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Effectiveness of life-skills training on the mental health of 2nd grade female High School students in Bam-Iran



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Due to ever-increasing changes and complexities of social relationships in the present era, it is essential to prepare individuals especially young generation to deal with difficult situations. Training life skills is a must because it can promote psycho-social abilities. Objective: This research aimed to study the effectiveness of training life skills on the mental health of female students of 2nd-grade high school residing in Bam, Iran.

Method: This is a quasi-experimental study with two groups with pre-test and post-test design. General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) was employed to collect the data. A sample of 40 students was selected

using convenience sampling. They were selected out of students who visited Payam-e Hedayat Educational-Cultural Complex to participate in GPA Promotion Program. They were randomly assigned to control and experiment groups. 16 sessions of training were held. After one month, post-test was performed. The data were analyzed using MANOVA.

Result: Findings showed that training life skills caused a significant difference in mental health compared to pre-test.

Conclusion: It is therefore concluded that training life skills can increase the mental health of female students on the 2nd-grade high school of Bam, Iran.

Keywords: Life skills, Mental health, Female students, 2nd Grade High School

Cite This Article: Irannezhad, S. 2017. Effectiveness of life-skills training on the mental health of 2nd grade female High School students in Bam-Iran. *Bali Medical Journal* 6(3): 583-588. DOI:10.15562/bmj.v6i3.635

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INTRODUCTION

Due to ever-increasing changes and complexities and expansion of social relationships in the present era, it is essential to prepare individuals especially young generation to deal with difficult situations. Training life skills is a must because it can promote psycho-social abilities. These abilities help one to deal with conflicts and life circumstance effectively; act consistently with other human beings, society; culture, and environment support the mental health.

Adolescence is considered an important step in the social and psychological development. In this period, the most important needs of adolescents are emotional balance especially the interaction between emotion and reason. Understanding the value of self, self-awareness (recognizing talent, ability, and willingness), selection of real goals in life, emotional independence from family, maintaining the psycho-social balance against environmental stressors, the establishment of healthy relationships with others, acquisition of essential social skills to make friends, and identification of healthy and efficient life.

According to the statistics forecasted by World Bank on World Development Indicators, almost 8.5 million Iranian residents were aged 14-18 in 2005.¹ Therefore, since adolescents are the most

vulnerable age group; it is obvious to pay attention to them. Adolescence is the transition period from childhood to adulthood. In this period, numerous changes occur including physical, emotional, and social ones.² In this period, adolescents are engaged with two main issues: 1. Reviewing and re-establishing the relationships with parents, adults, and society 2. Recognizing one as an independent entity.³

Therefore, it is essential to help adolescents grow and expand necessary skills for a pleasant life, develop self-confidence while dealing with problems, and evolve essential social skills for the successful consistency with effective life and environment.⁴

Life skills are, in fact, abilities people learn for a successful, useful, and satisfactory individual and group life.⁵ Jalili et al. (2006) stated that training life skills increase marital satisfaction, self-esteem, general health, conflict solving, and social communication and activities.⁶

In Iranian education system, training life skills have explicitly or implicitly been included in the ideas at different stages.⁷ However, numerous studies have shown that Iranian education system has failed to train such skills.⁸ In the present era, health and factors affecting are the great importance due

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Received: 2017-05-24

Accepted: 2017-08-28

Published: 2017-09-1

to technological advances and its direct impact on the quality of human life. Psychological health is one of the most important topics in every country. Gothenburg's definition of mental health is as follows: Proficiency and skills in correct communication with environment especially life, love, work, and recreation.

Carl Rogers believes that psychological health is one's compromise with the world in the maximum possible way so that it causes effective happiness.⁹ WHO (1946) defined mental health as follows: Health is the state of complete physical, mental, and social welfare and absence of disease and discomfort. A positive approach was taken into account in the first part of the definition, which is the presence of a positive quality such as welfare. However, the second section focuses on privative aspect, which is the absence of sickness or discomfort.¹⁰

Schechtman, Zipora Levy, and Mera investigated the effect of training life skills on general health promotion and teachers' perceptions of the

workplace. They showed that the training contributes to improving general health promotion and teachers' perceptions of the workplace.¹¹ The findings of the study by Bashour Lashkari indicated that the subjects in the experiment group established more efficient and effective communication with others after learning life skills. This efficient communication increased the general health and self-esteem and influenced their attitudes and behaviors.¹²

Moote et al. pointed that training life skills can have positive effects in numerous fields including general health, problem-solving ability, self-awareness, reduced anger, shyness, the creation of internal control resource, increased assertiveness, and reduced anxiety.¹³ Due to the fact that no study focused on the effect of training life skills on the general health of pre-professional mental retardation, this research aimed to investigate the effect of training life skills among these students.

Goals of Training Workshops

Session	Goal and Description
1	Introducing members and training program to increase the awareness on workshop and the necessity of training life skills
2	Team Work: When students enter group activity, they learn how to approach the goals. This session also focused on differences between group work and individual activities as well as advantages and disadvantages.
3	I am a great human being: The session intends to make students see themselves as great ones in order to identify their strengths and personal characteristics and realize their limitations positive and constructively.
4	Self-Awareness: Identifying one's feelings and strengths and relationships with feeling and reactions and having realistic views toward strengths and weaknesses.
5	Reviewing and repeating the contents of previous sessions
6	Feeling and Excitement (Part I): Diagnosing and showing emotions and feeling in order to identify a spectrum of common feelings experienced by students; Identifying verbal and non-verbal methods to express emotions and feelings and obtaining more skills to identify one's emotions and feelings and those of others.
7	Feeling and Excitement (Part II): Coping with intense feelings in order to identify them and the fact that all individuals experience some extents of these feelings at various times
8	Feeling and Excitement (Part III): Identifying effective methods to cope with intense feelings such as anger and sadness.
9	Review and sum up the contents on emotions and feelings due to its importance
10	Communication (Part I): Defining the process of good listening and identifying different parts of active listening and practicing it in class
11	Communication (Part II): Identifying different parts of communication and different aspects of verbal communication; Understanding the importance of nonverbal communications in human interactions and the importance of coordination between verbal and non-verbal communication.
12	Communication (Part III): Defining "Saying No" in order to understand the difference between assertive, passive and aggressive behaviors
13	Communication (Part IV): Students learn how to respects the opinions of others
14	Critical Thinking: Students learn not accept every information they receive, and they must analyze it first.
15	Decision Making and Problem Solving: Students learn that they need to deal with daily affairs and problems and have to decide and solve them. They also learn that some decisions are more important, and they focus on correct decision-making method.
16	Reviewing "Communication", "Critical Thinking", " Problem Solving", and " Decision Making" Positive responses and active participation were strengthened by verbal and nonverbal techniques. The participants were served with cake and juice at the end of each session.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study was a quasi-experimental study with pre-test and post-test design. The target population consisted of all 2nd-grade female high school students who visited Payame Hedayat Educational-Cultural Complex of Bam, Iran to participate in GPA Promotion Program.

Convenience sampling method was employed. A sample of 40 was randomly selected and was assigned into two groups (Experimental and Control Groups).

Research Tool

GENERAL HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE (GHQ-28)

The questionnaire comprises 28 items, and it used to assess the mental health. It was developed by Goldberg and widely used to diagnose mild mental disorders. The cut of point is 23 for the questionnaire, meaning that scores less than 23 show high mental health and greater than 23 reveal low mental health. These 4-point items are scored on a 1-3 scale.¹⁴

The reliability of GHQ-28 was reported between 0.78 and 0.95 in many studies. The study by Kilic et al. (2008) on Turkish students reported Cronbach's Alpha of 0.78 for the total questionnaire.¹⁴ The study by Palahang et al. (1995) showed that the

sensitivity and specificity were 86.5% and 82% at the cut of point 23.¹⁵ Taghavi (2001) reported 55% for the concurrent validity with Middlesex Hospital Questionnaire. He also reported the structure validity between 0.72 and 0.78.¹⁶

The study by Ebrahimi et al. (2007) investigated the psychometric properties of the General Health Questionnaire in the Iranian population and the questionnaire as a screening tool for the general health of the Iranian population. According to their study, sensitivity, specificity, and overall classification error were 24, 80%, 99%, and 10%, respectively. Criterion-related validity was 78%. Factor analysis showed that 4 factors comprise the GHQ base.¹⁷

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data (mean and standard deviation). MANCOVA was then used to investigate the difference between control and experiment group on pre-test and post-test.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the demographic statistics based on age and education. Table 2 shows the distribution of mean mental health in pre-test and post-test.

Mental health score was 31.1 in pre-test and 30 in post-test in control group (20 students). They were 33.7 and 20.6 in post-test of experiment group, respectively (20 students). Note that lower GHQ score means better psychological health.

Covariance Analysis

Prior to hypothesis testing and covariance analysis, Levene-test was employed to investigate the variance equality of variables.

Levene test was used. Since pre-test and post-test significance was 0.514 and 0.274 ($\alpha \geq 0.05$), the null hypothesis is not verified. Therefore, the variance is equal and parametric tests can be applied (Table 3).

Hypothesis

Training life skills had an effect on mental health of female students in 2nd grade of high schools in Bam, Iran.

ANCOVA Analysis

GLM was used to investigate regression coefficients. As shown in Table 4, significance (0.637) was greater than 0.05. Therefore, data follows from

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Education in Control and Experiment Groups

Group	Level	Number
Control	3 rd , High School	10
	Pre-University	10
Experiment	3 rd , High School	10
	Pre-University	10

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Mental Health Scores in Control and Experiment Groups

Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	St. Deviation	Mean	St. Deviation
Control	31.1	15.15	30	12.902
Experiment	33.7	16.15	20.6	9.489

Table 3 Levene Test for Variance Equality

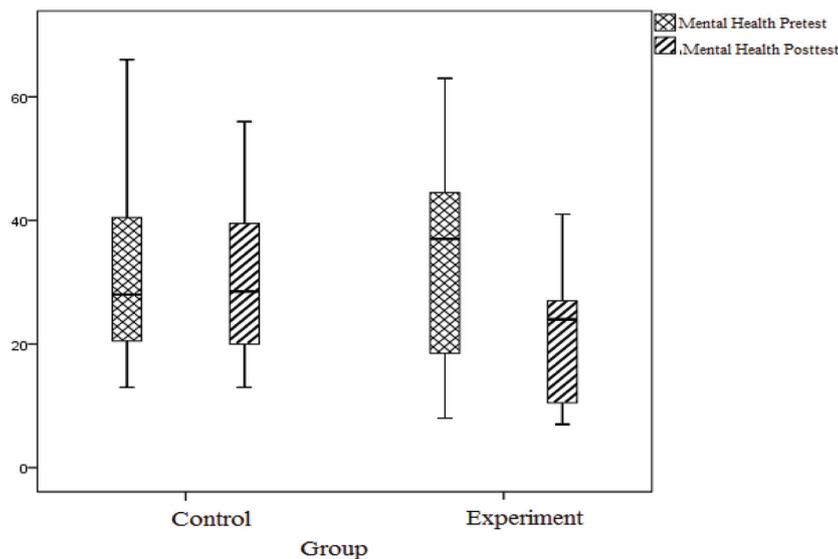
Mental Health	Levene Statistics	Significance
Pre-test	0.434	0.514
Post-test	1.233	0.274

Table 4 Homogeneity of Regression Coefficients

Source of Change	Sum of Squares	Freedom Degree	Mean Square	F	Significance
Group* Mental Health	15.154	3	5.051	0.622	0.637

Table 5 Covariance Analysis of Training Life Skills on Mental Health of Students

Source of Change	Sum of Squares	Freedom Degree	Mean Square	F	Significance	Impact Factor	Statistical Power
Pretest	4826.096	31	155.68	22.868	0.001	0.99	1
Group	141.34	1	141.34	20.763	0.003	0.748	0.972
Error	47.654	7	6.808	-	-	-	-

**Figure 1** Box Plot to Compare Pretest and Posttest Scores of Mental Health of Students in Control and Experiment Group

the assumption of homogeneity of regression and ANCOVA can be used.

In covariance table, since p (0.003) was less than 0.05, H_0 is not verified. It means that the average post-test score of mental health was significantly lower in experiment group than control. Therefore, training life skills were found to be effective in the mental health of female students in 2nd-grade of high school. The effect of training life skills was 74.8% in the mental health (Table 5).

DISCUSSION

Physical and psychological health is important because it influences human behavior. Today, it is proven that many psychological factors and environmental changes, associated with mental pressure, cause physical sickness or intensify the symptoms of diseases.¹⁸ Psychological reactions are caused by endangered physical health. For example, chronic physical disease and heart disease cause long-term diseases, associated with numerous adverse effects.

Psychological problems can also cause semi-physical diseases such as those who are not able to talk as a result of psychological pressure and psychosomatic diseases such as gastric ulcers and nervous blood pressure. Therefore, physical and

mental health is very important in terms of normal behaviors and those in line with social criteria.¹⁹ Studies can help promote physical, psychological and social programs by identifying the factors threatening the mental health and remove ambiguities and complexities related to pathology, quality of life, and causes of social harm.²⁰

Today, many researchers believe that when human beings are faced with threatening situations, they feel helpless and act abnormal behaviors including aggressive ones.²¹ If these behaviors continue for the long run, physical and mental health is disturbed, which can cause a decrease in general health in different aspects of life.²² Although no sector of society is immune from the consequences of mental health disorders, some social groups including adolescents are faced more so that many victims of threatening behaviors would be adolescents. Many adolescents have difficulty in coping with the crisis of adolescence and engage in life-threatening behaviors such as drug abuse, violence, unsafe sexual behavior, etc.²³

Individuals have different levels of compatibility while dealing with stress, personal life problems, and social dilemma. In a similar social environment, some lose their ability to cope with problems and challenges and are engaged in isolation, depression, anti-social behaviors, or even addiction and suicide. However, some are capable of dealing with the issues with no problems. Greater capacity helps more to maintain one's social and psychological health and solve problems positively and efficiently.²⁴

This article aimed to investigate the effect of training life skills on mental health in control and experiment groups. The results showed that training life skills improved the mental health of female students in 2nd grade of high school, which is consistent with many studies of Sajedi (2008), Albertin et al. (2001), Vichroski (2000), Zollinger (2000), Liu (2000), Schechtman, Zipora Levy, and Mera (2005), Bashour Lashkari (2006), Gholam Reza Pasha and Yadavari (2003), Bahari and Shafiqh Pour (2004), and Hashem Abadi and Kadkhodazadeh (2006).²⁵⁻³⁴

All the studies above also have proven the positive effect of life skills training on self-esteem and general health. The study by Sajedi showed that training life skills were effective in interpersonal relationships and general health of blind girls.²⁶

The study by Yadavari showed that training life skills were positively effective in general health and self-esteem of students and increased each of these variables.³¹ The study by Albertin et al. showed that training life skills positively changed the decision making and increased the general health of South African workers.²⁶ The study by Zollinger et al. also showed that life skills played a key role in increasing information, abilities, and general health and changing attitudes of students on correct lifestyle in a 3-year period.²⁷ The study by Liu showed that training life skills had a positive, significant effect on the successful transition of students from universities to workplaces.²⁸

Training life skills aimed at increasing social and mental abilities, preventing harmful behaviors, and promoting mental health. It is expected that individuals manage to obtain self-awareness, self-esteem to communicate with others, cooperation, dealing with psychological pressure, and hope after learning life skills. Despite efforts made by the education system, alarming news is released on children's and adolescents' educational, social, and ethical status.³⁴

CONCLUSION

It concluded that training life skills could increase the mental health of female students on the 2nd-grade high school of Bam, Iran. Training life skills aimed at increasing social and mental abilities, preventing harmful behaviors, and promoting mental health. Since the study was conducted among the female students in the 2nd-grade high school of Bam, Iran, the responses must be carefully generalized to all students in Iran. It suggested to conducting a similar study among 2nd-grade male high school students and conducting a similar study among primary school students.

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