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Effectiveness of communication skills in decreasing addiction tendencies among male students from cities within Tehran province

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the effectiveness of teaching communication skills in decreasing the tendency to addiction in guidance school male students. Communication skills are considered to be a component of life skills. This research entails a pre-test /post-test with control group design that includes all guidance school male students studying in the cities of Tehran Province. A total of 30 male students were selected according to the random sample cluster method. Half of the population was classified as the test group and the remainder comprised the control group. This research used the addiction potential scale (APS) that has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of approximately 0.72. The test group had eight, 90 minute weekly educational interventions. There was a meaningful difference in the numbers of addiction tendencies between the test and control groups. The results of this research support the results of previous studies on the effect of a program that includes teaching communication skills for decreasing the tendency of students to use drugs. Considering the educational intervention effects of teaching communication skills on the decrease of addiction tendency, the results are applicable for health and education experts.

Keywords: Communication Skills, Effectiveness, Addiction, Male Students

INTRODUCTION

Drug dependence is one of the major problems in today's world which has turned into a serious, concerning threat due to its destructive and preventive effects on the development and prosperity of the society (1). Drug abuse and its painful consequences are related to medical, psychological, financial, spiritual, familial, and social problems that cause tremendous damage for the family and society. Fighting against drug use and treating or maintaining drug dependent people costs tremendous amount money annually for many countries. According to a report published by Drugs & Crime (2), the number of drug users among the 15 to 64 year old age group is 208 million or 5% of the entire population. Currently, there is a worldwide epidemic of drug use among adolescents (3).

Adolescence is one of the most important, sensitive and crucial periods of a person's life because it is a stage of moving from childhood to maturity. This period of life includes rapid physiological changes, abstract thought attainment, mood instability and imbalance, concern about the future, accepting responsibility, and attempts to obtain the approval of others, particularly friends. Although these changes are helpful for adolescents to develop naturally, they can also cause behavioral, cognitive, and emotional problems (4)

According to studies, more than 90% of drug users begin during adolescence (5). Thus, one of the major ways to decrease drug use in adulthood is to control this use in younger people (6).

Characteristic problems such as having low self-confidence, lack of work satisfaction, intense need to receive others' approval, and anxiety have an important role in reducing an individual's drug tendency (7). Low self-confidence and lack of needed skills to communicate with other people puts the adolescent in a vulnerable position to become addicted to drugs. Therefore, awareness of the dangers of drug use can cause a change in the adolescent's thought process and function (8).

One risk factor that may encourage the adolescent to use drugs is the pressures and suggestions of his friends. Teaching resistance skills, particularly the ability "to say no" to friends is a key role in the prevention of drug use (9). In a study conducted by Forughi (10), 66% of cases outside school friends and colleagues encouraged and recommended drug use; in only 4% of cases did an individual begin to use drugs himself. According to Jessor et al. (11) the act of using drugs as a learned behavior is the result of intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions. In their opinion, when an adolescent who has low self-esteem, a feeling as being separated, an external control source, and positive beliefs and views regarding drugs interacts with people or situations that encourage him to use drugs, there is an increased risk of drug use. Results such as the positive meaningful relationship between shame and bruise (12); (13) great consequences of shame and ability hurt and caused social skills (14), and the relationship between weak ability for self-assertion with drug misuse (15) all indicate the importance of establishing social and communication skills during children and adolescents period. Weakness in the ability for self-assertion and personal decision-making are identified as one of the major factors for Tehran's youth to drug dependency (16).

Different studies have suggested that behavioral cognitive treatments which focus on teaching necessary skills can be effective for adolescents (17-18). Communication skills which are a component of living skills can increase and improve Problem solving skills, may decrease interpersonal conflicts and finally promote health. This skill is reported to be effective in controlling addiction and decreasing drug use (19-20). Generally it is believed that promoting communication skills are effective in psycho-cognitive improvement and health. These abilities may help the individual effectively confront situations and empower him to operate positively and congenially in his relations with society, his culture and environment, and particularly help him with his psycho-cognitive health (21). Communication and social skills have the most links with interpersonal behaviors in everyday life (2, 22). Communication skills are one of the three components of living skills that have been defined as verbal and nonverbal skills, listening, expressing feelings and emotions, acceptance and feedback presenting skills, conversation skills, "say no" skills, conflict management, empathy skills, co-operation and contribution skills.

Jarvis(20) believes that in addition to teaching communication skills, these skills will teach the individual how to start and continue a conversation, to listen actively to what others say, openly express his thoughts, emotions and beliefs, and to understand other people's feelings. He indicated that communication skills are important when they help the individual to decrease his negative feelings and social tensions, and constructively and successfully solve problems. Finally, communication skills can cause positive and constructive behaviors, and prevent the emergence of negative and unconstructive behaviors (20).

Although research on communication skills exists from the 1970s, recently they have attracted more attention; different methods are performed for teaching communication skills. Initially, teaching these skills have been used for treating cases such as changing behaviors and chronic diseases such as schizophrenia, however there have been prominent developments in the past two decades. Communication skills are reported to be of greater benefit in increasing social functions, quality of life, psycho-cognitive health, and in decreasing various psycho-cognitive symptoms instead of medication (23). Different researchers present preventive all-inclusive and various programs. Some (24) report the existence of a relationship between mental health and addiction potential, where mental health can be a predictor of addiction. Barghi (25) has observed that addicted students scored higher on an addiction potential scale in contrast to healthy students. According to Wilburn and Smith (26), that teaching communication skills to adolescents can improve their problem solving abilities, increase self-confidence and satisfaction with life, and decrease stress and suicide thoughts. In some research (9, 27-28) concluded that communication skills cause students' approach to drug misuse. A study conducted by Srikala and colleague (29) in an Indian school stated that teaching life skills as a component of communication skills was effective in improving self-esteem, compatibility and suitable confrontation, particularly for school and social behaviors. Another research conducted by Choque-Larrauri and colleague (30) stated that teaching life skills improved high school students' social skills.

Babapur (31) mentioned the effectiveness of teaching communication skills on students' ability to problem solve. He stated that teaching communication skills in guidance and high schools could help improve students' problem solving skills and promote their psycho-cognitive health, particularly among students faced with difficulties. Bagheri and Bahrami (32) have reported that teaching life skills to students can cause meaningful changes in their knowledge, view, and self-esteem. According to Jensen (33), in a research in the same field, teaching life skills has an effective role in preventing drug use. Studies by Poursharifi and colleagues (34) have shown that teaching life skills is effective in decreasing alcohol, cigarette, and drug use. The results of their studies indicated that teaching various types of life skills, such as communication skills, was effective in the prevention of risky sexual relationships, suicide, alcohol use and in decreasing alcohol use. Rahmati and Etemadi's (35) research showed that teaching confrontation skills through group negotiation changed students' views regarding drug use and had a meaningful effect on changing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components.

Recent research on preventing drug use has solely studied general life skills rather than communication skills, with the exception of one study by Kakia (36) on pre-university female students. Therefore, the current research is designed to examine the effectiveness of teaching communication skills, as a component of life skills, on the decrease in addiction tendency among guidance school male students. The hypothesis of the current research is that teaching communication skills can decrease adolescents' addiction tendencies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design and methodology

Design

The general design of this research was a pre-test /post-test with control group according to the goals and nature of the research.

Study population

The sample population included all male students enrolled in guidance schools in different cities of Tehran Province during the 2012-2013 school year. The cluster random sampling method was used. Educational district of RobotKarim was selected randomly from among 20 educational districts of cities in Tehran Province. From among 24 male guidance schools in this city, one was selected. An addiction potential questionnaire was presented to 240 students of the school and 30 students who scored higher than average were chosen. Finally, 15 students were randomly selected and assigned to the control group and another 15 were assigned to the experimental group.

Data collection

The addiction preparation scale (APS) was used in this study. The APS is a short version of Minnesota Multifaceted Personality Inventory (MMPI). The APS inventory includes three subscales: APS, Addiction Acknowledgement Scale (AAS), and Mac Andrew Alcoholism Scale-Revised (MAC.R). The APS scale was developed by Weed and colleagues (37) to evaluate people's addiction tendency as an indication of character and includes 39 'yes-no' questions. The inventory is scored according to an answer key. This inventory was normalized in Iran by Kordmirza and colleagues (38) on Iranian university students. The Cronbach's alpha calculated in the present research was 0.72.

Performance

Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control groups. Those in the experimental group were taught communication skills (verbal and nonverbal effective relation, self-assertion, negotiation, prevention, cope with shame and active listening) in eight, 90 minute sessions for a period of two months. The control group was maintained on the waiting list. The content of the communication skills sessions were adjusted and derived from teaching life skills programs with the intent to equip students to establish a healthy, amiable relationship with their friends, present their selves in a society, learn self-assertion and how to cope with friends' pressures by enforcing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. These techniques can change the addiction tendencies such as the tendency toward drug use. At the beginning of the session, the group leader informed the students that their active participation was essential for the sessions' goals and students had the right to express their opinions. The group leader emphasized that the sessions could not develop if the leader were the only speaker. The following methods were used to involve students in the teaching process and obtain more effective participation: group discussion, role playing, storytelling, brain storming, modeling, and reframing.

The content of the sessions included introductions of the leader of the group and members, the goals of the group, rules and expectations and the definition of communication skills in general as the goals of the first session. The second session entailed working on effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills and in the third session teaching self-assertion skills was emphasized. The fourth session taught negotiation techniques and the fifth session emphasized working on disagreement skills or the ability to say no. In the remainder of the sessions, students learned how to cope with shame (sixth session), developed active listening skills (seventh session) and in the eighth session, the group leader summarized lessons from the previous seven sessions and expressed appreciation for the participants.

Data analysis was performed on two levels: description and definition. Mean and standard deviation measures were used in the definition level.

A two variable covariance test (ANCOVA) was used for analysis. In this stage, the post-test scores were considered to be the dependent variable and the pre-test scores were the random variable (covariance). The group was added to the analysis as the independent variable (factor). In examining the minor hypothesis, Bonferroni test and the difference between mean were used for multiple comparisons. Data processing and analysis were performed with the SPSS version19 statistical software package.

RESULTS

Table 1. Mean distribution and standard deviation of addiction tendency

| Group | Number | Pre test | | Post test | |
|--------------|--------|----------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | | SD | M | SD | M |
| Experimental | 15 | 7.76 | 81.73 | 11.5 | 61.46 |
| Control | 15 | 10.07 | 82.33 | 10.52 | 82.13 |

The above table shows the volunteers' mean and standard deviation of their pre- and post-tests according to groups. The standard deviation of the mean measure was 61.46 in post-test addiction tendency of the experimental group, which showed the square root of the mean difference. The tendency score of greater than half of the members ranged from 49.96 to 72.96. The standard deviation of the control group was 10.52, which indicated that the addiction tendency score for the majority of participants changed between 71.61 and 92.65.

Homoscedasticity of the dependent variables

Leven's variance homogeneous test was used to show the test's reliability.

Table 2 Variance homogeneous test of the dependent variables

| Dependent variable | F | d.f1 | d.f2 | P |
|-------------------------------|-------|------|------|------|
| Addiction tendency post group | 19.55 | 1 | 28 | 0.06 |

According to the observed meaningful level, it can be resulted that the homoscedasticity of the dependent variable hypothesis is confirmed.

Hypothesis testing

The hypothesis "teaching communication skills are effective in the decrease of addiction tendency among male students" was tested.

Table 3 Covariance analysis of addiction tendency

| Source of changing | Sum of the square roots | df | Square Root of Mean | F | Sig | Eta | Test Square |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----|---------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Reformed model | 5511.66 | 2 | 2755.83 | 67.819 | 329 | 0.834 | 1.00 |
| Separator | 40.231 | 1 | 40.231 | 0.99 | 0.000 | 0.035 | 0.160 |
| Group | 6029.548 | 2 | 3014.774 | 74.192 | 0.00 | 0.733 | 1.00 |
| Addiction pre tendency | 2308.327 | 1 | 2308.327 | 56.807 | 0.000 | 0.678 | 1.00 |
| Error | 1097.140 | 27 | 40.635 | | | | |
| Total | 161266.00 | 30 | | | | | |
| Total reformed | 6608.8 | 29 | | | | | |

The results of the table for the changing source of the group indicate that: $F(1,27)=74.19$, $p>0.001$, Partial Eta Square=0.733. According to the degree of F and Eta coefficient for the group variable and its meaningful level in describing the addiction tendency dependent variable, it was determined that teaching communication skills was effective in changing the tendency toward addiction. The degree of Eta coefficient showed that 73.3% of the variance toward addiction tendency was related to the agent variable (group).

When the effect of the agent variable was meaningful, the addiction tendency mean differed between groups. Thus, for a more precise consideration and designating the difference between the groups' mean, the Bonferroni test was used.

Table 4. Comparing the groups' mean in the addiction tendency dependent variable

| Groups | SD | Mean difference | Sig |
|---|------|-----------------|-------|
| Teaching control and communication skills | 2.32 | -20.06 | 0.000 |

The results of table 4 show that the difference between the mean of the experimental group and the control group was calculated to be -20.06. This difference was significant at the 0.01 level. Thus, considering that F was meaningful at the $p<0.001$ level and mentioning table 4. It can be concluded that teaching communication skills was effective in decreasing addiction tendency. By taking into consideration that the difference between the mean of the test and control groups was meaningful, we could express with 0.99% confidence that the hypothesis was confirmed, as "teaching communication skills is effective in the decrease of male students' addiction tendency".

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

One of the most important and troublesome findings that threatens adolescents is drug misuse. Adolescence is a sensitive age; therefore drug misuse is an important concern at this age. The application of applying educative strategies during this stage, particularly the first years of adolescence, has an important and lasting effect in preventing addiction problems. Teaching communication skills as one of the major educational strategies can empower adolescents by developing features such as self-assertion, the ability to build and maintain accurate relationships, promoting social situations, increasing self-esteem, resisting before their friends' pressure, and resolving weaknesses that causes addiction tendency. The goal of the present research is to determine the effectiveness of programs that include teaching communication skills on the decrease of drug addiction tendency in guidance school male students.

The results of the present research stated that teaching communication skills was effective in the decrease of addiction tendency. These results were consistent with those by Jarvis (20) and Kims (19). The findings of the researchers showed that communication skills promoted health and addiction control, and decreased drug use by increasing problem solving skills and decreasing interpersonal conflicts. The findings of this research also confirmed many aforementioned research conducted by Botvin et al. (9, 27-28, 35-36, 39-40). These researchers agreed that teaching communication skills was effective in preventing drug misuse.

Communication skills can empower an individual by decreasing negative feelings and social tension, to successively and structurally solve his problems and act positively and congenially in his relationships with other society members. Communication skills can increase an individual's social operations and mental health, thereby decreasing the tendency for drug use. As has been observed by Zargar (24), there is a relationship between mental health and addiction potential, whereby mental health is predictive of addiction potential.

Taught communication skills include skills such as self-assertion, coping with shame, the ability to say no and confront friends' pressure, therefore, the findings of the present research are consistent with the findings of Aghabakhshi et al (16), Botvin & Kantor (9), Haji Hasani et al (15). According to these findings, it can be stated that shy people with low self-assertion do not have the ability to say no, reject others' unreasonable demands, criticize others or disagree with them, due to their low self-esteem and weak self-concept. Hence, it can be predicted with a high probability that such people will act passively when others encourage them to use drugs and answer positively to drug use, due to dependency and identifying with friends and the need to receive others' approval.

Limitations included limiting the study population to a specific age and sex. Therefore, the results of this research cannot be applied to a larger population, with wider age range and both sexes.

Conducting programs that include teaching communication skills as a component of life skills in addition to other educational materials at school can be effective for students (particularly in guidance schools) due to the sensitivities of this age. Since the family plays a major, basic role in children's education and development, it is essential for parents to present appropriate behavioral patterns for education and communication skills, and to have a friendly relationship with their children, and attempt to become closer to their children. The fast paced cultural, social, and economic changes have placed many families into various harms. Thus, we can prevent social harms by teaching and empowering the family.

According to the results of the research it is suggested that Policy makers should take positive, effective steps in related public organizations and institutes (particularly educational offices and artistic and cultural organizations throughout all provinces) in order to prevent the damage of addiction. Large sums should be invested in teaching and informing students and their families about the dangers drug abuse. By applying such actions the enormous mental, physical, and monetary costs on an individual and the society can be prevented.

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