

Promoting Social Competence of 6-8 Years Old Socially Incompetent Girls

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ABSTRACT The present study was conducted in Sonepat city with 6-8 years old girls. Two Government schools were selected at random. Twenty 6-8 years old socially incompetent girls were selected from each school on the basis of their social problem-solving skills. Twenty girls from one school served as control group and the twenty from second school as experimental group. Intervention programme was provided to experimental group girls to promote their social competence through social problem solving training for a period of two months. Results indicated that before intervention, there were no significant differences in social problem-solving skills of girls from experimental and control groups. After exposure to intervention programme, there were significant differences in pre- and post-testing performance of girls from experimental group. However, there was no improvement in social problem-solving skills of control group girls who did not receive any intervention.

INTRODUCTION

During early childhood years, parents and teachers give high priority to enhancing children's social development. Research indicates that unless children achieve minimum social competence by about the age of six years, they have a high probability of being at risk throughout their life. Peer relationships contribute a great deal to promote social competence and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer group are "at risk" (Hartup, 1992).

Social competence includes not only behaviours but also cognitive skills which direct and facilitate children's social behaviours (Dodge, 1983; Putallaz, 1983). Rubin and Rose-Krasnor (1992, p. 285) define social competence within an Interpersonal Problem-Solving (IPS) framework as: "*the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations*".

The lack of social problem-solving skills affects the way children handle problems that are encountered with peers and adults. Children who are poor problem solvers experience frustration and failure when problems develop with their caregivers including parents and

teachers. Caregivers also experience a sense of failure and frustration when they try to deal with children as they face these problems. This leads to unhealthy child-caregiver relationship. Shure and Spivack (1981) reported that parents who tell children what to do or who offer advice to solve the problem, are not teaching their children to think. Instead they are doing the thinking for the child.

Social problem-solving skills have important implications for socio-emotional adjustment and interpersonal social competence. Social problem-solving approach has potential to reduce, even prevent more severe behavioural dysfunction (Spivack and Shure, 1989). It is more important "how" children think, that is, the "process" of thinking or problem solving. Children from an early age can, or learn to, think for themselves and solve every day problems. Those who can do this are likely to be adjusted in their later life than those who cannot.

The present study was conducted to promote social competence of 6-8 years old socially incompetent girls.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

From Sonepat city of Haryana State, two Government schools were selected at random. From these schools, two separate lists of girls in

the age group of 6 to 8 years were prepared. In this age group there were 40 girls in School 1 and 41 girls in School 2. These girls were assessed for social problem-solving skills. Flexibility scores for alternative thinking were computed and were written in an ascending order, separately for both the schools. On the basis of median of flexibility scores, twenty girls with low scores from each school were identified as socially incompetent. Girls from School 1 served as control group and from School 2 served as experimental group. The mean age of target girls from control group was 82.54 months ($SD = 6.82$ months) and 82.40 months ($SD = 6.51$ months) for experimental group.

Measures and Procedure

Social Problem-Solving (SPS) Skills: Social problem-solving skills were assessed with the help of Social Problem-Solving Test-Revised developed by Rubin (1988). From this test ten stories were used to assess children's social problem-solving skills in hypothetical situations with their peers.

The responses obtained from Social Problem-Solving Test (SPST) were scored for quantitative features. The total number of categories and total number of different categories found in all SPST stories were computed. Responses were also scored for the number of relevant strategies suggested per story and were computed to get an Object Acquisition relevancy score and Friendship Initiation relevancy score. An index of response flexibility (alternative thinking score) was also computed. Flexibility involved a comparison of the categories found in response 2 with those found in response 1 for any given story. The categories found within the two responses were compared. The flexibility scores were computed for Object Acquisition and Friendship Initiation tasks. Total scores were also computed for all the ten stories which included total number of categories, total number of different categories, total relevancy, and total flexibility scores.

Intervention Programme: Intervention programme developed by Punia and Balda (2002) was used to promote social competence through social problem-solving skills. Emphasis was laid on alternative thinking and consequential thinking while dealing with interpersonal problems. The programme consisted of series of lessons in

the form of games. Intervention was provided to experimental group girls for two months.

After a gap of one month, girls were post-tested for social problem-solving skills to examine the impact of intervention package.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Testing Means and Standard Deviations of Quantitative Scores of Social Problem-Solving Tasks of Control and Experimental Group Girls: Independent sample t-test was computed to examine differences in interpersonal social problem-solving skills of control and experimental group girls for object acquisition, friendship initiation, and total task areas. Quantitative scores of interpersonal social problem-solving tasks were taken as dependent variables and group (control, experimental) was taken as independent variable. Means and standard deviations for control and experimental group girls are depicted in Table 1.

Independent sample t-test for object acquisition tasks, friendship initiation tasks, and total task areas revealed that the main effect of group was not significant for number of categories suggested, number of different categories suggested, and relevancy and flexibility scores. It can be interpreted from these results that both the groups were similar at pre-testing stage.

Pre-and Post-Testing Comparison of SPS Scores of Control and Experimental Group Girls: Pre and post-testing performance of control and experimental group girls was compared using paired-t tests. Separate analyses were run for control and experimental group girls. Pre and post-testing scores, mean difference and paired-t values are presented in Table 2 for control group girls and in Table 3 for experimental group girls.

Control Group Girls: Results displayed in Table 2 indicate that there were no significant differences in pre and post-testing performance of control group girls.

Experimental Group Girls: Results presented in Table 3 clearly show that there were significant differences in pre and post-testing performance of experimental group girls. For object acquisition, friendship initiation, and total task areas, post-testing mean scores of number of categories and number of different categories were significantly greater than pre-testing mean scores. Also, after intervention, girls obtained

Table 1: Pre-testing SPS scores of control and experimental group girls

| <i>Measured variables</i> | <i>Control group(n = 20)</i> | <i>Experimental group (n = 20)</i> | <i>t-values</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Object Acquisition Tasks</i> | | | |
| Number of categories | 8.75±2.25 | 8.85±2.56 | 0.17 |
| Number of different categories | 2.85±0.76 | 3.00±0.87 | 0.24 |
| Relevancy score | 6.15±1.23 | 6.30±1.69 | 0.15 |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 3.05±2.54 | 3.00±2.43 | 0.19 |
| <i>Friendship Initiation Tasks</i> | | | |
| Number of categories | 3.80±2.35 | 4.00±1.97 | 0.16 |
| Number of different categories | 1.80±1.15 | 2.00±1.23 | 0.15 |
| Relevancy score | 2.75±1.65 | 2.80±1.17 | 0.16 |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 0.45±0.50 | 0.50±0.51 | 0.18 |
| <i>Total Tasks</i> | | | |
| Number of categories | 12.55±3.20 | 12.85±3.29 | 0.29 |
| Number of different categories | 4.65±1.32 | 5.00±1.67 | 0.35 |
| Relevancy score | 8.90±2.49 | 9.10±2.31 | 0.21 |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 3.50±2.86 | 3.50±2.50 | 0.00 |

Non-Significant

Table 2: Pre and post-testing SPS scores of control group girls

| <i>Measured variables</i> | <i>Pre-testing</i> | <i>Post-testing</i> | <i>Mean difference</i> | <i>Paired-t values</i> |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Object Acquisition Tasks</i> | | | | |
| Number of categories | 8.87 | 8.90 | 0.15 | 0.51 |
| Number of different categories | 2.85 | 2.90 | 0.05 | 0.45 |
| Relevancy score | 6.15 | 6.20 | 0.05 | 0.32 |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 3.05 | 3.15 | 0.05 | 0.40 |
| <i>Friendship Initiation Tasks</i> | | | | |
| Number of categories | 3.80 | 3.85 | 0.05 | 0.38 |
| Number of different categories | 1.80 | 2.00 | 0.20 | 1.44 |
| Relevancy score | 2.75 | 2.85 | 0.10 | 1.00 |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 0.45 | 0.50 | 0.05 | 0.81 |
| <i>Total Task Areas</i> | | | | |
| Number of categories | 12.55 | 12.75 | 0.20 | 0.78 |
| Number of different categories | 4.65 | 4.90 | 0.25 | 1.83 |
| Relevancy score | 8.90 | 9.05 | 0.15 | 0.50 |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 3.50 | 3.65 | 0.15 | 1.16 |

Non-Significant.

Table 3: Pre and post-testing SPS scores of experimental group girls

| <i>Measured variables</i> | <i>Pre-testing</i> | <i>Post-testing</i> | <i>Mean difference</i> | <i>Paired-t values</i> |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Object Acquisition Tasks</i> | | | | |
| Number of categories | 8.85 | 11.50 | 2.65 | 13.98** |
| Number of different categories | 3.00 | 6.90 | 3.90 | 24.96** |
| Relevancy score | 6.30 | 10.10 | 3.80 | 24.02** |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 3.00 | 10.85 | 7.85 | 34.89** |
| <i>Friendship Initiation Tasks</i> | | | | |
| Number of categories | 4.00 | 6.00 | 2.00 | 10.51** |
| Number of different categories | 2.00 | 4.95 | 2.95 | 15.01** |
| Relevancy score | 2.80 | 5.95 | 3.15 | 21.89** |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 0.50 | 4.60 | 4.10 | 25.13** |
| <i>Total Task Areas</i> | | | | |
| Number of categories | 12.85 | 17.50 | 4.70 | 30.15** |
| Number of different categories | 5.00 | 11.85 | 6.85 | 33.83** |
| Relevancy score | 9.10 | 16.05 | 6.95 | 34.01** |
| With-in-story flexibility score | 3.50 | 15.45 | 11.95 | 39.01** |

Significant at ** $p < .01$.

greater relevancy and flexibility scores than before intervention.

These results clearly show that after intervention, there was significant increase in quantitative scores of experimental group girls for number of categories, number of different categories, relevancy and flexibility scores. These results get support from previous research indicating that social competence improved significantly after receiving intervention programme (Sharp, 1981; Shure and Spivack, 1981). Similar findings have been reported by Punia and her associates (Punia et al., 2003, 2004) and Malik et al. (2004).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the present study clearly indicate that social problem-solving training significantly affect the thought and behaviour of girls through problem-solving. During early childhood years children are required to develop healthy social relationships with peers and adults. This is particularly important for girls as they have to adjust themselves in a new family after marriage where they may encounter different problems. Therefore, it becomes very important for them to learn to cope with the problems and demands of social interactions. The early intervention programme for interpersonal social problem-solving during early childhood years can help children to think alternative solutions to a problem, and to look at the possible consequences of any solution. Thus, early identification and intervention helps in primary prevention. Intervention programmes can prevent maladaptive behaviour which has long-term negative impact on psychological health and well being of individuals.

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