



Full Length Research Article

AWARENESS ABOUT EFFICACY OF GENTLE TEACHING APPROACH FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: TRAINED SPECIAL EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 19th October, 2016
Received in revised form
22nd November, 2016
Accepted 20th December, 2016
Published online 30th January, 2017

Key Words:

Gentle Teaching,
Children with special needs,
Non-Aversive approach,
Awareness, Efficacy.

ABSTRACT

There are host of distinctive ways for education and training of children with special needs. Gentle teaching is one educational tool that has shown to be effective towards progress in students with special needs. It is a unique relational approach centered on building safe, loving and engaged relationships. With the amendment of RTE Act and progress of legal provisions for protection of child rights; there is now a blanket ban over punishment of any form, physical or mental. Gentle Teaching being an absolute non-aversive approach; most certainly stands as an answer for the protection of the marginalized children with special needs. This paper examines the awareness among trained special educators about effectiveness of gentle teaching for children with special needs.

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INTRODUCTION

With focus on inclusive education and amendment of RTE Act, there is now an intense concern over the ethical, legal, moral and philosophical issues concerning the use of aversive procedures in the training and management of individuals with special needs. Representing the definitive non-aversive approach to management of undesirable behaviors and also for training of adaptive behaviors; Gentle teaching has in particular outshined other approaches and strategies. In the last decade, the literature in the field of gentle teaching has been dominated by case studies and evidence-based practices pointing to the its success. Gentle Teaching (GT) is based on a psychology of human interdependence that sees all change as mutual. It provides means to gently and respectfully teach adaptive skills and manage maladaptive behaviors; and simultaneously redirects the person toward personally and socially appropriate tasks and interactions. GT focuses on four essential feelings that need to be taught — safe, loved, loving, and engaged; aimed at establishing a bonding and highlight the developmental potentials and personal learning characteristics of the individual with special needs. The core principle of GT is unconditional valuing of individuals (shown by verbal

valuing, gestural valuing and physical valuing); value reciprocation; and behavioral involvement (shown by co-participation in meaningful tasks). It needs to be supported through creating of increased opportunities for choice-making, errorless teaching and redirection of challenging behaviors. The core principle of unconditional valuing refers to words and actions that promote human dignity regardless of physical, intellectual or emotional diversity. Thus, making it fully in accordance to the demands of RTE Act, UNCRPD implications for enhancing human rights and the quality of life. Thereby making it a highly indispensable technique for special educators. Thus, the present study tries to gauge the awareness of the professionals on the efficacy of gentle teaching approach for children with special needs.

Key Terms

Gentle Teaching: The definitive non-aversive approach to training of adaptive behaviors and management of undesirable behaviors; based on a psychology of human interdependence.

Children with special needs: Children having any form of sensory disability, developmental disability, physical disability, medical conditions, emotional problems, learning difficulties or behavioral problems.

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Non-Aversive approach: An approach that avoids or causes avoidance of noxious or punishing stimulus.

Efficacy: The ability to produce a desired or intended result.

Awareness: The knowledge or perception of a situation or fact.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to obtain the level of awareness of the rehabilitation professionals about efficacy of Gentle Teaching approach for children with special needs. Following specific objectives were framed for this study:

- To study the level of awareness onefficacy of Gentle Teaching (GT)
- To analyze the level of awareness across purviews of practitioners, impact of GT, target group and intervention domains.
- To compare the level of awareness on efficacy of GT in reference to age, educational level, professional training and service delivery setting of the professional.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For collecting data to study the awareness of special educators towards efficacy of GT approach for children with special needs; the descriptive research survey method was employed. Questionnaire was developed, distributed and self-administered to 80 respondents. The main idea behind using this method was to better define the opinion held by special educators on the efficacy of GT approach. Against each question, there were predefined answer choices a respondent had to choose from; which provided statistically inferable data. In further studies, it will help analyze the changes of respondent's opinions over time.

Sample

For the study 80 trained special educators (both male and female) working in Delhi-NCR were selected. Professionals from different service delivery models including special school, inclusive school (Government and private) and clinical setup were selected for the study. The participants comprised of professionals in the age range of 25 to 40 years with an experience ranging from 2 to 7 years in the field; and were from different educational and professional training backgrounds. Special educators trained in different disability areas i.e. Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual Disability, Cerebral Palsy, Learning Disability, Hearing Impairment and Multiple Disability were considered for the purpose of the study. The participants were selected through a purposive sampling procedure. The survey was administered after obtaining consent from the participants; and it had taken an approximate 15-20 minutes for each participant to duly fill the questionnaire.

Tool

Demographic information form and a survey named as "Efficacy of Gentle Teaching for children with special needs" were used to collect data in this study. Demographic form included questions on age, organization type, education, rehabilitation qualification and years of experience. The

questionnaire used in the study was self-developed by the author. It contained 20 close-ended questions about the views on the efficacy of gentle teaching approach for children with special needs. The survey had a 4-point response format, including: *Yes, No, Partially Yes* and *Not Sure*; and it included statements related to Practitioners of GT, Impact of GT, Target Group of GT and Domains of intervention for GT.

Administration, scoring of tool and data collection

The data was collected through pre-scheduled personal meeting with the professionals and teachers. Samples were met at the place of work through principals and Head of Departments. The filing of questionnaires was done on-the-spot at the time of personal meeting. The data was collected over a period of 2months and was compiled in another fortnight for analysis.

Analysis of Data

The data gathered by the researcher was analyzed and the results are expressed in frequencies and percentages for qualitative variables. Results are expressed in mean \pm standard deviation. Independent t-test was used to determine the mean score differences of the awareness about efficacy between professionals from different service delivery models, educational background, professional training, age and years of experience of professional. Statistical significance was determined at $p < 0.05$.

FINDINGS

A total number of 80 special education teachers from different service delivery models, different age, educational qualification and professional training backgrounds; having a range of 2-7 years of experience; participated in this study. Graphs below provide detailed information against the level of awareness about efficacy of GT; where the number of participants who either negated or were unsure of the efficacy of GT is greater than those who were aware about effectiveness:

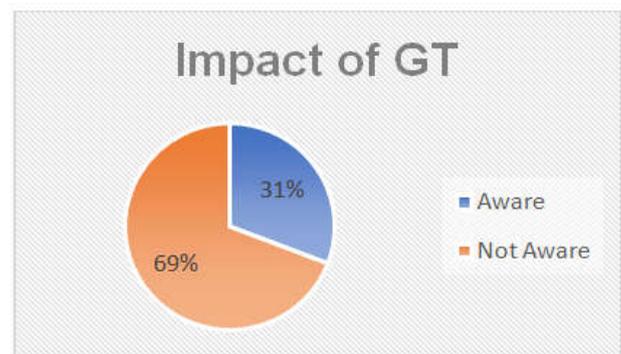


Figure 1. Awareness about Impact of GT for CwSN

As can be seen from the graph above, only 31% of the respondents were aware of the efficacy of GT on children with special needs. This is a surprising finding and rather deems worrying given the fact that participants have undergone professional training programs for special education. As can be seen from the graph above, only 27% of the respondents were aware of the domains of intervention of GT for children with special needs. This finding shows how unprepared the

professionals are about the approach; and it also illustrates that perhaps efforts to provide training for special educators need to be stepped up.

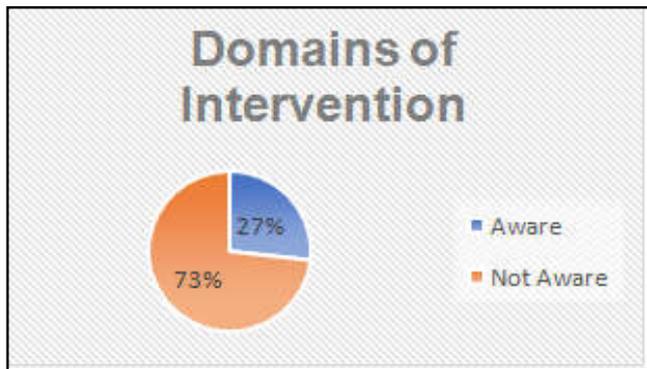


Figure 2. Awareness about Domains of Intervention for GT

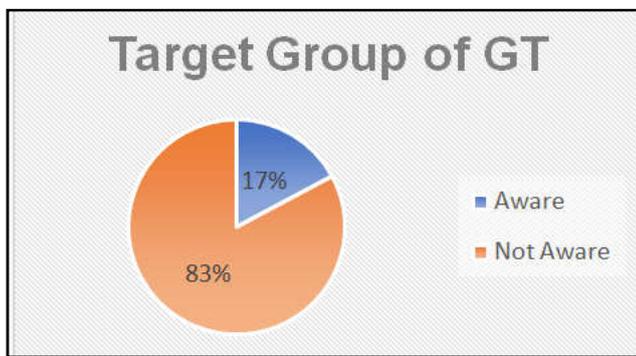


Figure 3. Awareness about who is Target Group of GT

The graph above shows that only 17% of respondents were aware of the target group of GT. This statistic is in particular disturbing, as the respondents had different professional training backgrounds, not just in terms of qualification but also the disability specialization area.

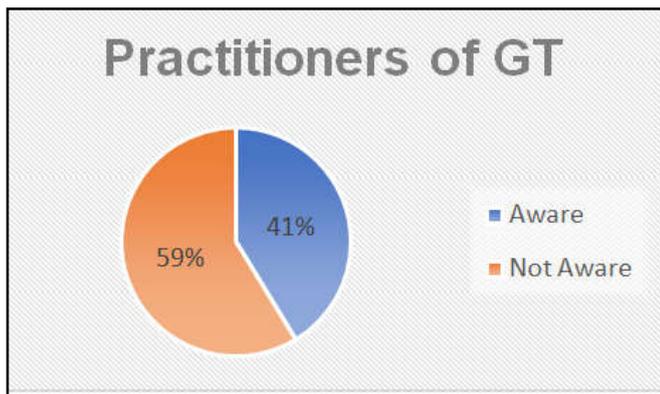


Figure 4. Awareness about who practices GT

The survey shows that an overwhelming percentage of participants – 59% were not aware of the who are the practitioners of GT. This certainly does not promise well for the efforts towards inclusive education; and raises an alarm towards the existing quality of training and management of children with special needs.

To findings of the study for level of awareness about efficacy of GT among varied demographic characteristics of the participants are provided below:

- Level of Awareness among different age groups of professionals

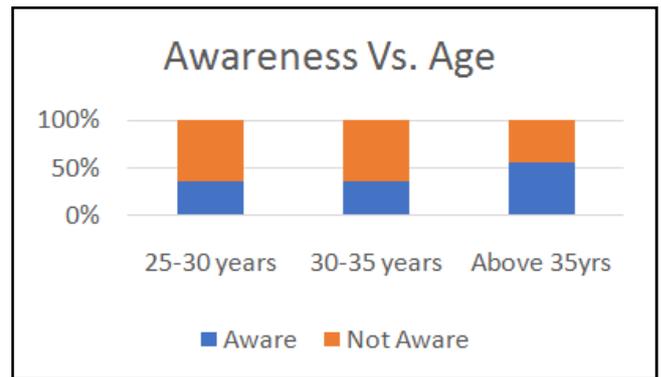


Figure 5. Awareness as per Professional's age-group

- Level of awareness against different groups of Educational Qualification (EQ) background of professionals

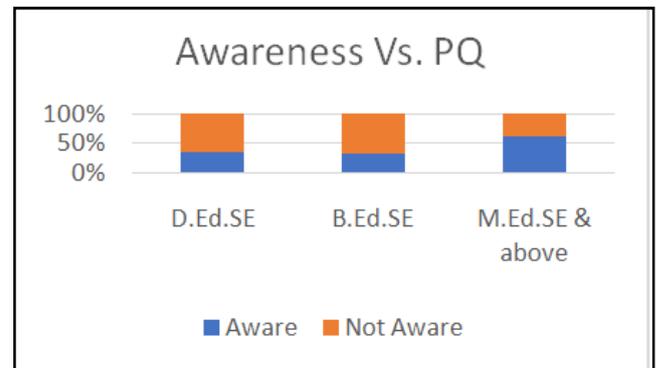


Figure 6. Awareness as per Educational background of professional

- Level of Awareness amongst professionals from different service delivery models

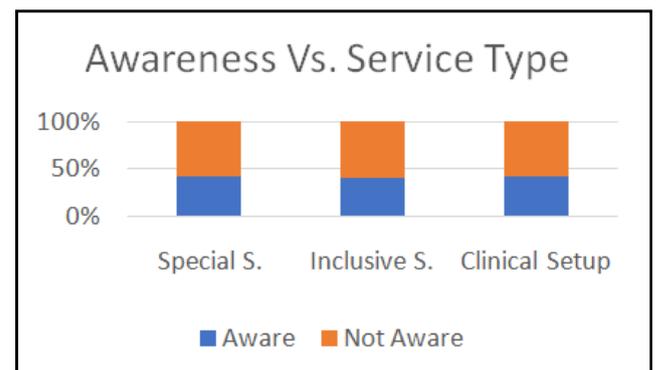


Figure 7. Awareness as per Service-Delivery model of professional

Conclusion

Although special educators share a common theoretical and conceptual basis towards teaching techniques and strategies; the results reflect lack of awareness about the efficacy of the GT approach for children with special needs. Thereby necessitating the need of creating more awareness about the approach and its efficacy. It is the need of the hour that for enhancing human dignity and quality of life of children with

special needs; we need to revisit and change the methods in practice to the most non-aversive approaches. With the advent of focus on inclusive education and implications of various acts and policies, it is empirical that the training on the GT must be made mandatory in pre-service teacher education programmes. As GT is the answer for providing right-based non-aversive intervention to children with special needs. Development of Parent Training Packages needs an equal emphasis as they play a vital role in training and rehabilitation of children with special needs. Such training packages will not just equip parents as partners but also ensure sustenance of quality of life for the family. Further investigation on awareness on efficacy and also on attitudes of professionals towards the approach is necessary.

Implications

The current research reported the results of the survey of special educators on awareness of efficacy of GT; through which following implications can be drawn: There is poor level of awareness amongst special educators about efficacy of GT; which may be attributed to lack of formal training and curricular focus in in-service and pre-service teacher training programmes. Also, there seems to a continued and increased dependency on the traditional approaches of behavior modification; existing among the special educators.

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