

The Relationship between Life Skills and Mental Health in High School Students

Zekrollah Morovati^{*1}, Tahereh Elahi¹, Abolfazl Babaei² and Amir Reza Ghadimi³

¹ Department of Psychology, University of Zanjan, Zanjan, Iran

² Zanjan University of Medical Sciences, Zanjan, Iran

³ Farhangian University, Shahid Beheshti Campus, Zanjan, Iran

*Corresponding author's e-mail: z_morovati@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between life skills and mental health in high school students. The statistical population of this study consisted of all the male high school students of Zanjan Province (Iran) within the academic year of 2007-2008. From this population, 300 students were selected using a multi-stage random method. The research instruments were Life Skills Questionnaire and The Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R). The results of the simple correlation showed that there is significant relationship between analytical skill, decision making skills, problem solving skills, assertiveness skills and creative thinking with mental health, but there is no significant relationship between cooperative skills with mental health. The results of regression analysis also showed that analytical skill, decision making skills, assertiveness skills and cooperative skills orderly played a major role in predicting mental health.

Keywords: Life skills, Mental health, High School Students

Received 14 Jan. 2014
Accepted 15 Mar. 2014

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology have increased power and wealth, but deprived people of living with peace and confidence. In fact, "quality was sacrificed for quantity", moderation and proportion have been removed and replaced by neurological and psychosomatic disorders [1]. Teenage years are considered to be the important stages of social and psychological development. Some of the most important needs of adolescents include: An emotional and affectionate balance especially between emotion and intellect, existential self-appreciation, self-awareness (recognizing the talents, abilities, and interest), choosing the real purposes in life, emotional independency from parents, keeping mental and emotional balance against environmental stressors, healthy relationships with others, acquiring social skills necessary to make friends, recognizing the healthy and effective life and how to reach them. Thus contributing to the growth and development of their life skills for effective living, creating or increasing confidence in dealing with problems and their solutions and helping them in the development of necessary emotional and social skills for successful adaptation to the social environment and an effective and productive life in society would seem to be necessary [2].

Students need some functions in order to acquire the abilities of adaptive coping with stress, different situations and conflicts in their life. These fundamental functions are formed through transformation process such as cognition, emotion, and behavior which are manifested in structures such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, problem solving and social skills [3]. The studies show that adaptive and practical capabilities of most adolescents are not enough to solve personal and social problems effectively. Thus, life skills training with a focus on the most important personal and social problems of adolescents is overwhelming as an important element [4]. In fact, life skills lead to greater self-regulation, positive thinking and internal attribution. It eventually makes his/her dreams come true [5].

Several definitions have been made for life skills. The World Health Organization defines life skills as the ability to adapt and deal with the challenges of life correctly; this ability can be physical, cognitive and behavioral [6]. Sometimes, life skills are applied as a treatment for behavioral problems and / or strategic support and preparations for the treatment of certain diseases [7]. Also, life skills in areas other than psychology are also used as management [8]. Also, studies show that life skills' training has a positive influence on assertiveness, self-esteem, accountability, and public health [9]. It also reduces depression, anxiety and loneliness, improves interpersonal relationships [10], promoting social adjustment [11].

Coping with life stress and personal and social skills has been a part of the reality of life, manifesting in different periods of his/her life in various forms. Childhood conflicts have little effect, but with increasing age, especially when faced with the difficulties of adolescence and youth, more internal and environmental conflicts manifest. Along with the physical and psychological development, family and community expectations increase, so the teenager will limit his/her own desires due to the social life and leave them in social and group norms [12].

Individuals with high confidence and courage will benefit from higher problem solving and decision making skills. So that they can identify effective solutions much better than those with lower confidence and achieve better

results. They can criticize better and rely more on the effectiveness of the critiques. So they benefit from the ability to criticize as a highly complex interpersonal skill [13]. Pasha and Yadavari [12] found that there are significant differences between the experimental group and the control group, that is, life skills training will increase self-esteem in high school students.

The main research question was whether there is a relationship between life skills types and mental health among high school students. To answer this question, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between analytical skill and mental health in high school students. H2: There is a positive relationship between decision making skill and mental health in high school students. H3: There is a positive relationship between problem solving skill and mental health in high school students. H4: There is a positive relationship between assertiveness skill and mental health in high school students. H5: There is a positive relationship between creative thinking and mental health in high school students. H6: There is a positive relationship between collaboration and mental health in high school students. H7: There is a multiple relationship between life skills types and mental health in high school students.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study is descriptive with correlation research design. The research population consisted of all the high school male students in Zanjan Province, Iran who were enrolled in academic year of 2007-2008. 300 high school students were selected through multi-stage cluster sampling. They were given a brief introduction of what the study would require and invited to participate. Also 100 students participated to validate questionnaire. Life Skills was assessed by means of Life Skills Questionnaire [14] which is consisted of 30 items, representing 5 factors: analytical skill, decision making skills, and problem solving skills, assertiveness skills, creative thinking and collaboration. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for different components between 0.73 to 0.76 and for whole questionnaire has obtained 0.81. Mental health was assessed through The Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R). This instrument is a 90-item self-report symptom inventory developed by Leonard R. Derogatis in the mid-1970s to measure psychological symptoms and psychological distress. The SCL-90-R assesses psychological distress in terms of nine primary symptom dimensions and three summary scores termed global scores [15]. The principal symptom dimensions are labeled Somatization (SOM), Obsessive-Compulsive (OBS), Interpersonal Sensitivity (INT), Depression (DEP), Anxiety (ANX), Hostility (HOS), Phobic Anxiety (PHOB), Paranoid Ideation (PAR), and Psychoticism (PSY). The global measures are referred to as the Global Severity Index (GSI), the Positive Symptom Distress Index (PSDI), and the Positive Symptom Total (PST). The SCL-90 normally requires between 12 and 20 minutes to complete [16]. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for different components between 0.76 to 0.89. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis (stepwise method) were used for the assessment of hypothesis. Internal consistencies of the instruments were tested using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the scales. Table 2 shows correlation coefficients of the predictive variables with criterion variable. As it can be seen in table 2, there is a positive and significant correlation between analytical skill and mental health ($r= 0.73$, $P\leq 0.001$). Thus, the research's first hypothesis is verified. There is a positive and significant correlation between decision making skill and mental health ($r= 0.51$, $P\leq 0.001$). Thus, the hypothesis 2 is approved. There is a positive and significant correlation between problem solving skill and mental health ($r= 0.47$, $P\leq 0.001$). Thus, the hypothesis 3 is approved.

There is a positive and significant correlation between assertiveness skill and mental health ($r= 0.37$, $P\leq 0.001$). Thus, the hypothesis 4 is approved. There is a positive and significant correlation between creative thinking and mental health ($r= 0.42$, $P\leq 0.001$). Thus, the hypothesis 5 is approved. There is a positive and non-significant correlation between collaboration and mental health ($r= 0.03$, $P>0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis 6 is rejected.

As shown in Table 3, multiple regression analysis (stepwise method) showed that there is multiple relationship between life skills types and mental health ($F=131.11$, $P\leq 0.001$). Results showed that analytical skill, decision making skills, assertiveness skills and cooperative skills orderly played a major role in predicting mental health. In fact, 58% of variance of mental health explained by mentioned variables. Thus, the hypothesis 7 is approved.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of the predictive variables and criterion variable

| Variable | M | SD |
|-----------------------|-------|------|
| analytical skill | 15.31 | 5.22 |
| decision making skill | 20.65 | 4.14 |
| problem solving skill | 17.28 | 4.15 |
| assertiveness skill | 14.96 | 4.24 |
| creative thinking | 15.51 | 4.05 |
| collaboration | 16.32 | 4.06 |
| mental health | 1.09 | 0.55 |

Table 2. Correlation coefficients of the predictive variables and criterion variable

| criteria variable | predictive variables | correlation coefficient (r) | Sig. |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
| mental health | analytical skill | 0.73 | P≤0.001 |
| | decision making skill | 0.51 | P≤0.001 |
| | problem solving skill | 0.47 | P≤0.001 |
| | assertiveness skill | 0.37 | P≤0.001 |
| | creative thinking | 0.42 | P≤0.001 |
| | collaboration | 0.03 | P=0.451 |

Table 3. The results of multiple regression analysis with stepwise model

| Dependant Variable | Predictors | MR | RS | F/P | Regression coefficients | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|------|------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| mental health | 1. analytical skill | 0.73 | 0.53 | F=432.36 p≤0.001 | β=12.36 t=20.79 p≤0.001 | - | - | - |
| | 2. decision making skill | 0.75 | 0.57 | F=249.93 p≤0.001 | β=10.63 t=16.42 p≤0.001 | β=2.57 t=5.65 p≤0.001 | - | - |
| | 3. assertiveness skill | 0.76 | 0.57 | F=171.18 p≤0.001 | β=10.25 t=15.50 p≤0.001 | β=2.32 t=5.04 p≤0.001 | β=0.96 t=2.53 p≤0.05 | - |
| | 4. collaboration | 0.76 | 0.58 | F=131.11 p≤0.001 | β=10.29 t=15.65 p≤0.001 | β=2.31 t=5.03 p≤0.001 | β=1.17 t=3.01 p≤0.05 | β=0.93 t=2.27 p≤0.05 |

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between life skills types and mental health among male high school students of Zanjan province in Iran. This research showed that there is a significant relationship between analytical skill and mental health. A person with high analytical skill can break multiple threads up into their constituent elements and understand the relationships between them. That makes him/her aware of the scope of the analysis which is an important and effective element in the mental health.

Results showed a positive and significant correlation between decision making skill and mental health. This result is consistent with findings of Safarzadeh [13] and Aqajani [4]. Decision-making skills will help the individual to decide more efficiently. If children and young people actively involved in decisions about their actions and examine different aspects and evaluate the consequences of each choice, a higher level of the mental health will be placed in certainly.

Also, the results showed that there is a positive and significant correlation between problem solving skill and mental health. Since problem solving skills and reaching a correct answer will add to the person's self-concept and due to the influence of self-concept (positive or negative) on the mental health (high or low), we can explain the hypothesis of the present study.

In this research, the relationship between assertiveness skill and mental health was found significant. This finding is consistent with Pasha and Yadavari [12]. Since one of the components of mental health is self-reliance and absolute independency in decision-making which is achieved through assertiveness skills, we can say that people with high mental health show great skills on their expressiveness.

The results showed that there is positive and significant correlation between creative thinking and mental health. It could be said that this type of thinking will contribute to the proper problem solving and decision making. Using this type of thinking, different solutions to a problem and the consequences of each are examined. This skill enables a person to discover things on their own direct experiences, make them live with more adaptability and flexibility even when there is no problem and there is no specific decision making indicating the high mental health.

There was no significant relationship between the mental health and the collaboration skills. Despite previous research, no significant relationship was observed between the cooperation skills and the mental health. This finding requires further research.

Overall, the results showed a positive relationship between life skills and mental health. These findings have important practical implications. On assertiveness skills, along with the instruction given by parents and teachers, respecting the expressiveness of the students in the family and school environment should be considered. So you can run a free discussion in group providing students with an environment in which they can achieve expressiveness skills through interpersonal. Also, teachers must pay more attention to the anonymity of their students in class so that students feel a sense of belonging as a part of their classroom context to their educational and interactive process contributing to the improved cooperation and expressiveness skills.

To enhance decision-making skills, teachers try to make students aware of the benefits and limitations of their decisions and to teach them to avoid insisting too much on personal beliefs in their decisions. In order to promote problem solving skills in students, real-life issues should be addressed with problem-solving ability not

limited to the areas discussed in textbooks (Problem Based Learning). Given the influence of problem solving on learning styles used by students, educational workshops can be arranged to make them more familiar with these styles. Finally, it is suggested that the Education Department should act more in assessing the mental health of the students. In this regard, the students with low mental health could be identified and received proper counseling measures, intervention and treatment to promote the mental health.

This research has some limitation. First, this study has conducted on male high school students and the findings are not generalizable to other groups. Another important limitation of the study is that the results have to be interpreted with caution because of the use of self-report measures. Replicating the study on different groups, applying interview or non-self-report methods to collect data and using longitudinal design may overcome these limitations.

Acknowledgements: The authors gratefully acknowledge financial support from Zanjan Province Education Department, Zanjan, Iran. We also thank the high school students in Zanjan Province who participated in the study.

REFERENCES

1. Hatami, H., Razavi, S.M., Eftekhari Ardabili, H., & Majlesi, F. 2006. The mental health: A comprehensive textbook of public health, Volume 3, Arjmand Press.
2. Shoarinejad, A.A. 1998. The role of extracurricular activities in strengthening adolescents, Fourth edition, Tehran: Etelaat Institute.
3. Lavasani, F. 2004. Life Skills, State Welfare Organization of Iran.
4. Aghajani, M. 2002. The effect of life skills training in mental health and locus of control in adolescent, MA thesis in psychology, Alzahra University.
5. Papaioannou, A. G., Simou, T., Kosmidou, E., Milosis, D., & Tsigilis, N. 2009. Goal orientations at the global level of generality and in physical education: Their association with self-regulation, affect, beliefs and behaviours. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10, 466-480.
6. Jones, M., & Lavallee, D. 2009. Exploring the life skills needs of British adolescent athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10, 159-167.
7. Kurtz M. M., Jeffrey S. B., Rose J. 2010. Elementary neurocognitive function, learning potential and everyday life skills in schizophrenia: What is their relationship? *Schizophrenia Research*, 11, 280-288.
8. Anderson, J., Bruce, J., & Mouton, L. (2010). 4-H made me a leader: A college-level alumni perspective of leadership life skill development. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 9(2), 35-49.
9. Haghighi, J., Mousavi, M., Mehrabi Zadeh Honarmnd, M., & Bashildeh, K. 2006. The effect of life skills training on mental health and self-esteem of freshman female students, *Journal of Education and Psychology*, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, 13, 61-78.
10. Smite, R. 2004. The effect of life skills training on anxiety and aggression in group of third-grade guidance school. *Journal of mental Health care*, 41(3), 212-220.
11. Rahmati, B., Adibrad, N., Tahmasian, K., & Saleh sedghpour, B. 2010. The Effectiveness of life skill training on Social adjustment in Children. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 870-874.
12. Yadavari M, & Pasha, G.H. 2008. The effect of life skills training on general health, self esteem and self-expression in adolescents, *Journal of social science*, 10 & 11, 18-24.
13. Safarzadeh, M. 2003. Investigation of effectiveness of life skills training on effective communication among freshman female students, MA Thesis, Allameh Tabataba'i University.
14. Atashzar, B. 2005. Survey and Comparison of the effectiveness of educational programs of high school on Life Skills of Students in Kermanshah Province, MA thesis, Allameh Tabataba'i University.
15. Derogatis, L.R. & Unger, R. 2010. Symptom Checklist-90-Revised. *Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology*. 1-2.
16. Derogatis L.R. 2000. Symptom Checklist-90-Revised. *Handb Psychiatr Meas*. American Psychiatric Association, 81-84