


Chapter 12


Mental Health and Emotion Regulation in At-Risk Adolescents: A Study Using Positive Psychology Intervention

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ABSTRACT

Around 20% of the world's adolescents have mental health problem (Vranda, 2015) and half of these start during adolescence (Kessler et al., 2005). School-based intervention programmes possess a great potential in reducing the risk factors and increasing the protective factors to promote mental health and well-being of children and adolescents (Vranda, 2015; Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2013). The present study aims to examine the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions on mental health and emotion regulation of at risk adolescents. 65 students were identified as at-risk by administering SDQ (students form) from a sample of 147 class 8th students. Other tools used were Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (Keyes et al., 2009) and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (Victor, & Klonsky, 2016). Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) (12 sessions) related to gratitude, hope and mindfulness were given for about three months. Findings are discussed in terms of implications for positive psychology interventions as a sustainable mental health promotional tool in the school context.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-9983-2.ch012

INTRODUCTION

The young population is a long-term asset of any nation. To tap their fullest potential, these adolescents must be physically and mentally healthy, and well-equipped with 21st-century skills, so that they can contribute to the socio-economic growth of their families, communities, and nation. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (2013) stated that every child (individual below 18 years of age) has a right “to survive, grow and develop” and emphasizes on “rights of children and adolescents to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health”. Providing the right kinds of environments, relationships, and experiences will help them grow, develop, achieve, and flourish. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on adolescents especially the vulnerable or at risk of having mental health issues, so that the adolescents who are the future of the nation are physically and mentally strong and positive. However, given the vast diversity of adolescents, the key challenge is what kind of promotive and preventive strategies can be planned that would be easily accessible, easily implemented, and can cater to all adolescents.

According to WHO (2016), “Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and can contribute to his or her community”. UNICEF (2020) has considered mental health as a priority for development and imperative for global health states that,

- Rights-based perspective gives every adolescent the right to quality mental health care and psychosocial support services.
- Mental well-being is fundamental for adolescents’ health and development which is influenced by a host of factors such as family, cultural, societal, economic, and environmental factors.
- Mental well-being among adolescents is a good predictor for a variety of risk behaviors, like substance misuse and abuse, self-harm, unsafe sexual behaviors, and violence – which have lingering effects.
- Having good mental well-being influences the capability of young people to learn, participate, and be productive members of society.

According to the WHO (2021), half of all mental health disorders in adulthood start by age 14, but most cases are undetected and untreated. Further, mental health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10–19 years (WHO, 2021). Hence action must be taken to improve adolescent mental health because the cost of neglected or poor mental health in adolescents is very huge. It not only affects their present physical and mental health but also spreads into adulthood, restraining prospects of living satisfying lives and contributing as adults.

Adolescence is a period where one of the major tasks is to develop the capacity to regulate emotions. Emotion regulation is a basic socio-emotional skill that allows the person to be in charge of emotionally charged situations and handle them flexibly. During adolescence, a stage described by emotional difficulties and evolving regulatory neural circuitry, emotion regulation skills improve significantly. So emotion regulation can be defined as the ability of an individual to recognize, accept, and manage emotions as well as their reactions to them. Emotions can be learned and conditioned by our environment. It is a skill which we learn from our interaction with others in our environment from childhood to adulthood. Largely, the capacity to manage one’s emotional responses is defined as emotion regulation which covers strategies to enhance, sustain, or diminish the intensity, length, and course of positive and negative emotions (Koole, 2009 & Gross, 2002).

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