing personal diary which allows to self-reflect thereby realizing one's own strengths/weaknesses (Vonk, 2006). In millennial's era, with social media where everything seems to be on full display for the world, it can be easy for Gen Y to compare themselves with others. This leads to resentment, lowers self-confidence, impacting the individual in a negative way. In the event of such circumstances, few studies have proved that meditation is one of the powerful tools which contribute immensely for the improvement of self-esteem (Brown and Ryan, 2003). So, we from CIPACA Institute of Research had decided to conduct a study for researching on the tools that could be used to improve self-esteem levels of Junior college students, for which we chose to assess the impact of HELP (Heartfulness Experience Life's Potential) program. HELP program - A 16 weeks certificate course that equips teachers and students to contribute a sustainable school reform and community citizenship. Course comprises weekly sessions, delivered one-hour per week. Every session has a unique topic on life skills and values followed by practical session on Heartfulness meditation's tools and techniques.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: Students of Junior colleges in Andhra Pradesh, India, aged between 16-18 years were the willing participants of the study. Prospective observational method was used in this study to observe the self-esteem levels of students based on pre and post implementation of 'HELP' Program.

Tools & Data Collection: Participants were asked to fill up the questionnaire which comprised Socio-demographic details & Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965). At the completion of HELP program the students were asked to record their response in the questionnaire. They were not given prior information about the questionnaires to be filled in both the times.

Data Analysis: Among 4038 students who participated in the study, data from 3084 students were considered for statistical analysis. 437 students provided incomplete responses & 517 did not respond during end-line assessment, so their responses were excluded from the study. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 21. Data was derived using inferential and description statistics in the pattern of counts, percentages and frequencies. Paired statistical 't' test was used to compare the mean between baseline and end-line data of Self-Esteem.

RESULTS

Table 1 depicts the frequencies and percentage values that were computed based on students' demographic profiles. Among 3084 students 48.4% were females and 51.6% were males. Most of them were from rural areas (59.4%), followed by urban (20.9%), sub-urban (10.3%) and Metro (9.4%). 81% students were from Nuclear family and 19% students were from joint family.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Students

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Overall		3084	100
Gender	Female	1494	48.4
	Male	1590	51.6
Types of Residency	Metro	290	9.4
	Urban	644	20.9
	Sub urban	319	10.3
	Rural	1831	59.4
Types of family	Nuclear	2499	81.0
	Joint	585	19.0
Physical illness	Illness	219	7.1
	Without illness	2865	92.9
Mental illness	Illness	369	12.0
	Without illness	2715	88.0

Participants' self-esteem levels had increased significantly ($p < 0.05$) ($m=24.0 < 24.3$) after the intervention of HELP program. Similar trend was observed even in Sub-group analysis which is detailed below. Figure 1 illustrates the students' Pre & Post mean values of Self Esteem level.

Gender: Amongst participants, in gender category males had displayed significant improvement ($m = 23.7 < 24.3$) ($p < 0.05$) whereas females' self-esteem level remained the same.

Residential place: Following categories of place of residence were included in the study - Metro, Urban, Sub Urban and Rural area. In-spite of the diverse residential background students from Metro, urban & rural areas had significantly increased their self-esteem level after the intervention ($p < 0.05$). However, there was no significant increase in self-esteem levels of students from sub-urban statistically (Refer to Table 2).

Types of family : Nuclear family consists of parents and their children. Joint family has more than three generations living together under one roof as a single unit. Per our findings students from Nuclear family significantly enhanced ($p < 0.05$) their self-esteem levels after that Intervention of HELP program (Refer to Table 2).

Chronic Illnesses: Participants with chronic physical illnesses like hypertension, diabetes etc., had increased their self-esteem level significantly ($m=23.3 < 24.5$) ($p < 0.05$), same pattern was observed with students without physical illnesses.

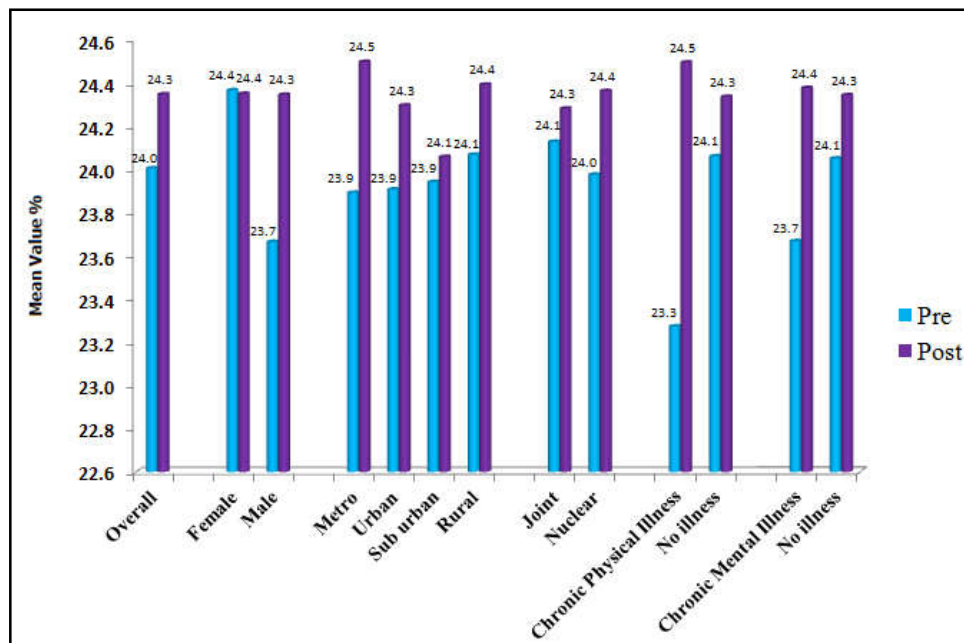


Figure 1. Students' Pre & Post mean values of Self Esteem level

Table 2. Comparison of pre & post HELP program Self-Esteem scores of students

Variables		Pre & Post Self esteem	Paired Differences					T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Overall		Pre & Post	-.34339	4.00111	.07205	-.48465	-.20212	-4.766	3083	0.000*
Gender	Female	Pre & Post	.01673	3.94152	.10197	-.18329	.21676	.164	1493	0.870
	Male	Pre & Post	-.68176	4.02830	.10102	-.87991	-.48361	-6.749	1589	0.000*
Place of residency	Metro	Pre & Post	-.60690	4.24720	.24940	-1.09778	-.11602	-2.433	289	0.016*
	Urban	Pre & Post	-.38975	3.99906	.15759	-.69920	-.08031	-2.473	643	0.014*
	Sub urban	Pre & Post	-.11599	3.99005	.22340	-.55552	.32354	-.519	318	0.604
	Rural	Pre & Post	-.32496	3.96416	.09264	-.50665	-.14326	-3.508	1830	0.000*
Type of family	Joint	Pre & Post	-.15385	4.18988	.17323	-.49408	.18638	-.888	584	0.375
	Nuclear	Pre & Post	-.38776	3.95518	.07912	-.54290	-.23261	-4.901	2498	0.000*
Physical illness	Illness	Pre & Post	-1.22374	3.87300	.26171	-1.73956	-.70793	-4.676	218	0.000*
	Without illness	Pre & Post	-.27609	4.00343	.07479	-.42275	-.12943	-3.691	2864	0.000*
Mental illness	Illness	Pre & Post	-.71003	4.05866	.21129	-1.12551	-.29455	-3.361	368	0.001*
	Without illness	Pre & Post	-.29355	3.99138	.07660	-.44376	-.14335	-3.832	2714	0.000*

*Significant p value (<0.05).

Participants with chronic mental illnesses like schizophrenia, depression also had significant raise in their self-esteem level ($m=23.7 < 24.4$) and similar pattern was observed among students not suffering from mental illnesses (Figure 1 & Table 2).

DISCUSSION

Documented studies over several decades have shown that meditation improves psychological well-being phenomenally. However, only few studies have explored the relationship between Meditation and Self-esteem. Studies conducted by "Mindfulness" have proved the fact that meditation has a tremendous positive impact on self-esteem (Christopher *et al.*, 2013). In our study Male students' self-esteem had increased notably after HELP program, whereas the self-esteem of female participants remained the same. Similar observation was recorded in the previous studies (Bleidorn *et al.*, 2016). It has been postulated, in the previous research that adolescent girls are sensitive to society's concerns and cultural norms which creates an inferiority complex with regards to their physical appearance (Harter, 1993). Umpteen studies have shown that girls' attitude changes due to this perception

causing lack of self-worth, doubt and uncertainty about oneself and feelings of not measuring up to standard. Due to these reasons, we feel that adolescents' girls need more time and practice to attain improvement in their self-esteem. We had observed that after the HELP program self-esteem levels of adolescents from Nuclear family significantly increased. Although same changes were observed in case of adolescents from joint families, it was not statistically significant. It had been discussed in the previous research studies that adolescents from joint family lack decision making capacity due to frequent dependency upon their families. It was also mentioned that the protected environment of the joint family system tends to blunt the sharpness to deal with the problems of day to day life. In a Nuclear family, the deed and words of an adolescent were taken into due consideration when compared to a joint family (Kochukrishnakurup *et al.*, 2016). These could be the reasons why adolescents from Joint families failed to attain a significant raise in their self-esteem levels. It is possible that practicing HELP for some more time might produce a significant improvement. In our study, HELP had positively impacted the self-esteem levels of students significantly irrespective of their residential backgrounds such as Metro, urban & Rural. In previous studies, it was observed

that children with chronic physical illnesses had low levels of self-esteem (Pinquart, 2013). HELP had significantly increased self-esteem levels in this population. Henriksen and his team proved that self-esteem acts as a resilience factor against the symptoms of chronic mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression and attention problem (Henriksen *et al.*, 2017). Students with chronic mental illnesses had reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem after the HELP program. If used as a part of treatment plan, this might be an important intervention that could possibly reduce the symptoms of the chronic mental illnesses such as speech poverty, social withdrawal and anhedonia.

Conclusion

Self-esteem is the center of self-confidence, self-worth and self-respect. It plays a vital role in decision making in crossroads of life. It provides belief in one's ability and motivation to carry them out ultimately reaching fulfillment as we navigate life with a positive outlook. Inculcating values at the appropriate time to students is essential. Adolescent phase is very crucial period in everyone's life which is highly vulnerable to emotional influences by teachers, family, peers & social media. Educational systems that concentrate solely on academic excellence create pressure to excel in outwardly things which often creates emotional pressure that could weaken the internal personality and self-esteem of these people. An ideal curriculum is that which aims at the holistic growth of an adolescent balancing both academics as well as internal personality development. HELP program contains Heartfulness meditation as its core component along with teaching of life skills. It had been observed that cleaning practice of Heartfulness meditation facilitates a person to get rid of negative thoughts & aids in positive thinking (KamleshPatel, 2019) and flourishes the psychological well-being (RajaAmarnath *et al.*, 2018). It brings interconnection with oneself which improves the self-esteem of a person. In our findings we observed that HELP program is a powerful tool to improve self-esteem. In our opinion, integrating HELP program in school's curriculum might help to enhance self-esteem of youngsters which aids them to lead a flourished life.

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