

The Importance of Life Skills Training in Preventing Addiction Recurrence between January and February 2020: A Narrative Review Article

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Abstract

Background: Drug abuse problem is one of the four global crises and the most important social crisis in Iran. This study was conducted to investigate the importance of life skills training in preventing the recurrence of addiction among young people.

Methods: The present article is a narrative review performed by two researchers between January and February 2020 by searching in scientific databases in articles published in Scopus, Pubmed, Google scholar and Google search engine including the terms “addiction”, “youth”, “Coping skills”, “adaptability skills”, “life skills training”, and “drug abuse”.

Results: The results of various studies indicate that the life skills training program increases the feeling of happiness, improves the quality of life of people, and increases the ability to control emotions.

Conclusion: Due to the positive impact of life skills training and its applicability to all segments of society, planners and managers in the community’s mental health sector can set up centers to continuously hold such classes and conduct life skills training even as in-service training program.

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Introduction

For many years, human society has been plagued by the problem of addiction, and in this predicament, human and society have always suffered materially and spiritually. Drug abuse problem is one of the four global crises and the most important social crisis in our country, which is closely related to other economic and cultural aspects of the country.¹ Unfortunately, today, many of the country’s prisons are occupied by addicts and drug addict offenders.² Also, in the last three decades, the world has been faced with shocking statistics on the prevalence of substance abuse in society, especially among adolescents and young people.³ ⁴ According to statistics, addiction affects more than 15 percent of the young population over the age of 15 in the United States.³ Today, the risk of substance use

in the younger generation has increased; as a result, the mental health of this group has been seriously endangered. Reports indicate that young members of society are not immune to various psychosocial harms and are at risk of drug and substance abuse.⁵⁻⁷ In order to start and continue to use drugs, unhealthy growth conditions, various underlying factors need special intervention and characteristics, the foundation of which is within the family and then in society. However, in the field of addiction, various psychological and familial biological factors are involved.⁸ Due to the harmful effects of pharmaceutical, health, socio-economic and legal effects of substance abuse, the society needs serious attention to expand more effective preventive strategies.⁴ Choosing the right coping strategies for stress can improve a person’s physical and mental health.^{9,10} People with substance abuse problems have cognitive

and lifestyle disorders associated with abuse problems such as lack of awareness, difficulty making decisions, poor judgment, lack of insight, lack of problem-solving skills, job skills, social and personal skills, and negative self-perceptions. In these individuals, self-esteem and self-evaluation are low in terms of cognitive, behavioral, moral, and family relationships.¹¹ One of the methods that researchers suggest is life skills training. The term life skills refers to a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can help individuals make informed decisions and communicate effectively with others and achieve the comfort of physical-mental, and social well-being and deal effectively with the needs and challenges of their daily lives.¹² In general, life skills training is a comprehensive program, and in fact it is an approach that affects the development of the skills that a person needs to live. Self-awareness, empathy, proper communication, decision making, problem solving, anger management, and coping with stress skills are the most important concepts of these trainings.¹³ Studies have shown that improving life skills, including coping skills and psychosocial abilities, is very effective in promoting life conditions. Psychosocial abilities help a person cope effectively and deal with the struggles and achievements of life. These abilities enable the individual to act positively and compromised in relation to other human beings, society, culture, and environment, and to provide their mental health.¹³ According to Bandura, the person, environment, and behavior have an effect on each other and none of the components is separate from each other. In Bandura's social learning perspective, learning is also an active process based on environmental experience; therefore, children and individuals learn active life skills and interact with the environment during active learning and training. Therefore, in this type of training, the methods that facilitate the active participation of individuals in the training of social skills and individual and interpersonal communication are used.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ In the study of Beigi and Shirazi, which was performed on 32 patients undergoing methadone treatment in Shahroud city with the aim of making life skills training effectiveness on improving their quality of life in 2012, the results showed that life skills training was effective, meaning that people who were trained in life skills, including effective stress management techniques, decision-making and problem-solving skills, and effective communication skills, significantly improved coping skills. And life problems were associated with and clearly demonstrated the role of life skills in promoting effective communication with others and increasing problem-based coping strategies.³⁷ The effectiveness of these trainings contributes to the reduction of smoking, alcohol, and substance abuse;^{17,18} preventing violence and delinquency;¹⁹ preventing suicide;²⁰⁻²² and reducing stress and anxiety.²³ The life skills training program is designed to promote mental health and prevent social harm. The basic premise for designing this program is research on psychological

and social harms, and its main purpose is to provide opportunities for promoting life skills in addition to gaining professional job skills. Therefore, since the lack of basic life skills eliminates the potential for social harm, this study was conducted to investigate the importance of life skills training in preventing the recurrence of addiction among young people.

Methods

The present article is a narrative review performed by two researchers between January and February 2020 by searching in scientific databases in articles published in Scopus, Pubmed, Google scholar and Google search engine including the terms "addiction", "youth", "coping skills", "adaptability skills", "life skills training". All currently available full text articles in English or Persian languages were examined. Abstracts of papers presented at the congresses, and conferences were excluded.

After conducting the search, 68 articles were first retrieved, and after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as reviewing duplicate results in the searched articles, 27 articles were finally selected to extract the content.

Results

So far, the effectiveness of life skills training has been measured on a number of factors. For example, Mahdavi Haji et al. in a study examined the effectiveness of life skills training on happiness, quality of life and emotion control. The findings of this study indicate that the life skills training program increases the feeling of happiness, improves the quality of life of people, and increases the ability to control emotions.¹³ According to Mohammadi's research, teaching these skills to students increases their satisfaction with life.²⁴ Researchers also studied the effect of life skills training on the mental health of students in a study and concluded that these trainings had significant and positive effects on the mental health of the experimental group.²⁵ In general, the skills needed to prevent relapse in young people can be divided into the following types:

A) Self-awareness skills: the individual recognizes its strengths and weaknesses in this skill;^{26, 27} B) Empathy skills: they are the experience of understanding the circumstances and feelings of others in such a way that the individual puts itself in another place and looks at the situation from its perspective;²⁸⁻³⁰ C) Anger Management: Anger is a type of basic emotion that is institutionalized in the creation of many creatures. It is a behavioral response that is closely related to components such as stress and hostility^{31, 32} and is followed by feelings of frustration.³³ Following this type of excitement, a series of involuntary physiological responses such as high blood pressure and heart rate occur.^{34, 35} When

anger is out of control and destructive, it causes major disruptions in work, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life,³⁶ so the important thing is to manage it; D) Stress management skills: They are methods that people can use to reduce perceived stress or increase their ability to cope with life's stresses;³⁷ E) Coping skills: When people are stressed, they need to have the necessary coping skills to minimize its detrimental effects. If stress is managed, an individual will be able to cope better with the needs and challenges of life;³⁸ F) Strengthening the social support: People who are isolated or accustomed to loneliness are at high risk of failure in the face of events; thus, social support by community health and support networks helps people to treat and control stress; G) Interpersonal Relationship Skills: Every social activity exchanges information, and a group needs to be organized in order to stay afloat, and it is through communication that the individual introduces itself to others; H) Problem Solving and Decision Making Skills: Naturally, each choice, depending on its complexity or simplicity, inflicts a certain amount of stress on the person; therefore, having problem-solving skills to cope effectively, reduce or eliminate stress, and feel satisfied with the decision-making process in a creative way is considered essential.³⁹

Discussion

Life skills training are generally effective in improving the social skills of participants.⁴⁰ Researchers showed that after training, self-esteem, decision-making power and social skills of individuals increase and this leads to an improvement in their lives.⁴⁰⁻⁴² So far, the effectiveness of life skills training has been measured about a number of factors. For example, Mahdavi Haji et al. in a study examined the effectiveness of life skills training on happiness, quality of life and emotion control. The findings of this study indicate that the life skills training program increases the feeling of happiness, improves the quality of life of people, and increases the ability to control emotions.¹³ According to Mohammadi's research, teaching these skills to students increases their satisfaction with life.²⁴ Research also showed the effect of life skills training on the mental health of students in a study and concluded that these trainings had significant and positive effects on the mental health of the experimental group.²⁵ Life skills training can be provided to individuals and families by the community's physical and mental health support bodies as one of the psychosocial support services. These trainings are very economical with the aim of prevention at different levels. One of the important factors in teaching life skills is the skill of coping with stress. Similar studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of stress coping skills training so far, all of which confirm the effectiveness of this program, including Paul's research.⁴³ In general, life skills provide a powerful tool in the hands of health care

providers so that by teaching them, they can improve the general health of people depending on the needs of the target population. For example, a study by Magnani et al. conducted by the United States Center for Public Health in South Africa aimed at examining the impact of life skills training on high-risk sexual behaviors; in this study, the researcher focused on a life-centered life skills training in AIDS.⁴⁴ The World Health Organization also defines life skills as "the ability to engage in adaptive and positive behaviors that enable the individuals to effectively deal with the needs and challenges of everyday life".⁴⁵ These abilities include cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and social skills in which people develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, communication, and responsible and correct decision-making skills. Self-awareness skills include building self-confidence and self-esteem, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and goal setting. Self-management skills include anger and stress control skills, time management, adaptive and coping skills, and relaxation techniques. Social awareness skills include empathy skills, active listening, identifying and respecting individual and group differences. Communication skills include the skills of negotiation and effective communication, conflict management, and group formation. Responsible decision-making skills include gathering information, critical thinking, and evaluating the expected outcomes.⁴⁶ Life skills enable people to be successful in dealing with their surroundings. Goudas believes that life skills can be physical, such as maintaining good physical and behavioral status, such as effective communication with family and community members, or cognitive, such as making wise and correct decisions.⁴⁷ Therefore, since the lack of appropriate life skills in clients has many individual and social consequences on their health and family and friends and ultimately society, life skills training can be considered as a way to provide support services to this vulnerable segment of society. Learning life skills by directing one's attention to oneself enlightens one's feelings, attitudes, and latent conflicts, and gradually develops coping and adaptive skills to deal with problems and solve them. One of the main limitations of this study was the lack of access to the full text of some articles.

Conclusion

Due to the positive impact of life skills training and its applicability to all segments of society, planners and managers in the community's mental health sector can set up centers to continuously hold such classes and hold life skills training programs even in the form of in-service training of employees and in case of passing the course, they can insert it in the personnel file and also provide counseling services to the vulnerable groups of the society; these are effective steps to prevent the occurrence of addiction complications such as

inappropriate social relations with family and society, remove its negative consequences, and promote the quality of life, especially in the relationship between the clients and their families. As a result, the society has witnessed a decrease in tensions and conflicts; fewer prisoners are in prisons due to addiction, and clients who have been traumatized by society have returned to normal life.

Conflict of Interest: None declared.

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