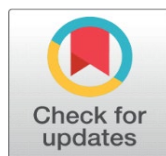


BODY AWARENESS: PRIMAL IN HEALTH PROMOTION

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ABSTRACT

It is globally accepted that health promotion is prerequisite to any community development because it empower communities with individuals who are healthy and economize community living by saving money, time and energy. Promoting the health of adolescents increases their chances to be healthy adults constituting healthy community. Having an insight into the determinants encouraging health promoting behaviors might assist in adopting strategies to encourage youth to adopt health promoting behaviors. With this aim, present study was carried out to appraise the effect of body awareness on health promoting behaviors. 200 college students were administered Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile II by Susan Walker (1995) and Body Awareness Questionnaire by Shields, et al (1989). It was hypothesized that individuals high on body awareness would be higher on health promoting behaviors as compared to individuals low on body awareness. Findings of the present investigation supported the hypothesis.

Keywords: Body Awareness, Health Promotion

1. AN INTRODUCTION

In the recent past, the world was overwhelmed by the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. According to the World Health Organization, this current pandemic was the largest global public health emergency, exerting extreme pressure on health systems. In a desperate attempt to contain the further spread of the virus and the diffusion of the COVID-19 disease it causes, governments across the world have taken measures that are unprecedented. Entire cities, regions and countries were sealed off, travel was banned, schools and universities were closed, shops ran out of stocks, and all economic, cultural and social activities had come to a stop. Never before in modern history has a health problem had such an overwhelming impact on society. Health (or rather the threat of ill health) has become the prevailing concern that takes precedence over all other issues.

These challenges are putting lives, livelihoods and economies in jeopardy, and reflect a deep concern that we as a society are failing to invest enough resources in core health priorities and systems. The need is to realize that our health and total well-being depends upon what we do and do not do for ourselves, than what health professionals can do. Enabling people to increase control over their health and its determinants is at the core of health promotion. As such, health promotion may paradoxically be more important in this time of crisis than ever before.

Health promotion includes all the activities that aim at increasing well-being; prevention and control of disease and health hazards. These behaviors include any measures taken to maintain and enhance the health of an individual or a group. Health promotion can have many meanings, depending on one's perspective (Tones & Tilford, 2001). These

behaviors appertain to regular activities that boost self - realization and a sense of well - being, inclusive of deeds that aid individuals in holding and encouraging healthy lifestyles. Health promoting behaviors, undertaken by the people to enhance and maintain their health, can play a key role in solving their health problems and promoting the health of the society and nation at large.

Health promotion model explains health as not merely the absence of disease, but a positive dynamic state. Increasing a client's level of health and well-being is the central concern of health promotion. Number of theories on health behaviors has focused on the importance of biological factors as the determinants of health and health promotion. Researches have also demonstrated the biological factors as a fundamental contributor of health of an individual. Considering the fact that biological factors play an important role in the health behaviors of individuals, developing body awareness seems to be important.

1. BODY AWARENESS

Body awareness is a multidimensional construct (Pennebaker, 2012) that may include awareness of internal cues or sensations, conscious monitoring of these sensations (Van Zuuren & Dooper, 1999), or the interpretation and attribution of such sensations (Jurgens, 2006). It is how connected and conscious a person is of his own body, how one recognizes where one's body is in space. The way we perceive our body is our mode of access to the world, and hence the primary mode for knowing the world. When we know and feel where our body is in space, we are better able to direct it to do what we want it to do. Understanding what our body is communicating can help us to meet our own needs better, which leads to greater physical, mental and emotional well-being and satisfaction.

Body awareness represents a guiding healing heuristic which acknowledges the validity of the person's physical symptoms and uses body sensations to identify the psychological, physiological, and social factors needed for symptom self-regulation. Body awareness involves directing one's attention to interoceptive or body experience and associated feelings for the purpose of self-healing and achieving health. One can accept experience and alter the impact of previous trauma, personality, stress and emotions if he views the body as the mediator of these experiences. An individual needs to develop awareness of the link between their body reactions and the emotional/situational context and begin altering their body's habitual way of responding.

Being aware of how our body feels in health and illness is essential for the nervous system to locate the source of disease in the body and direct the body's resources to facilitate healing. For instance, if there is any injury or wound, the immune system temporarily sends inflammatory cells (the first stage of healing) to those specific areas of the body, before the repair cells are activated. But, until recently it was not known that paying conscious attention and bringing body awareness to the point of injury (feeling for the pain, anger or sadness connected to the circumstances of the injury) allows us to activate additional focus on self-care. A person can apply bandages, seek medical attention if needed, or take time to rest so that they can recover soon. This shows how body awareness or interoception can boost the healing power of immune system, thereby increasing health promoting behaviors.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous researches have pointed out the relevance of Body awareness for a broad range of health behaviors

The relationship between body awareness and quality of life in people with idiopathic scoliosis was examined by Yagci, Karatel, and Yakut (2020). The results showed that people with idiopathic scoliosis have a lower level of body awareness than people without the condition, and that body awareness among scoliosis participants had a positive correlation with self-reported pain, bodily function, body image, and mental health.

According to a research by Malmgren-Olsson et al. (2001), all three treatment groups—body awareness therapy, feldenkrais, and traditional physiotherapy—saw notable improvements over time. Participants reported better negative self-image, less pain, and psychological anguish. Additionally, the data showed that, in comparison to the usual treatment, the group receiving body awareness therapy and feldenkrais may have better results. According to Aspegren Kendall et al. (2000), the BAT group showed better overall health at the 18-month mark, but their outcomes were worse than those of the Mensendieck system (MS) group. The MS group experienced less pain at the worst spot, fibromyalgia, and arthritic self-efficacy symptoms.

The benefits of body awareness treatment for a person's physical and emotional well-being have been the subject of numerous research. In a study, Malmgren-Olsson, et al., (2001) revealed significant positive changes over time in all three treatment groups i.e. body awareness therapy, feldenkrais and conventional physiotherapy. Subjects reported reduced psychological distress, pain and improved negative self-image. Further, the analysis revealed that the treatments group using body awareness therapy and feldenkrais may produce more effective outcome as compared to the conventional treatment. Aspegren Kendall, et al., (2000) also revealed that the BAT group demonstrated improved global health at 18 months follow up, but lower results than the mensendieck system (MS) group. The MS group had improved fibromyalgia, arthritis self-efficacy symptoms and pain at worst site.

Multidisciplinary studies have indicated that basic body awareness therapy (BAT) can enhance health-related quality of life and cost-effectiveness indicating that basic BAT may have positive effect (Gard, 2005; Sertel, Simsek & Yumin, 2021). Similarly, Van Der Maas et al. (2016) observed that across treatment conditions, increases in body awareness were linked to improvements in depression, disability, and health-related quality of life. It was also found that self-efficacy and catastrophizing had a role in mediating these associations.

2.1. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present research are to study:

- 1) The status of health promoting behaviors among college students
- 2) The effect of body awareness on health promoting behaviors of college students

HYPOTHESIS

Individuals high on body awareness would be higher on health promoting behaviors as compared to individuals low on body awareness.

SAMPLE

200 llege students in the age range of 18-24 years were randomly selected from different colleges of Punjab.

2.2. MEASURES

- 1) **Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLP-II)** (Susan Walker, 1995) is a measure of health promoting behavior patterns. The 52 item health promoting behavior scale consists of six sub scales to measure behaviors in the theorized dimensions of health promoting lifestyle: namely spiritual growth, interpersonal relations, nutrition, physical activity, health responsibility and stress management. Content validity for the scale was established by literature review and content experts' evaluation. Construct validity was supported by factor analysis that confirmed a six dimensional structure of health promoting lifestyle, by convergence with the personal lifestyle questionnaire ($r=0.678$). Criterion related validity was indicated by significant correlations with concurrent measures of perceived health status and quality of life ($r=0.269$ to 0.491). The alpha coefficient of internal consistency for the total scale was 0.943; alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from 0.793 to 0.872. The 3-week test-retest stability coefficient for the total scale was 0.892 (Walker, Sechrist & Pender, 1987; Walker & Polerecky, 1996).
- 2) **Body Awareness Questionnaire (Shields, Mallory & Simon, 1989):** Body Awareness Questionnaire is an 18-item self-report scale designed to assess self-reported attentiveness to normal non-emotive body processes, specifically, sensitive to body cycles and rhythms, ability to detect small changes in normal functioning, and ability to anticipate bodily reactions. Responses on the items are taken on a 7-point rating scale ranging from not at all true for me (1) to very true of me (7). Body Awareness Questionnaire is a 7 point rating scale. It has been scored as 1 for not at all true of me and 7 for very true of me. One of the items in the scale was reverse scored i.e. 7 for Not at all true of me and 1 for very true of me. To calculate the overall score, sum of all the items were calculated. The total score ranges between 18 and 126. Internal Consistency of the Body Awareness Questionnaire was found to be 0.82. Test-Retest coefficient separated by 2 weeks was 0.80. The convergent and discriminant validity of the Body Awareness Questionnaire was established by examining the relationship between the responses of BAQ and a set of self-report instruments that tap other dimensions of self-evaluation and self-awareness.

2.3. DESIGN

t-test was used to analyze the differences in health promoting behaviors among the individuals with high and low body awareness.

3. RESULT

Table 1: Showing means, and SDs of health promotion in relation to body awareness.

VARIABLES	LEVELS	N	MEANS	SD	SE _M	SE _D	df	t-value
Body Awareness	High	106	2.88	0.37	0.037	0.063	198	6.91**
	Low	94	2.45	0.50	0.051			

**p<.01

Results revealed that there is significant difference between individuals with high body awareness and Individuals with low body awareness on health promoting behaviors. Mean comparison shows that individuals with high body awareness (M=2.88) exhibit more health promoting behaviors than individuals with low body awareness (M=2.45).

4. DISCUSSION

The findings depict that individuals with high body awareness were found to exhibit more health promoting behaviors than those with low body awareness. These results support the hypothesis that individuals with high body awareness would be higher on health promoting behaviors as compared to those with low body awareness.

The findings are in line with the previous literature which reveals that body awareness is positively associated to health behaviors. It is reported that increase in body awareness increases an individual's ability to cope with pain (Gard, Nyboe and Gyllensten, 2019; Dragesund and Raheim, 2008) and leads to decrease in pain through development of an increased sense of control as well as a changed attitude to themselves, their bodies and their pain (Lundwall, et al., 2019). It also leads to improvement in health related quality of life, disability and depression (Van Der Maas, et al., 2016); enhance sexual well-being in some women (Seal & Meston, 2020) and subjective well-being (Price and Hooven, 2018; Brani, et al., 2014). Further researches have also shown that basic body awareness therapy can promote psychological growth & personal development (Skatteboe, et al., 1989); improves depression severity and cardiovascular fitness (Danielsson, et al., 2014); reduces depressive symptoms in the geriatric population (Chitra and Gomes, 2019); increase health-related quality of life (Sertel, Simsek & Yumin, 2021; Gard, 2005) and reduces distress, improves sensory (physical and emotional) awareness, and regulation (Price and Hooven, 2018). People become more capable of self-management in coping with stress and psychosomatic symptoms (Landsman-Dijkstra et al., 2004) and thus indicate that basic body awareness therapy has positive effects on physical as well as mental health of an individual.

Researches have consistently confirmed that body-to-brain interactions influence physical and mental well-being of an individual. Our awareness of how our bodies experience in health and sickness helps the nervous system to site the origins of disease in the body, and channelize the body's own resources to facilitate healing (Fogel, 2013). For instance, if there is an injury or a physical lesion, the immune system, directs inflammatory cells, i.e. the first phase of healing before repair cells are triggered off, to that specific area of the body for a limited time. Giving conscious attention, taking body awareness to the point of the injury (feeling, for instance, the pain, anger or gloominess connected to the circumstances of the injury) allows us to activate extra forms of self-care such as individuals can put on bandages and antibiotic ointments, seek medical care if required, and take time for relaxation so that they can recover more quickly and hence increasing health promoting behaviors.

5. CONCLUSION

Health promotion model focuses on health promoting behaviors rather than health protection or illness prevention behaviors. In times of crisis like this, people want to know what preventive measures and health behaviors they must

take and how they can deal with the consequences. The findings of the present investigation reveals that health promoting behaviors are exhibited more by individuals with high body awareness. Body awareness is an approach often used to promote health and well-being. The awareness of how our body feels in health and sickness and the knowledge of health measures one must take can help us to deal with the situation like this more effectively. Moreover, health promotion should not wait until a crisis happens, but one must be well prepared to respond swiftly.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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