

The Effect of Life Skills Training of Mothers of Elementary School Children on Childhood Behavioral Problems

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Abstract

Background: The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effect of life skills training of mothers of elementary school children on behavioral problems of children in Isfahan. **Materials and Methods:** In a cross-sectional study, individuals were enrolled by a multistage cluster sampling from 5 educational districts in Isfahan and 90 students who had behavioral problems were distinguished and included. The individuals were divided into case and control groups. The life skills were presented to the mothers of the case group during 9 sessions. Groups were compared regarding pre-test and post-test results. **Results:** The results showed that life skills training of mothers in the case group caused significant decrease in behavioral problems of children in comparison with the control group ($P < 0.05$). **Conclusion:** This study demonstrated that life skill knowledge can help mothers to control their children's behavioral problems and these sessions are suggested to be presented routinely at elementary schools. [GMJ. 2013;2(2):76-79]

Keywords: Life skills; Mothers; Behavioral problems; Children

Introduction

Behavioral problems in children are expressed in different manners which originate from many factors such as biological, psychological, and social factors. Patterson et al showed that behavioral problems in children were significantly correlated with the behaviors of family members, mothers' education, and their cultural status [1]. It is also believed that social environment is effective on behavioral problems that emphasizes on importance

of family effects and shows that family function helps the children change their behaviors [2]. Most of the behavioral problems can be reflected in childhood period; thus, concerning the importance of this stage of life, training of mothers and application of a set of relationship skills are necessary for suitable interactions with children [3,4].

Considering the parents' role in preventing and managing the behavioral problems of children, training of life skill programs seems to be important. Accordingly, Turner showed

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that the parents' training program caused promotion of children adjustment and decrease of their behavioral problems[5]. In this regard, other studies also showed that life skills training is an effective way to increase the parents' self-efficacy to interact with their children [6-8]. The main goal of the present study was to investigate the effect of mothers' life skill training on behavioral problems of elementary school children.

Materials And Methods

Participants and procedure

In this cross-sectional study, the population was girls and boys in the range of 9 to 11 years-old from elementary schools in Isfahan, Iran, 2010-2011. Multistage cluster random sampling was conducted for sample selection. From districts of education department of Isfahan, one was randomly selected, and then two schools (one school for girls and one for boys) were randomly chosen from this district. A total of 676 children were screened based on Rutter Questionnaire. Finally, 96 students (48 girls and 48 boys) in 3 different grades, considering the inclusion criteria (Rutter's Questionnaire cut of point>9), were selected. After this, mothers of the students were assigned randomly into two groups, case and control. Life skills training were performed in 9 sessions for mothers of children with behavioral problems. The Rutter Children's behavior Questionnaire for children was filled before training sessions and after the 9th session (posttest) in both groups. To know further evaluation about the stability and ineffectiveness of the lessons on mothers over time, another post-test was done after one month of follow-up. Training session methods and format provided on the basis of designed training package by UNICEF (United Nation International Children Emergency Fund) together with using several sources. Creating effective relationship, ability to pay attention, decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, self-expression, confliction resolving, and the

tactics to decrease anxiety, were the topics of the sessions. All parents were aware of the aim of the study and they were asked to sign informed consent prior to any intervention.

Measures

The Rutter Children's Behavior Questionnaire The Rutter Children's Behavior Questionnaire (Rutter, 1967) which was completed by teachers in a 26-items survey designed to evaluate children's behavior at school. Answers were rated on a scale of 0 to 2. Higher ratings indicate more severe presence of the symptoms. Possible total rate on the scale ranged from 0 to 52. The Persian version of Yousefi (1998) was used in this study. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire were reported as %66 and %90, respectively [9].

Data analysis

Data were expressed as mean \pm standard deviation (SD) and percentages. Statistical tests such as ANOVA were used to compare 2 groups (case and control). All statistical analyses were done using SPSS software (SPSS version 16.0). P value <0.05 was considered significant.

Results

Table-1 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of groups in pre-test, post-test and follow-up. Statistical analysis showed that there were significant differences between control and case groups in post-test for both boys and girls groups ($P<0.001$).

In order to investigate the stability of training, the statistical difference between control and case groups in follow-up and pre-test was measured as well, which was considerable in both boys and girls groups ($P<0.001$).

Discussion

During past decades up to now, child upbringing has been one of the most important concerns in parents' life. The need to have necessary skills to solve children's behavioral problems is obvious in all cultures [3,4,10]. Thus, it is an important task for all the persons participating in children's education to pro-

Table-1. Descriptive statistics of groups in pre-test, post-test and follow-up

Status	Group	Number	Mean	SD	
Boys	Case	Pre-test	24	18.00	8.40
		Post-test	24	13.37	6.24
		Follow-up	24	11.91	5.15
	Control	Pre-test	24	16.91	6.45
		Post-test	24	17.04	5.69
		Follow-up	24	18.08	5.68
Girls	Case	Pre-test	24	13.50	5.71
		Post-test	24	11.29	4.93
		Follow-up	24	10.20	4.25
	Control	Pre-test	24	14.17	3.99
		Post-test	24	14.50	3.22
		Follow-up	24	15.75	3.82

vide appropriate condition for parents to pull through. Nowadays, life skills training, as the skills that provide mental wellbeing, are of important necessities [11]. Considering this, the mothers will have considerable assistance in prevention, control, and treatment of their children's behavioral problems.

Previous studies showed that relatively low levels of mother's life skills would predict high levels of children's behavioral problems [2,12,13]. Additionally, it was expected that the training of parents can decrease children's behavioral problems [5,6,14,15]. So, in this research the effectiveness of life skills training on mothers of children with behavioral problems was studied. Roline and Daryl showed that aggressive children in elementary schools had low self-control and higher aggressive temperament in comparison with their similar aged kids, and life skills training (especially social skills) can be assumed as effective interventions to decrease their behavioral problems [14,15]. Another study revealed that parents' behavior can be effective on children's self-concept. The parents with high acceptance level, create higher self-esteem and emotional security in their children [13,16]. Esmaili et al also showed parental training effects on decrease of behavioral problems in adolescent girls [17]. In one study, Gonzalez and colleagues performed life skills program on 15 children with behavioral problems. In

this program, they tried to use self-control, respect, group partnership, and legality strategies and the result showed that continuous and ongoing training of life skills can increase children's adjustment [18]. Botvin and Griffin in 1993 discussed about teaching life skills as a program for the first time, and the universal wellbeing organization arranged this training program in order to prevent and increase the mental wellbeing level of people and set it in 5 groups including: 1) self-knowledge, empathy, 2) relation, interpersonal relationships, 3) decision making, problem solving, 4) creative thinking, criticism thinking and 5) making control to emotions and opposition to stress [19]. Previous works investigated the effects of life skills training on decreasing the mental stress of mental retarded children's mothers; the results have showed that these skills were effective in decreasing the mental stress level of this group[20,21].

The results of the present study also declared that mothers' life skills trainings are effective on children's behavioral problems. It demonstrated that life skills training has positive effect on mothers' knowledge which helps them to confront and behave their children regarding to their behavioral problems. The stability of effective training was confirmed at follow-up stage. It was shown that training methods are effective and the participants did not put them behind after time passing. It may be due to mothers' tendencies to apply such trainings in order to handle their children. Overall, regular life skills training programs are suggested for parents especially at elementary schools.

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Conflicts Of Interest

None

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