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A STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF TEACHING LIFE SKILLS (COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS, CREATIVE THINKING SKILLS, AND DECISION-MAKING SKILLS) ON THOUGHT CONTROL STRATEGIES OF MOTHERS WITH INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Aim: the current study aimed at investigating the effects of teaching life skills on thought control strategies of mothers with intellectually disabled children. Method: this study is of an experimental type with pre- and post-tests and case and control groups. For this purpose, a sample of 60 mothers with 30 as case group and 30 as control group was chosen using simple sampling from among mothers with intellectually disabled children, covered by Welfare Organization. The instrument was Wells and Davies (1994) thought control questionnaire, including 30 questions on a personal report about cognitive coping strategies. Results: data analysis by analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) indicated that after modifying the pre-test scores, there were a significant relationship between the subjects. The modified mean scores of thought control strategies revealed that the case group which was provided with life skills teaching program was in a higher level in terms of thought control strategies compared to control group which was not provided with such skills. Conclusion: the results of ANCOVA indicated that teaching life skills has a significant effect on thought control strategies of mothers with intellectually disabled children.

Keywords: Communicative skills, thought control skills, creative thinking, problem solving skill

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary century is a century of plentiful transformations. Parents with abnormal children face extra responsibilities due to the problems and difficulties imposed by their children disabilities. On the other hand, they cannot prepare enough environment and time for accomplishing their educative, pedagogic, and hygienic duties towards their children. This impose excessive pressure on the parents and has a negative effect on their mental-social interactions. Undoubtedly, the pressure of the children disability as an intervening variable can cause harmful effects on decision-making of family members in their mental-social life. In fact, the life quality parents with disabled children undergo a transformation and reduce their satisfaction with life. Among the most important causes of this issue is the financial burden on the families, especially the middle-class and poor families (Tranball & tranball, 2006).

Members of the families with an intellectually disabled child undergo great mental pressure and their psychological hygiene can be endangered. Mofidi (1386) suggests for such parents that as parents of children with specific needs, they need to get familiar with their feelings treating their children. On the other hand, anxiety is

introduced as most important mental distresses of recent years. Pathologic cases aside, a considerable portion of referents to health centers suffer from anxiety.

An efficient and effective method among treatment approaches for coping with mental pressures is teaching life skills. In this manner, by providing the needed teachings, the necessary skills for success in life is taught in a ten stages and he/she is aided to flourish skills, information, interests, and proficiencies for a successful and healthy life without much mental pressure (Seif, 1389).

Life skills are a set of skills which increase adaptability and positive and efficient behavior. Consequently, the person is able to accept his responsibilities without doing any harms to himself or others and face the life challenges in an effective manner. Human, in his vital reactions with social environment, take specific attributes. The most important effects of life environment are sensitive and emotional and these affect human's approach and lead in dramatic changes. Ultimately, human gains experiences which after repetition and practice, turn into some skills. The researchers believe some of the gained skills are the basis for promoting mental hygiene (Hoseini, 1386).

Teaching the life skills was initiated in 1979 by works of Dr. Gilbert Botyin. He codified a set of life skills for seven to nine graders which were highly welcomed by the experts of mental hygiene. This program taught teenagers how to resist the offer or temptation of drug abuse from their peers by brave behaviors, decision-making and critical thinking. Botyin aimed at designing a single program for primary prevention. The upcoming researches showed indicated that teaching life skills are fruitful on the event that all the skills are taught. They were indicative of successfulness of the program in preventing abuse of some drugs such as Cigarette (Noori et al., 1389).

There have been a number of studies conducted on effectiveness or effects for teaching the life skills. For example, Lemb and Mir (2003) studied the effects of teaching on parents with sadness, fatigue, hopelessness, and stresses due to having an intellectually disabled child. By the end of teachings, these parents had a feeling of success and showed better skills in decision-making having less problems.

Also, Betshav (2005) believes that by using cognitive methods for solving the problems, the experts can help families with disabled children to cope with stresses, depression, incompatibility and loneliness, specifically

when these feelings weaken the parents' strength for helping and protecting their children.

By life skills, one is able to turn his knowledge, attitude, and substantial values into real and objective skills and use them for better implementing his abilities, making himself a happy and prosperous life. The one who uses life skills interacting and communicating with others will enjoy the following achievements:

- 1) More tolerance on different ideas and sense of security against others speeches
- 2) In-time actions regarding the time and place conditions
- 3) Planning and effort for useful tasks and avoiding any useless activities
- 4) Keeping secrets and speech control
- 5) Realistic interpretation of the world and learning lessons from history
- 6) Strengthening self-image and self-confidence
- 7) Using the intelligence capabilities and actions

Life skills are also effective in reduction of personal and social harms and by creating principled and scientific attitudes, proves its effectiveness in choosing the best method for optimized accomplishment of each activity (Tareimian, 1389).

Life changes both the person and environment and this mutual principle accelerate the promotion of mental hygiene.

Thought control strategies

Thought control strategy is a method by which the person controls his unwanted and unpleasant thoughts (Kaviani, 1380). Wells and Davies (1994) state that strategies for coping with distressing and disturbing thoughts can be categorized under 5 categories:

- Distracting the mind: I am doing something pleasurable
- Punishment: I am angry with myself because of having such thoughts
- Worry: I pay attention to my worries
- Reassessment: I analyze the idea reasonably
- Social control: I ask my friends if they have the same thoughts

Distraction is awareness of presence of a pressuring stimulus, but trying to focus on it for a short time period (Elise & Croply, 2004). In this manner, all the new stimuli distract the person's mind and getting used to them takes more than usual. Such condition may happen when one is tired, anxious, depressed, confused or in common situations. Distraction is based on the assumption that in each given time, people are able to fully concentrate on a single thought. Distraction

is a strategy by which people can successfully change their focus. It may prevent getting upset (McCay & Grace, 2003).

Social control: by social control, people hoping to obviate pressuring stimulus seek to gain instrumental/ emotional protection of others. This control is basically accomplished through socialization procedures and attracting the norms and values of the society (Poor Afkari, 1386).

Reassessment: it is creation of a change in person's attitude for reassessing the incidents (Ellis & Croply, 2003).

Worry: Burk et al. (1993) define worry as a mostly verbal and conceptual activity whose aim is problem-solving. Worry happens as a chain of thoughts with negative emotional prospect (Kaviani, 1380).

Punishment: punishment is reviewing an incident or self-punishment or self-blaming. It also includes prescription of a disappointing stimulus on the event of a specific behavior or the disappointing stimulus itself (Poor Afkari, 1386).

In cognitive models of anxiety it is believed that what prepares people for interpreting a vast range of situations as threatening, is their belief about themselves and external world. Inefficient beliefs and assumptions are different in generalized anxiety, but most of

them are circled around acceptance, adequacy, control responsibility and anxiety symptoms itself (Dehbashi, 1383).

Ellis(1984) believes that some people have unreasonable fundamental beliefs which affects their interpretation of incidents and lead in inappropriate emotional reactions. Beck states that anxiety depends on the one's thoughts responding to incidents and situations. Once the person recoils the negative thoughts, he is unable to resist them. These thoughts spontaneously create a cycle of self-break and the person feels distressed facing incidents and he/she gets anxious. Several studies have shown that inappropriate beliefs can cause anxiety (Dadsetan, 1386).

Teaching thought control

Whenever the references assert fantasies or distressing thoughts as a portion of their problematic anxiety, thought control teaching should be included in treatments. It has been observed that people who are more anxious cannot utilize complex strategies. Therefore, the referents should be taught on techniques such as creative thinking which require more mental activities. For teaching thought control, firstly the role of thoughts in creating and stabilizing anxiety should be clarified and then the depression controlling strategies through resisting machinating thoughts be

explained. Also, the common thought faults such as exacerbation, catastrophe, extremist generalization, ignorance of positive aspects, and misinterpretation should be taught (Dehbashi, 1383).

The basic characteristic of human is the power of thinking. Human, by the aid of this power has been able to dominate the changing and complex environment and survive. People think about the ways for doing the tasks in their own specific style. The term "style" is not equivalent with "skilled", but it is a way for utilizing the person's ability (sterenberg, 1998). The relationship between thinking styles and several variables have been studied. Zhang, has conducted several studies on thinking styles. He showed that thinking styles and cognitive growth are connected and the more cognitive growth is, the more the person is inclined for using a wider range of thinking styles.

METHODOLOGY

Population, samples, and sampling method

The statistical population included all the mothers with intellectually disabled children covered by Welfare Organization. The samples included 60 mothers out of which 30 were taken as case group and 30 as control group which were chosen by simple sampling.

Case group were provided with five 90-minute sessions on life skills and the tests were given as pre- and post-test and the results were analyzed.

Thought Control Questionnaire (TCQ)

This questionnaire was developed by Wells and Davies in 1994. They created it for assessing the individual differences in terms of utilized strategies for controlling unwanted and unpleasant thoughts. TCQ is personal report questionnaire with 30 questions on cognitive coping methods and it is scored based on Likert scale. It includes 5 strategic scales as:

- 1) Distraction
- 2) Social control

- 3) Anxiety
- 4) Punishment
- 5) Reassessment

This test has been used for both clinical and normal samples with reliability and validity scores and is proved to be sensitive to medical improvements (Elise & Croply, 2002).

The scoring method is as follows:

The scores of subscales of distraction, anxiety, punishment, and reassessment are written by the responders by adding the scores. The social control subscale includes 3 choices and is scored reversely (Dehbashi, 1383).

Task elaboration table

Elaboration of the tasks	Goals	Session
Expression of the goals, Introduction of the members, Parents get familiar with each other, Expression of the expectations, Running pre-test	Get acquainted with each other and the group leader Get acquainted with the general framework of the group and the goals Have commitment for continuous presence in the group	First session Introduction and pre-test
principles of communication, types of communication, efficient communication, strategies for promoting group work	Be able to express feelings, needs and viewpoints in classroom and outside of it	Second session Teaching communicative skills
Critical thinking skill Positive thinking	People be able to think differently and exceed the normal ways and create solutions specific to them	Third session Creative thinking
Types of decision-making methods	People learn what decision-making is and how important it is. Get familiar with different types of decision-making and practice it step-by-step	Fourth session Decision-making skill
Running post-test		Fifth session conclusion

RESULTS

The participants' education

In the table 4-1 is provided the participants' education frequency. The results indicate that bachelor is the most frequent

Cumulative frequency	Frequency percentage	Frequency	Education level
8.3	8.3	5	Secondary school degree
46.7	38.3	23	diploma
98.46	51.7	31	Bachelor
100	1.7	1	Master's degree

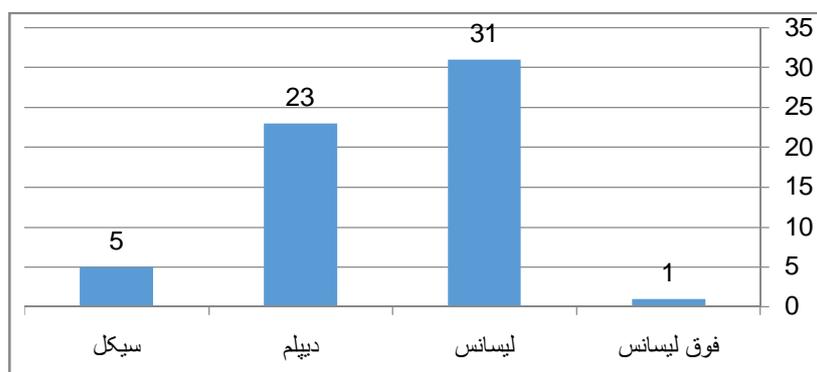


Figure 4-1: frequency distribution of participants' education level

In table 4-2, the frequency distribution of the participants' job is provided.

Cumulative frequency	Frequency percentage	Frequency	Job
61.7	61.7	37	House-hold
100	38.3	23	Employee

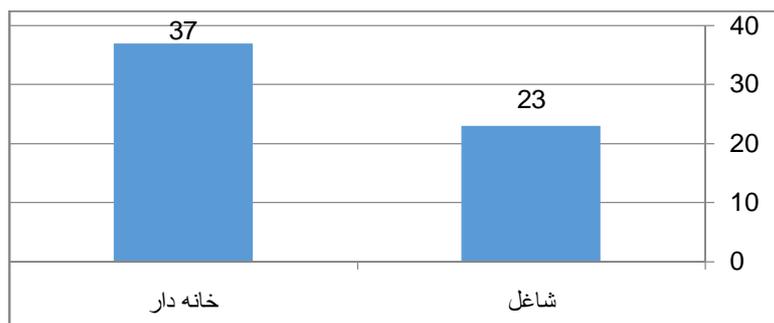


Figure 4-2: frequency distribution of the participants' job

The financial condition of the participants is shown in table 4-3.

Cumulative frequency	Frequency percentage	Frequency	Financial condition
25	25	15	good
88.3	63.3	38	Normal
100	11.7	17	Poor

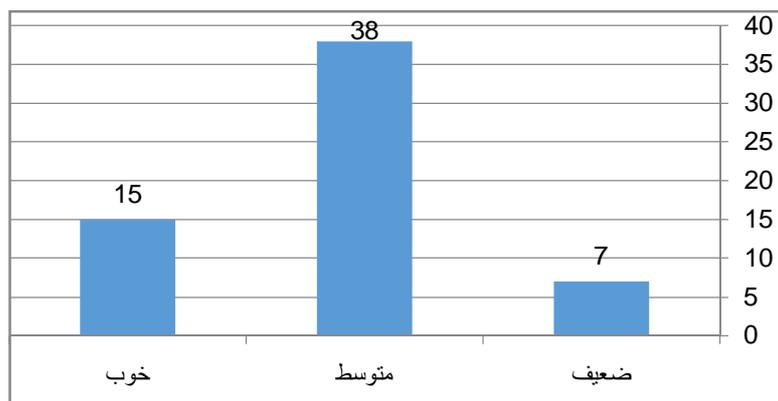


Figure 4-3: the frequency distribution of participants' financial condition

Thought control strategies

In the table 4-4, the mean and standard deviation of participants' pre-test scores in both case and control groups for thought control strategies variables are provided.

Table 4-4: the distribution of means and standard deviation for pre-test scores of participants' thought control strategies

Standard deviation	Mean	Group	Variable
1.4	12.77	Case	Distraction
1.38	12.60	Control	
1.7	13.07	Case	Social control
1.7	12.97	Control	
1.43	17.07	Case	Anxiety
1.30	16.7	Control	
1.7	19.20	Case	Punishment
1.5	19.70	Control	
1.6	12.93	Case	Reassessment
1.5	13.01	Control	

The results in table 4-4 indicates that there is no significant differences between the two groups in terms of thought control strategies.

Teaching the life skills has a significant effect on thought control strategies of mothers with intellectually disabled children

ANCOVA was used for analyzing this hypothesis and the results are provided in table 4-7.

a) Homogeneity of regression coefficient

Table 4-5: pre-assumption test of homogeneity of regression coefficient in thought control assumption

Significance level	F	Mean of squares	DF	Pre-test total square	Source of change
0.19	15.87	125.13	1	125.13	Pre-test
0.46	27.58	217.92	1	217.92	Tested groups
0.20	51.60	407.68	1	407.68	interaction between group and pre-test
		709	57	7.9	Error

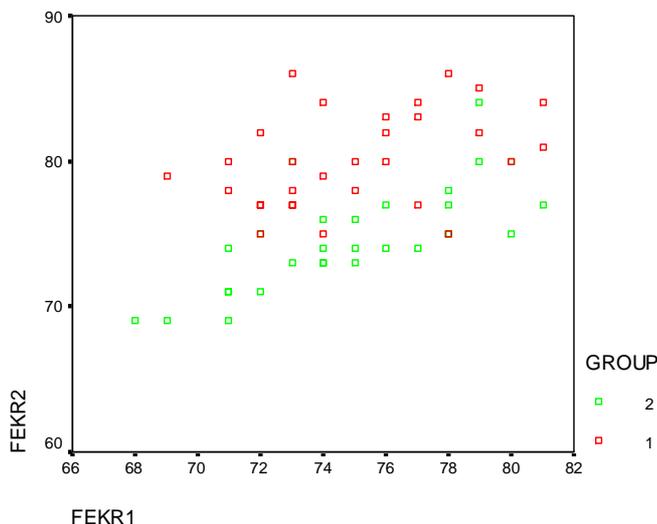
The results of homogeneity of regression coefficients tests are provided. Since the calculated F for interaction between group

and pre-test is not significant ($F < 51$, $p < 0.05$), the data confirm the homogeneity

of regression slopes and the hypothesis is affirmed.

b) Linearity assumption:

Regarding the transmittal figure and regression lines, it can be approved that there is a linear relationship between the variables in the two groups.



Transmittal figure of thought control strategy variable divided to two groups of case and control

c) Variances homogeneity assumption based on Loin test:

Another assumption that should be followed for covariance analysis is the homogeneity of variances which is investigated by Loin’s test

Table 4-6: loin test for investigating the homogeneity of variances in thought control assumption

Significance level	Degree of freedom 2	Degree of freedom 1	F ratio
0.40	59	1	0.697

The results of variances homogeneity tests in creativity assumption are provided in table 4-6. The data analysis indicate that

significance level is higher than 0.5. So, the homogeneity of variances pre-assumption is confirmed

Table 4-7: ANCOVA for thought control strategies

sig	F	Df	Standard deviation	Mean	Variable	group
0.0001	1/53	58	1/43	18.50	Distraction	Case
			1/29	12.70		Control
0.0001	4.22	58	2.20	17.1	Social control	Case
			1.55	13.30		Control
0.0001	0.13	58	1.34	13.20	Anxiety	Case
			1.32	16.20		Control
0.0001	13.92	58	1.91	14.93	Punishment	Case
			1.75	19.63		Control
0.0001	0.029	58	1.38	16.40	Reassessment	Case
			1.67	12.97		Control

The results in table 4-7 indicated that after modifying the pre-test scores, there was a

significant effect between the variables of the participants.

The modified mean scores thought control strategies indicate that the case group which was provided with the life skills teachings were in a higher level of thought control strategies compared to the control group without the teachings. So, the hypothesis is confirmed.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Teaching life skills is effective on thought control strategies of mothers with intellectually disabled children. ANCOVA was used for investigating this hypothesis and the results are provided in table 7-4. As it is indicated in the table, teaching the life skills was significantly effective on all the thought control strategies.

The results of the current study are in line with those of Mohammad Khani and Mazlum (1391), Khalatbari et al. (1390), Amiri Barmkuhi (1388), Mohammad Khani and Mazlumi (1389), Omidvar and Chari (1385), Phili and Jones (2011), and Yamuchi et al. (2009).

Behavioral sciences experts believe that teaching the life skills is among the effective plans for better and healthier life. Life skills are a set of abilities which make adaptability and positive behavior viable. The aim of teaching life skills is promotion of person's adaptability firstly with himself and then with others and the environment he lives in.

The evidence are indicative of harmfully higher mental pressures tolerated by parents with disabled children. Although the parents react differently to childbirth based on their own specific characteristics and the surrounding environment which can be hardly predicted, the reactions of parents to birth of a disabled child is predictable as: sense of being guilty, anger, extreme protection, interpersonal problems and marriage issues (Chen & Thang, 1997). On this same matter, Troster (2001) states that anger toward the child, anger toward the spouse and anger for being unlucky is prevalent among mothers with intellectually disabled children. The mental involvement of family members for disabled children needs and fear of not being able to deal with the needs of their other children sufficiently and more of the same issues exacerbates the life pressures on them (Haris, 2005). Gown (1998) states that these families need more time and energy and higher finances. Parents, specifically mothers, experience more distress, mental illness, and emotional and emotional instability. Fisman and Wolf (1997) believe that family system is among the most important human systems and in a family with an intellectually disabled child, the parental, conjugal, sisterhood and brotherhood micro-systems and even the

system outside the family such as friends, neighbors, school, servicing institutes are affected and lead in higher pressures inside the system and endangers the stability and consolidation of the system, especially in core families. It also increases the probability of defects in the system and cause tensions between family micro-systems. These negative effects will correspondingly inflect the disabled child, too.

Challenging with the thoughts for controlling worrying thoughts is an effective technique for those who deem attention turning as insufficient and inefficient. In most of the cases we ignore our thoughts and reassessment of anxiety-provoking thinking patterns is impossible. Yet, when the worrying thoughts are identified, person can realistically assess them and as a result, prevent formation of a mental pressure cycle. The aim of challenge is reassessment of worrying thoughts and reformulation of them in a way which is helping. This method requires analysis and interpretation of thoughts and reasonable conduct toward anxiety (Dehbashi, 1383).

Families with disabled children need especial knowledge and skills with regards to severity of disability, social and financial conditions, the child's age, and adaptive behavior. The successful acquisition of life skills change

the feelings of the learner about himself and others and besides learning these skills, change the attitudes of others. For this reason, acquiring life skills change both the individual and environment and this mutual principle accelerate psychological hygiene.

Today, in spite of deep cultural change and change in lifestyles, most of people lack the necessary and basic skills and this make them vulnerable facing life problems and issues. Several researches have shown that self-cognition, self-confidence, and self-esteem are the basic components of every person's abilities and disabilities. These features enable the person to take his chances, get prepared for the probable risks, think about his family and society and be worried about his surrounding problems. Life skills as the media for these three features can help the individual and the society in reaching the above goals (Mohammad Khani, 1381).

Also, the life skills have a proper effect in reduction of individual and social harms and by creating principled and scientific attitudes, is proved to be effective in choosing the best method for optimized accomplishment of each task (Taremian, 1389).

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