



Empowering rural women through life skills intervention

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Abstract

With the assumption that developing certain life skills can bring empowerment in women, an intervention study was carried out on women of Varanasi. Pre-test Post-test quasi-experimental research design was used in the study, where the sample comprised eighteen rural women. The life skills intervention (13 sessions) was done for selected ten life skills. Life Skills Inventory for Women was used for pre-test and post-test assessments, to check the level of life skills before and after the intervention. Mean, standard deviation, and t-tests were used for data analysis. The findings of the study indicated that all the participants differed significantly in life skills levels after the intervention. The level of life skills increased in the case of rural women; therefore, it can be concluded that the intervention programme-life skills module was found effective for them. The findings provide a foundation for designing a course/programme to facilitate the development of life skills among rural women.

Key words: Gender Equality, Life Skills Education, Life Skills Intervention, Life Skills Module, Life Skills, Rural Women, Women Empowerment

Introduction

Recently, the World Economic Forum published the Global Gender Report, (2017), stating that, although women represent half of the world's population, they do not have access to the same level of health assistance, education, economic participation, potential earning and political decision-making power.

Gender discrimination, female infanticide, child marriage, dowry system, patriarchal order and the subordinate status of women, illiteracy, financial constraints, professional inequality, workplace harassment, inequality in sharing the burden of household work, lack of health care and safety, violence against women, decreased self-esteem and identifying abilities and potential, lack of proper

educational programme are some obstacles that go against the way of women empowerment in India.

Women empowerment is a process to make women progressive, educated, financially independent, and having good health and status. It further refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political, and legal strength of the women by assessing their abilities/skills, making them recognize their worth, helping in boosting their confidence level, educating them about their rights, aiding them to be able to take wise decisions and solve their problems independently and survive in all adverse situations without being exploited. It would create awareness and provide the proper direction to women.

The various types of empowerments can be measured by applying the indicators in the study of women's empowerment. Qualitative Indicators of Empowerment include becoming more stronger and self-confident, increasing positive self-image, self-awareness and self-esteem, having critical thinking power and problem-solving ability, having access to information and resources for taking proper decisions on their own, having a range of options from which they can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or), maintaining a positive relationships with others, having good communication skills and negotiation skills, developing good coping strategies to handle stress and emotions, increase in personal leisure time and time for child care, ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power, learning different self-defence techniques, increasing awareness about legal rights, changes in the roles and responsibilities in the family and in society, change in perspective of customs that are against anti-women, e.g. child marriage, dowry, widow marriage, etc., ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means, involving in the formation of cohesive group and development of leadership quality, and able to access information on the internet and become tech savvy. Quantitative Indicators of Empowerment include the average age at marriage, sex ratio, improvement in female literacy rate, changes in physical health status and nutritional levels, reduction in rate of violence against women, participation levels of women in the political process, and participation levels of women in different development programmes.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defined it as "Life Skills Education is a structured programme of needs- and outcomes-based participatory learning that aims to increase positive and adaptive behaviour by assisting individuals to develop and

practice psycho-social skills that minimize risk factors and maximize protective factors. Life Skills Education programmes are theory- and evidenced-based, learner-focused, delivered by competent facilitators, and appropriately evaluated to ensure continuous improvement of documented results" (Definition of Terms, UNICEF).

A skill is a learned ability to do something well. So Life skills are the abilities that individuals have to develop to live a fruitful life. Life skills are psychosocial abilities that enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitudes, and values regarding their concerns into well-informed and healthy behaviours. World Health Organization, (1997) defines Life Skills as "*the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable the individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life*". Here 'adaptive' means that a person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust in different circumstances and 'positive behaviour' implies that a person is forward looking and even in challenging situations, can find a ray of hope. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines Life Skills as "*a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skill*."

To develop healthy human beings in the world, World Health Organization (WHO) in 1997 has identified ten skills that help the person to develop into a healthy responsible and productive citizen. The ten core Life skills are- Self Awareness, Empathy, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Decision Making, Problem Solving, Effective Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Coping with Stress and Managing Emotions.

Life Skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions,

solve problems, increase self-awareness, promote positive attitudes, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, promote greater sociability, empathize with others, and manage their lives healthily and productively by preventing negative and high-risk behaviours.

Strengthening of women's mental, emotional, and social skills is needed for empowerment. Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses is very essential for the development of an individual; it would help in deciding their life goals. Thinking skills enable women to think clearly and rationally, take the right decision about their careers, and handle problems and conflicts in their life satisfactorily without any stress. Intense stress and emotions can have negative effects on mental health which can be reduced by Emotional skills as these skills inculcate healthy and positive coping strategies to manage stress and emotions of life. Social skills provide them with skills to maintain healthy relations with others, effective communication to put their views and to advocate for their rights and stand in society on their own. Management skills equip them to manage their healthily and productively. Livelihood skills make them aware of different sources of livelihood and provide them better opportunities to earn and become independent. Safety skills teach about health care and safety, self-defence saves from violence against them.

It is important for a country that its women should be productive but it is a fact that most women are unable to utilize their potential and rights appropriately due to a lack of proper guidance and motivation. The time has challenged women in exceptional ways to find their identity, status, and value. Conditions for rural women are worse. Rural women are comparatively powerless, facing threats to their lives due to poor health, being overloaded with work, and getting less

weightage and respect. They have higher illiteracy rates and earn significantly less than urban women. Rural women play a major role in supporting their households and generating income. They contribute to agriculture and rural enterprises and add to local and global economies. But due to a lack of education, decision-making skills, and problem-solving skills, they became exploited. There has been observed a lack of rural women participation in top leadership roles also. Rural women are full of potential but due to lower levels of literacy and an overload of household chores, they are unable to flourish.

Practicing life skills leads to the development of such qualities which are the foundation of empowerment requires certain skills such as self-awareness, self-esteem, effective communication, and capabilities to have the freedom to decide what to do and who to be. Adapting life skills accelerates decision-making skills, abilities that promote mental well-being and competencies to face the realities of life, enhances problem-solving skills, enables knowing their rights, negotiation, and refusal skills, improves communication skills, builds healthy relations, boosts self-esteem and self-confidence, power, improve gender relationship, awareness about health and hygiene, accessing community services and develop the ability to take responsibility for self and society. Gopikala, (2014) in the article 'Life Skills for Women Empowerment: An Overview' dealt with the empowerment of women, appropriate mechanisms and interventions have been built for the betterment and prosperity of women, and life skills are one of them. Priyadharisini and Rani, (2015) found intervention of life skills effective for women with disability in higher education in understanding their strengths and weakness so that they can easily break the personal and social bearers and lead a very self-reliant and self-dependent life.

Thus, it is essential to sensitize women towards achieving life skills for acquiring, sustaining, and preserving empowerment through the implementation of a well-planned and well-designed intervention programme. By including life skills education programs one can create awareness and provides guidance and proper direction to a woman. It aims to empower rural women by making them aware and strengthened individuals, bold enough to claim their rights, leadership, opportunities, and choices, and to participate in shaping laws, policies and programs.

Present study was conducted with objectives to assess the effectiveness of intervention programme-Life Skills Module for developing essential life skills that leads to the empowerment among rural women.

Materials and methods

Research Hypothesis: The intervention programme would have a significant positive effect on the development of life skills among rural women which would be foster empowerment among them.

Null Hypothesis: The following null hypothesis were formed for the above objective and tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Ho1. There will be no significant difference in pre-life skills scores and post-life skills scores

Research Design: The experimental design employed in the present study was one group pre-test- post-test design which can be symbolically presented as follows O1 X O2 Where O1 – Pre-test O2 – Post-test X - Experimentation

Methods: An experimental method (Quasi-Experimental) was employed for the study.

Population: The population of the present study comprised of all the women (rural and urban both) in the Varanasi district.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample comprised of eighteen rural women was selected through a convenient purposive sampling method.

Life Skills Inventory for women has included the behavioural statements related to selected ten life skills areas. Each statement describes a situation that women might have come across in everyday life. There were five choices for each statement. - Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never. The choice selected by women suggests their level of agreement with the statement. The women responded to each item by putting a tick mark (✓) and did not have an option to have any item unanswered. This tool was particularly appropriate for collecting data from the women, who are educated and comfortable in either language; Hindi or English in relatively quick and efficient manner.

Life skills module- *Life Skills for Women: An active Learning Module (LSWALM)* was developed on selected ten life skills by the investigators Dr. Poonam Tiwari & Dr. Anjali Bajpai in 2021-2022 based on a study conducted in Varanasi, UP, India. This module is designed to develop life skills among women for their empowerment. The duration of the intervention programme was of 30 hours in 13 days. The module includes ten separate sessions on ten different life skills along with a pre-session, an introductory session, and concluding session. The modules include sessions focusing on ten important life skills - Health awareness skills, Self-defence skills, Digital skills, Legal awareness skills, Self-awareness, Coping with stress, Problem-solving, Decision-making, Leadership skills, and Effective Communication skills. There were interesting, relevant and meaningful activities included in the module which were accurate, fulfill the objectives and

targeted the development of life skills among rural women in the sense of empowerment.

For the sake of easy analysis, a master chart was prepared using excel spreadsheet. Mean, standard deviation, and t-test were used to arrive at meaningful inferences related to the above objective of the study.

Results and discussion

The t-test was applied to compare the pre-life skills scores and post-life skills scores of rural participants after intervention and the values obtained are shown in the table below.

Table.1: Showing comparison of the level of life skills of Pre-test and Post-test of Rural women in terms of Mean, S.D., and ‘t’ values.

An examination of the findings in the above table reveals that the calculated t-

value was 13.41, whereas the table t- value was 2.03 at 0.05 level for df=34. The calculated t-value was greater than the table t-value at 0.05 level. Hence null hypothesis was not accepted. It further reveals t-value was found to be significantly higher than the table value at 0.05 level. It can be inferred that there was a significant difference between the life skills scores of rural participants on pre-test and post-test after intervention. Further, from above table it is evident that the mean value is higher in the post-test (M=145.33) as compared to pre-test (M=86.05). This indicates that rural participants differ significantly in life skills levels after the intervention. It reveals that their level of life skills increased, therefore it can be concluded that the intervention programme-Life skills module was found effective for rural women.

Test	N	Mean	SD	t- value	Remark
Pre test	18	86.05	26.45	13.41	Significant at 0.05 level
Post test	18	145.33	10.20381		

Empowering women and enhancing their capabilities is the need of the hour. Life skills can uproot the barriers in the way of empowerment by developing certain capabilities and enhancing the hidden potential of women. Accelerating empowerment with life skills intervention can be an effective mechanism. It can be a strong strategy for empowering women. Findings of the present study reveals that there was a significant difference between the life skills scores of women on pre-test and post-test after the intervention. There was an enhancement in the level of life skills after the intervention. It indicated about the effectiveness of the intervention

programme. Several studies are found supporting the findings of the present study. A study was done by Prashanthi *et al.*, (2021) concluded the need for life skills intervention program for affecting the empowerment status of farm women in Telangana. Similar findings were also obtained by Pujar and Patil, (2016) stated that the intervention of life skill education helps take positive actions and improve coping skills of stress and problem-solving ability among rural adolescent girls. Another study done by Tohani *et al.*, (2019) again stated the development of women's competence through vocational life skills education in the context of

increasing the quality of the family and community socio-economy in the disaster-vulnerable village. The existence of women empowerment makes it more productive in economic activities to achieve women's welfare. Findings of the all these studies strongly provide a foundation for designing a course/programme to facilitate the development of the life skills among women. Government should focus on the need of the rural girls/women and develop policies related to their education equipped with life skills education, so that they become confident, empowered, vibrant, and productive members of the society.

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