Original Research Article

Effectiveness of self-awareness training for young adults on improving their professional skills: a Quasi-experimental study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Young adulthood is a productive phase in an individual's life, marked by a shift towards achieving higher academic success and pursuing desired career paths. In this context, awareness of merits and demerits is vital in attaining desired goals. Therefore, the objective of the current study is to evaluate the differences in self-awareness skills among undergraduate students before and after participating in a life skills intervention program.
Method: The study used a quasi-experimental design involving 243 students from four private undergraduate colleges. A half-day self-awareness training program was provided using activity-based participatory approaches. Data were collected pre and one-month post-intervention through a semi-structured questionnaire validated by two mental health professionals and three industry experts.
Results: Of the 243 participants, 55.55% were female, and 44.44% were male. A significant number of female participants were in the age group of 18 to 20 (Male: 68 (62.96), Female: 113 (83.7), p<0.001) compared to male participants. The life skills intervention significantly enhanced participants' abilities to connect with like-minded individuals (Pre-in: 46.5%, post-in: 52.26%, p<0.01), make new friends (pre-in: 54.32%, post-in: 66.67%, p<0.002), and engage in team interaction (pre-in: 39.09%, post-in: 68.72%, p<0.001). additionally, there were improvements in adopting a positive approach towards tasks (pre-in: 62.14%, post-in: 64.2%, p<0.058) and prioritizing assignments (pre-in: 27.57%, post-in: 53.91%, p<0.001).
Conclusions: Our study observed a significant improvement in the domains of harmony, self-belief, adaptability, and discipline post-intervention among students.

Keywords: Youth, Self-awareness, Career, College, Life skill

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is a productive phase of an individual's life, where the primary focus shifts towards achieving higher academic success and pursuing desired career paths. However, this phase is also fragile, as various environmental factors may negatively impact young adults, hindering their overall growth and well-being.[1] According to Erik Erikson's stage theory, role confusion and identity crisis emerged as two significant phenomena.

Furthermore, the theory posits that young adults, armed with adequate awareness of their roles and life goals, are propelled positively to pursue academic and career endeavours, aiding them in establishing their identity. Conversely, when young adults are confused regarding their roles and potentialities, it can compromise academic and career pursuits.[2-4]

Self-awareness is a fundamental life skill leading to recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses. Often, individuals lack insight into their merits, hindering their

ability to appreciate life's journey fully. This deficiency in self-awareness can lead to challenges in both career and academics, as individuals may navigate adverse circumstances without a clear understanding of their attributes. Many individuals engage in work, but if it does not align with the requirements, they may struggle to achieve their desired goals.[5] From this standpoint, self-awareness emerges as a crucial life skill in livelihood. Therefore, the present experimental study aims to explore self-awareness among young adults and discern any differences in self-awareness levels before and after intervention. Recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses is pivotal for personal and professional development, and this study seeks to shed light on impact of intervention in enhancing self-awareness among the target demographic.

METHODS

With the approval of the institute's ethics committee, this quasi-experimental study aimed to assess the differences in self-awareness skills among undergraduate students before and after participating in a life skills intervention program, with a specific focus on careers.

Sample and data collection

The sample size was calculated using G-power software version 3.1, which employed an effect size of 0.3, an α error of 0.05, a 95% confidence interval, and 5 degrees of freedom. The total sample size was determined to be 220. However, a total of 243 students from four private colleges in Bangalore, selected through purposive sampling, participated in an eight-session self-awareness life skill program (with approximately 30 to 35 students in each session) designed to impart career skills. All these students were recruited for this study based on inclusion criteria, including being 18 years and above and the absence of past and current history of psychiatric illness (assessed through subjective questions). Data collected from the participants between April 2022 to July 2022.

Training program

Self-awareness life skill training program, a half-day activity and discussion-based session conducted in the four colleges. The content for the self-awareness program was collaboratively developed by the first author and co-author, focusing on four domains: harmony, self-belief, adaptability, and discipline. A set of 14 items questionnaire with 4 responses including one correct response was created through a review of relevant studies. A situation was given to all students and guided them analyse the situation and choose the correct response. Questionnaire and training content both underwent content validation by two mental health professionals (a psychiatric social worker and a clinical psychologist) and three industry experts, each with over twenty years of managerial experience in industry or corporate sectors. Following the validation process, data were collected from participants both before the training program and

one month after its completion to assess the impact of the training. Informed written consent was obtained from participants before data collection. Descriptive statistics and the chi-square test were employed to measure differences in variables between the pre- and post-intervention phases.

RESULTS

Of the 243 participants, 55.55% were female and 44.44% were male. A significant number of female participants were in the age group of 18 to 20 (Male: 68 (62.96), female: 113 (83.7), p<0.001) compared to male participants. The majority of the participants are unmarried (Male: 108 (100), female: 131 (97.04), p<0.131). more than half of the female participants were from urban areas (male: 55 (50.93), female: 75 (55.56), p<0.518), representing a nuclear family structure (male: 89 (82.41), female: 118 (87.41), p<0.364) compared to their male counterparts. most male participants had a family size of 2 to 4 (male: 73 (67.59), female: 76 (56.3), p<0.183). a higher number of parents of female participants were salaried employees (70 (51.85%)), whereas male participants' parents were salaried (39 (36.11%)) and farmers (37 (34.26%), p<0.018) as well. the majority of both groups had a monthly family income between 10,000 to 20,000 (male: 73 (67.59), female: 86 (63.7), p<0.509), with no statistically significant difference. Although the difference is not statistically significant, a higher number of male participants were doing part-time jobs (Male: 52 (48.15), female: 54 (40), p<0.242) (Table 1).

Life skills intervention significantly enhanced participants' abilities to connect with like-minded individuals (Pre-in: 46.5%, post-in: 52.26%, p<0.01), making new friends (pre-in: 54.32%, post-in: 66.67%, p<0.002), and team interaction (pre-in: 39.09%, post-in: 68.72%, p<0.001). Punctuality also improved (Pre-in: 23.46%, post-in: 25.1%, p<0.789). Participants demonstrated increased readiness to seize opportunities (pre-in: 133, post-in: 147, p<0.018) and an ability to recognize their own abilities (pre-in: 85, post-in: 124, p<0.002). They became more proactive in embracing life (Pre-in: 87, post-in: 122, p<0.014) and resilient in challenging situations (Pre-in: 147, Post-n: 153, p<0.706). Results in adapting to new environments (Pre-in: 44.44%, post-in: 45.68%, p<0.563) and maintaining patience for desired outcomes (Pre-in: 59.67%, ost-in: 60.49%, p<0.92) remained consistent. Participants' ability to accept feedback positively significantly increased (Pre-in: 41.56%, Post-in: 44.03%, p<0.053). A higher number of participants exhibited enhanced self-discipline, focusing on long-term goals (Pre-in: 39.09%, Post-in: 45.68%, p<0.36), adopting a positive approach towards tasks (Pre-in: 62.14%, post-in: 64.2%, p<0.058), and prioritizing assignments (Pre-in: 27.57%, post-in: 53.91%, p<0.001). Overall, the intervention positively impacted various aspects of participants' personal and interpersonal skills (Table 2).

Table 1: Demographic characteristic of participants.

Variables		Male, (n=108) (%)	Female, (n=135) (%)	X²	Df	P value
Age (in years)	18 to 20	68 (62.96)	113 (83.7)	13.5	1	0.001
	20>	40 (37.04)	22 (16.3)			
Marital status	Married	0(0)	4 (2.96)	3.25	1	0.131
	Single	108 (100)	131 (97.04)			
Domicile	Urban	55 (50.93)	75 (55.56)	0.517	1	0.518
	Rural	53 (49.07)	60 (44.44)			
Type of family	Joint	19 (17.59)	17 (12.59)	1.18	1	0.364
	Nuclear	89 (82.41)	118 (87.41)			
Size of family	2 to 4	73 (67.59)	76 (56.3)	3.56	2	0.183
	5 to 7	30 (27.78)	53 (39.26)			
	7>	5 (4.63)	6 (4.44)			
Occupation of the family	Agriculture	37 (34.26)	27 (20)	11.8	4	0.018
	Daily wage	11 (10.19)	14 (10.37)			
	Salaried	39 (36.11)	70 (51.85)			
	Self employed	12 (11.11)	20 (14.81)			
	Other	9 (8.33)	4 (2.96)			
Income of the family (monthly)	10 k to 20 k	73 (67.59)	86 (63.7)	3.32	4	0.509
	20 k to 30 k	18 (16.67)	18 (13.33)			
	30 k to 40 k	3 (2.78)	9 (6.67)			
	40 k to 50 k	8 (7.41)	10 (7.41)			
	50 k and above	6 (5.56)	12(8.89)			
Part time job	Yes	52 (48.15)	54 (40)	1.621	1	0.242
	No	56 (51.85)	81 (60)			

Table 2: Career related self-awareness among young adults pre and post intervention phase.

Situations	Responses	Pre in, (n=243) (%)	Post in, (n=243) (%)	X² value	P value
I like to connect with the type of people	Like-minded collaboration*	113 (46.5)	127 (52.26)	4.69	0.01
	No personality preference	15 (6.17)	22 (9.05)		
	Task-specific associations	33 (13.58)	31 (12.76)		
	Value for independence	82 (33.74)	63 (25.93)		
I connect with people	Ease in making new friends*	132 (54.32)	162 (66.67)	14	0.002
	Time-taking in new friendships	77 (31.69)	47 (19.34)		
	Momentary friendships without friendliness	14 (5.76)	22 (9.05)		
	Not an easy-going person	20 (8.23)	12 (4.94)		
When I find new team	Cultivating interaction and team integration*	95 (39.09)	167 (68.72)	43.1	0.001
	Immediate project involvement	39 (16.05)	18 (7.41)		
	Performance validation	54 (22.22)	28 (11.52)		
	Freedom for team integration	55 (22.63)	30 (12.35)		
My presence in any occasion	Punctuality priority	97 (39.92)	99 (40.74)	1.06	0.789
	On-time despite difficulties*	57 (23.46)	61 (25.1)		
	Risk-averse punctuality	48 (19.75)	50 (20.58)		
	Convenient on-time arriva	41 (16.87)	33 (13.58)		
when opportunity knocks my door	Maximizing opportunities*	133 (54.73)	147 (60.49)	10	0.018
	Seizing suitable opportunities	33 (13.58)	59 (24.28)		
	Proactive approach	32 (13.17)	30 (12.35)		
	Patience for right opportunities	31 (12.76)	21 (8.64)		
The confidence I have in my skills	Skill enhancement focus*	94 (38.68)	103 (42.39)	0.956	0.817
	Confidence in competence	90 (37.04)	96 (39.51)		
	Avoidance of perceived incompetence	22 (9.05)	26 (10.7)		
	Embracing challenges	28 (11.52)	27 (11.11)		

Continued.

Situations	Responses	Pre in, (n=243) (%)	Post in, (n=243) (%)	X^2 value	P value
In a given situation	Joyful embrace of life*	87 (35.8)	122 (50.21)	10.5	0.014
	Thoughtful decision-making	102 (41.98)	81 (33.33)		
	Adaptive life perspective	35 (14.4)	24(9.88)		
	Principle-based living	19 (7.82)	16 (6.58)		
My recovery capacity in tough situations	Resilience in tough situations*	147 (60.49)	153 (62.96)	1.41	0.706
	Gradual bounce back	59 (24.28)	59 (24.28)		
	Tendency to depression in difficulty	23 (9.47)	16 (6.58)		
	Loss of control in crisis	14 (5.76)	15 (6.17)		
I can adjust with certain environments	Adaptability to unfavourable situations*	108 (44.44)	111 (45.68)	2.08	0.563
	Selective about working environment	63 (25.93)	64 (26.34)		
	Partial adjustment with a quest for improvement	56 (23.05)	59 (24.28)		
	High selectivity, possible quitting	16 (6.58)	9 (3.7)		
Open to feedback	Positive approach to weaknesses*	101 (41.56)	107 (44.03)	6.97	0.053
	Resistance to acknowledging drawbacks	47 (19.34)	47 (19.34)		
	Selective approach to feedback	76 (31.28)	56 (23.05)		
	Dislike for feedback	19 (7.82)	33 (13.58)		
I wait for the task to be completed	patience for desired results*	145 (59.67)	147 (60.49)	0.476	0.92
	Lack of patience, urgency-driven	49 (20.16)	54 (22.22)		
	No belief in waiting for project status	22 (9.05)	19 (7.82)		
	Limited patience with hurry-up response	25 (10.29)	25 (10.29)		
My approach while accomplishing the tasks	Sincere project completion*	151 (62.14)	156 (64.2)	7.45	0.058
	Shortcut approach	41 (16.87)	41 (16.87)		
	Determined completion	9 (3.7)	23 (9.47)		
	Sincerity under pressure, shortcut adoption	37 (15.23)	28 (11.52)		
My way of looking any assignment or projects	Long-term benefit focus*	95 (39.09)	111 (45.68)	3.21	0.36
	Immediate benefits emphasis	33 (13.58)	36 (14.81)		
	Instant result priority	64 (26.34)	51 (20.99)		
	Immediate results and benefits	51 (20.99)	45 (18.52)		
I adopt certain principles in scheduling any project/ assignment	Priority-based assignment planning*	67 (27.57)	131 (53.91)	38	0.001
	Quality-focused delays	38 (15.64)	34 (13.99)		
	Timely task completion	89 (36.63)	54 (22.22)		
	Project importance over timeline	49 (20.16)	24 (9.88)		

*: Correct response, X^2: Chi-square value, for all variables, degrees of freedom are 3, Pre-in: pre-intervention, Post-in: post intervention.

DISCUSSION

The development of any nation depends on the size of its youth population, particularly the number of skilled youths it possesses. To maximize the benefits of the youth population, they need to be healthy and educated. However, a significant portion of the youth in India is suffering from one form or another of mental illness. This is detrimental from an individual's perspective and hampers the nation's growth.[67]

The current study's primary focus was to assess young adults' self-awareness levels concerning their careers. The findings revealed a notable improvement in self-awareness skills after the intervention, particularly in areas such as spending more time with like-minded individuals, making new friends and enhancing team interaction skills among the participants. These skills are integral to maintaining harmonious relationships with others.[8] This positive outcome can be attributed to the training program, which utilized an activity-based participatory approach. The inclusion of situational examples provided experiential learning opportunities for the youth.

Furthermore, it was observed that participants' skills in identifying opportunities, recognizing their abilities, being open to feedback, developing a positive approach towards any given task, and prioritizing assignments showed significant improvement post-intervention. These skills are crucial for career growth, particularly in the corporate sector, where individuals must be adept at seizing opportunities, open to constructive feedback for skill refinement, and effectively prioritize assignments to reduce stress and enhance problem-solving.[9] Thus, it can be assumed that most activities conducted in the training

program effectively reached the participants. Shankman et al article on business skills supported these findings.[10] Additionally, given that these participants are students with their own career aspirations, and considering the program included career components, we assume that participants were actively engaged in the training.

Other skills, such as punctuality, resilience in tough situations, adaptability, maintaining patience for desired goals, and focusing on long-term benefits, were slightly improved but remained statistically insignificant even after the intervention. We hypothesize that, as all these participants are students, they are accustomed to completing their academic assignments and other activities within stipulated timeframes, receiving constant direction and guidance from faculties. Consequently, being punctual and resilient during deadlines are commonplace skills for students. Therefore, these skills might not have appeared insignificantly post-intervention.

The study's strength lies in being the first to explore self-awareness skills from a career perspective. However, a major limitation is that the study did not assess other life skills due to time constraints and feasibility issues.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our study observed a significant improvement in the domains of harmony, self-belief, adaptability, and discipline post-intervention among students.

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