

Character Strength of Adolescents in Kerala

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Abstract

This study aims to find out the character strength of adolescents in southern part of Kerala. Adolescence is the time period where one tries to find out one's own identity and explore one's own strengths. Character strengths are certain personality traits each and every one possesses in our life as well as we express them through in different ways such as through how we feel, what all we think and how we behave in our life. Quantitative within group design is used to study the character strength of adolescents. Demographic measures and Values in action inventory of strength for youth were administered to 100 adolescents aged between 13 and 15. Result of this study shows that there is a difference in level of 24 character strengths in adolescents.

Key words: Character strength, Adolescents

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a phase of rapid growth, where major changes happen in all aspects of a person. During adolescence, an adolescent or a teenager will have to face different issues as a part of the transition they are going through (Hurlock, 1981). Developing good values and virtues during this age period is a major task and if we can develop it successfully, we can mould healthy adolescents. Virtues are considered as what is good in a person. A group of character strengths will lead to virtues. Character strengths are personality traits we express through our feelings, thinking and our behaviour. Positive psychology, itself focuses on uncovering strength of an individual which in turn helps them to lead a positive living or functioning. Understanding one's own strengths will help an individual for their own growth.

Martin Seligman, father of positive psychology noticed that the psychology as a field focuses only on negative aspects of human behaviour. Rather than denying the existing focus in field of psychology, he refocused through the concept of human strengths and virtues (Simonton & Baumeister, 2005), hence the field of Positive psychology born. It is known to be "the scientific study of human strengths and virtues" (Sheldon & King, 2001). He refocused from disorders to the psychological strength while brought in positive focus in field of psychology.

While APA developed Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorder (2000) to find out and classify pathologies, weaknesses and disorders, Seligman came up with the idea of Values in Action project in 2004 which focused on character strengths and virtues as a classification

system for human strengths. Coordinated by Peterson and Seligman, various researchers from different parts of world came up with idea of 24 character strengths and 6 virtues (Baumgardner & Crothere, 2015). Peterson and Seligman states that the “virtues are core defining features of good character”. A group of character strengths will leads to virtues we possess. Character strengths will not result in harm of others, it’s considered as good universally (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Virtue of wisdom and knowledge can be obtained through strengths such as creativity, curiosity, open mindedness, love of learning and perspective; virtue of courage can be obtained through strengths such as authenticity, bravery, persistence and zest. Character strengths such as kindness, love and social intelligence will lead to humanity, fairness team work and leadership will result in justice. Someone can be said to be having virtue of temperance when they possess certain strengths such as self-regulation, ability to forgive others, being modest and prudent, similarly, those who have virtue of transcendence will appreciate and find beauty in all aspects of life, express gratitude and will be looking into future in an optimistic way, as well as humor and spirituality will be there (Park, Nansook & Chris Peterson, 2009).

Studies conducted in 240 college students shows that use of our signature strengths will help in progress towards goal attainment as well as for developing well-being (Linley, Nielsen, Wood, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010). Thus, understanding one’s own strength is an important part towards attainment of goal. After understanding strengths we can use various methods and use it our daily life, so that we can develop wellbeing and live a more fulfilled life (Rashid et al., 2013). It’s been found out that using various strategies to identifying and for developing the strengths in school is necessary for a positive development of children.

Studies conducted on adolescents also shows that strengths such as being kind to others, self-regulation, ability to work effectively in a team, forgiveness and perseverance leads to lesser depression symptoms in adolescents. Certain other strengths such as hope, love of learning, gratitude, etc. leads to life satisfaction. Similarly various character strengths will leads to attainment of fulfilled life and thus, character strengths play a major role in dealing with depression, risk taking behaviour and academic stress during adolescence (Gillham et al., 2011).

It’s also evident that the character strengths will have a positive correlation with school functioning and academic achievement of adolescents. It also improves school functioning as well as wellbeing of adolescents (Shoshani & Slone, 2013). Thus the identification of strength is important and building and promoting strengths of adolescents are necessary and important in a school setting. Thus, this study will help in understanding character strength of adolescents and will help in further development of interventions for strength development.

II. AIM OF THE STUDY

In our life from birth to death, we will be undergoing through different stages of life. Adolescence is one of an important stage in life. To deal with environmental and biological changes adolescents should understand their strengths and nurture those strengths. As there is less studies focusing on character strength of adolescents in Kerala, this study will help in further exploration in this field. This study will help in understanding character strength of adolescents in southern part of Kerala.

III. METHOD

Using quantitative approach for assessing character strength of adolescents, researcher administered self-report questionnaires for collecting data.

Objectives of study

1. To study the character strength of adolescents.
2. To assess the mean order of character strength of adolescents in southern part of Kerala.

Variables

Character strength: Character strength is known to be “Basic building blocks of human goodness and flourishing” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). They are the traits which are reflected in the way we think, act and feel (Carr, 2013).

Adolescence: According to Hurlock, Adolescence is considered to be age of transition, because in this stage, a child is undergoing major changes such as physical or biological, cognitive or in the way of thinking and in social relationship (Hurlock E., 1981).

Adolescents: Individual or a child belongs to developmental stage of adolescence, which starts from age of 13 till age of 18.

Samples: sample from age 13 to 14 is selected from various CBSE schools from southern districts of Kerala. 100 adolescent students were selected using selective sampling method.

Inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria’s:

Children from age 13 to 14 are only selected for the study and they were 8th standard students from various CBSE schools situated in different schools situated in southern part of Kerala.

Adolescents from age 15 and above are excluded from this study. Participants are only from CBSE schools, students from other boards as well as from schools of other districts are excluded from the study.

Inventory used

Values in action inventory by Park and Peterson used in this study. It is used to assess character strength of an individual. There are adult version of inventory as well as inventory for youth. In the beginning it was developed as a 198-item version of VIA Youth and then it’s been turned in to a brief version of 96 items. Both 198 item questionnaire and 96 item questionnaire have similar validity. This self-report questionnaire has good level of reliability and validity. It’s been used to assess character strength of youth from age 13 to 17. Which is a 96 item version with 4 items per character strength. Response of participants are in a 5 point scale, were 1 indicate not like me at all, 2- a little like me, 3- somewhat like me, 4 mostly like me and 5- very much like me. Topmost strengths ranging from four to seven strengths are known as signature strengths and last few strengths are known as lesser strengths. More focus have been given to signature strengths. Online version of this inventory is available and open to all. While using the questionnaire should follow agreements and conditions.

Data analysis

Raw score is obtained and analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation of each strengths are used to study the character strength of adolescents. In this study, the mean score obtained by the total number of participants for each strengths is calculated and analysis is done by comparing mean score of adolescents for each strengths.

I.V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Objective 1. To study the character strength of adolescents.

Table1: Descriptive statistics showing number of participants, mean and standard deviation of scores obtained for each character strengths.

Character strengths	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	100	4.0525	0.76401
Spirituality	100	3.95	0.86237
Love	100	3.9075	0.75433
Gratitude	100	3.8875	0.82141
Humor	100	3.7975	1.04368

Hope	100	3.755	0.80087
Forgiveness	100	3.7375	0.79246
Kindness	100	3.7325	0.78757
Zest	100	3.655	0.79755
SI	100	3.5475	0.70862
Teamwork	100	3.5425	0.77366
Fairness	100	3.51	0.73848
Curiosity	100	3.4325	0.84973
Love of learning	100	3.4275	1.00961
Judgement	100	3.3875	0.88004
Bravery	100	3.37	0.89222
Creativity	100	3.37	0.87939
Humility	100	3.17	0.89674
Prudence	100	3.0675	0.78565
Perspective	100	3.0349	0.76623
Honesty	100	3.0025	0.77157
Self-regulation	100	2.995	0.6844
Perseverance	100	2.9675	0.73654
Leadership	100	2.655	0.87023
Valid N (list wise)	100		

*primary source

The above table shows that mean score and standard deviation of 100 adolescents for 24 character strengths. Adolescents have a highest mean score of 4.0525 for appreciation of beauty and least mean score of 2.655 for leadership. Highest score indicates that the adolescents as a whole have mean signature strength as Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence in comparison with other strengths. Least score indicates that the adolescents as a whole have leadership as lesser strength. Self-regulation, perseverance and leadership with a lesser mean score of 0.6844, 0.73654 and 0.87023 found to be the lesser strengths of adolescents and a highest mean score of 4.0525, 3.95, 3.9075, 3.8875 and 3.7975 respectively obtained for character strengths like Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, spirituality, love, having gratitude and humour, which indicates that they are the signature strengths of adolescents. Adolescents as a mean score of 3.755, 3.7375, 3.7325, 3.655, 3.5475, 3.5425, 3.51, 3.4325, 3.4275, 3.3875, 3.17, 3.0675, 3.0349, 3.0025 respectively for hope, forgiveness, kindness, zest, social intelligence, teamwork, fairness, curiosity, love of learning, judgement, humility, prudence, perspective and honesty. They also found to be having same mean score of 3.37 for character strengths such as bravery and creativity.

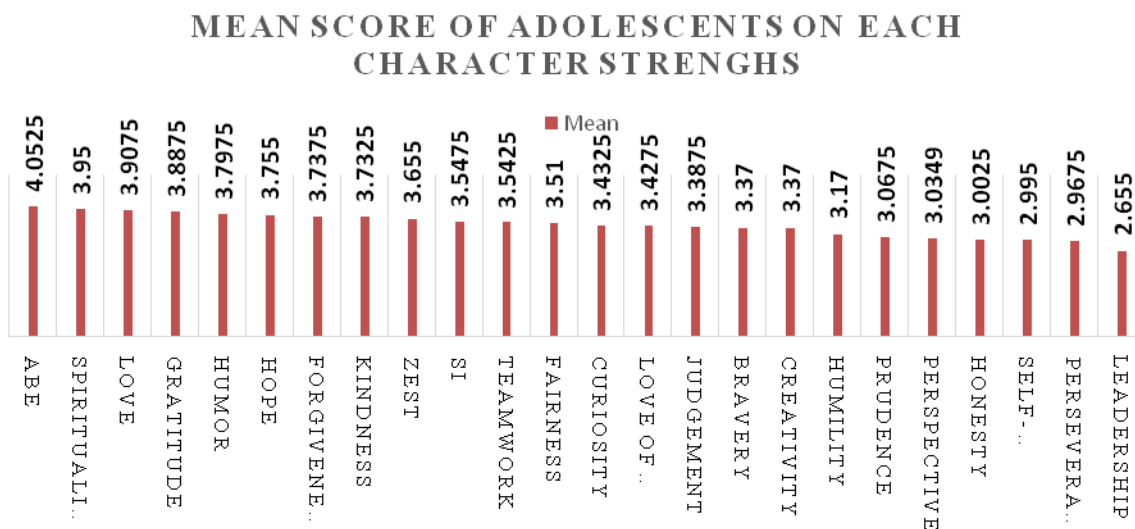


Figure1. Figure showing the mean score of adolescents on character strengths.

From the figure 1. We can observe the mean scores of character strength of adolescents. Studies shows that hope, teamwork and zest are common strengths among youth(Park & Peterson, 2006b). Similarly in this study also we can see that these strengths also belongs to the top most strengths. High level of appreciation of beauty and excellence indicate that the adolescents will notice as well as appreciate beauty in all aspects of life. Then the next highest mean score is obtained for spirituality, which indicates stronger connection with divine and one’s own belief system. Mean signature strength is love, which indicates that the adolescents will value close relationships and they are close with their fellow beings. Having mean score of 3.88 for gratitude indicates that he adolescents are thankful and grateful with others as well as for whatever they have. High score for humour indicates ability to make others laugh and knowing what will make others happy. Mean score of hope indicates optimistic view for future. In this study, we can see that appreciation of beauty and excellence, spirituality, love, gratitude and humour are the strengths which adolescents have more mean score similarly in a study conducted in American adolescents, strengths which are common in young people are having gratitude, being humours and valuing close relationships (love) (Park & Peterson, 2008). Less mean score in strengths such as leader ship, perseverance, self-regulation and honesty should also need an emphasis. These strengths are important in terms of dealing with once own emotions and to build up a strong and better social relationship. Without promoting these strengths adolescents will have difficulty in coping up with major changes during this time period. These strengths are essential for personal growth; these further studies should focus on development of these strengths too. Studies also shows that character strengths may vary because of the influence of gene, influence of family, school they belong too, relationship with peers and community they are part of. Thus the variation in the mean score of strength they obtained may be due to the effect or influence of these factors(Park & Peterson, 2009). Similarly the top most strengths may also vary due to these influence. Thus further studies should examine these factors in order to understand its influence in adolescents of Kerala.

Studies shows that strengths are related to satisfaction of life and hope of adolescents and children (Park & Peterson, 2006a) as well as it leads to more fulfilled life (Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007), self-esteem, wellbeing(Proctor et al., 2011), life satisfaction and self-efficacy (Ruch, Weber, Park, & and Peterson, 2014).It’s evident that the character and

mental status during adolescence have a positive effect on adulthood and during further stages of life. Wellbeing during childhood is a predicting factor for the wellbeing on adult (Richards & Huppert, 2011). It is necessary to focus attention on children during their early stage, and then only they can have a fulfilled life throughout other stages of life. Studies shows that gender as well as care and control by parents also have influence on certain strengths of adolescents. It shows that the bond of a child with his or her parents have impact on adolescents strength development (Ngai, 2015). Thus further studies should focus on the development and influence of various factors in character strengths of adolescents in Kerala

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