

Investigating the Life Skills and Self-Esteem in Teenage Girls in Birjand, Iran

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Abstract

Background

Life skills are the strategies that enable people to live a successful life in different environments. Life skills training promotes self-esteem. Self-esteem, as one of the most fundamental factors in the optimal growth of personality in teenagers, is a crucial factor. Considering the role of life skills in gaining self-esteem, we aimed to study the status of life skills and self-esteem as well as the association between life skills and self-esteem among Iranian teenage girls.

Materials and Methods

This correlational cross-sectional study was conducted on 364 teenage girls in the age range of 12-14 years in Birjand city, 2018. The data were collected using a three-part questionnaire; baseline characteristics, Life Skills questionnaire, and Rosenberg Self-esteem Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using SPSS software version 22.0.

Results

The highest mean score of life skills was related to the "interpersonal relationships" dimension (15.07 ± 2.99); whereas, the lowest mean score was related to the "problem-solving" dimension (12.09 ± 3.53). The total mean score of life skills was 138.23 ± 26.80 and the mean score of self-esteem was 4.98 ± 4.41. There was a significant association between life skills and self-esteem ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion

According to the significant association between life skills and self-esteem, we can improve adolescents' self-esteem by conducting appropriate educational courses about life skills.

Key Words: Life skills, Girls, Iran, Self-esteem, Teenager.

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1- INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is considered as a critical period in human life since the majority of physiological, cognitive, and psychological changes occur throughout this era. Changes in the social activities of teenagers and new expectations of the society lead to the formation of new roles and tensions in adolescents' lives. Therefore, teenagers need to acquire some skills to confront the daily stresses and tensions (1). Lack of emotional, psychological, and social skills make people vulnerable to problems and expose them to mental, social, and behavioral disorders (2). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines life skills as the psychosocial abilities to conduct adaptive and positive behaviors that enable them to confront everyday challenge effectively (3). In other words, life skills are the strategies that enable individuals to live a successful life in different environments (4). Life skills training fosters motivation, attitudes, and skills to reach success (5).

It also plays an important role in promoting an individual's mental and physical health, reducing maladaptive behaviors and social problems, improving interpersonal relationships, reducing aggression and behavioral problems, as well as enhancing psychological competence. Furthermore, life skills can prevent a wide range of problems such as drug abuse, pregnancy in adolescence, aggression, and harshness. They also improve self-esteem, amend the social and emotional compatibilities, improve intelligence, and provide information about peace and general health (6). Life skills training increases the overall self-confidence, social and educational self-esteem, as well as educational self-efficacy (7). Life skills programs help people to promote their self-esteem and acquire skills to confront different challenges of life (8). Self-esteem is one of the most

fundamental factors in the optimal growth of personality in children and teenagers. High self-esteem is the central and essential factor in emotional-social compatibility (1). Self-esteem helps teenagers to have an effective performance in their academic and social lives (9). The prevalence of some behavioral and emotional disorders was higher than the average rate among students with low self-esteem. Low self-esteem was also associated with many anti-social behaviors such as smoking, drug abuse, friend-making problems, early or late maturity, educational problems, perfectionism and competitive anxiety, algebraic thinking, lack of effort to improve the situation, and suicide commitment. Students with higher self-esteem were more successful in school assignments and academic achievements. These students had better interpersonal relationships and reached higher levels of emotional and social compatibility (10).

People with high self-esteem have better health conditions and the rate of suicide commitment is very low among them (11). Establishment and maintenance of healthy mutual social relationships are very difficult in individuals with low levels of self-esteem. Therefore, they experience a high degree of isolation and loneliness (12). Self-esteem is effective in reducing the vulnerability of teenagers and can improve their physical and mental health. Moreover, life skills play an important role in human life. This study was carried out taking all of these into consideration. The aims were to determine the status of life skills and self-esteem and to specify the relation between them among the teenage girls in Birjand city, Iran. The results of this study can be applied in planning appropriate interventions.

2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

2-1. Study design

This correlational cross-sectional study was conducted in 2018. The study aimed

to determine the status of life skills and self-esteem and to investigate the relationship between life skills and self-esteem in teenage girls.

2-2. Participants

The population included 364 high school girls in the age range of 12- 14 years in Birjand city, Iran. The sample size was calculated at 95% significance level based on the findings of a pilot study and a sample of 364 was estimated. In order to recruit the participants, two high schools were randomly selected and all 7th and 8th grade students were asked to complete the questionnaires.

2-3. Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria to enter the research were being in the age range of 12–14 years, studying in public schools, and willingness to participate in the study.

2-4. Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria included having a history of psychological disorders, speech and hearing problems, drug consumption, and intake of psychotropic drugs.

2-5. Ethical considerations

This study project was accepted by the Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences Ethics Committee with the ethics code of (IR.SSU.SPH.REC.20018.37). Moreover, the necessary licenses were obtained to enter schools and conduct the research. After coordinating with the school principals, the researcher attended the classes, introduced herself, and explained about the aims and process of the study. Furthermore, the students were instructed about the questionnaires and ensured about confidentiality of the information. The participants were also asked to sign the written consent forms to enter the study.

2-6. Instruments

The data collection tools consisted of the demographic information questionnaire and a two-part questionnaire. The baseline characteristics included age, parents' education and occupation, type of life and its reason, such as living with one of the parents and the reason. The first part of the second questionnaire included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale Questionnaire (13), which consisted of 10 items. Positive answers to each question (items 1 to 5) had a score of +1 and negative responses had the score of -1. Positive answers to each question (items 6 to 10) had a score of -1 and negative answers had the score of +1.

A two-dimensional response (Agree or Disagree) was used to score the items. In order to interpret the results, we used the sum of scores. The minimum and maximum attainable scores were -10 and +10, respectively. Rajabi and Bohlol evaluated the validity and reliability of this scale (14). The internal consistency coefficient was 0.84 for the whole scale and the correlation coefficients between each item and the achieved total score varied from 0.56 to 0.72 at the significance level of $p < 0.001$. The second part of the questionnaire included the Life skills questionnaire, which was designed by Saatchi et al. in 2010 (15). This test consisted of 40 questions in 10 subscales of self-awareness, having a life goal, human communication skills, interpersonal relationships, decision-making skills, mental health, problem-solving skills, collaboration skills, as well as creative and critical thinking. All questions were designed based on a 5-point Likert scale: "very much, much, to some extent, little, and very little". The scores ranged from 40 to 200. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.92.

2-7. Data analysis

After collecting the questionnaires, the data were analyzed using SPSS software

version 22.0. The One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the relationship of mothers' education level with life skills and self-esteem. T-test was also applied to determine the relationship of mothers' occupation with life skills and self-esteem. Moreover, Pearson correlation coefficient and linear Regression Model test was run to determine the relationship between life skills and self-esteem.

3- RESULTS

In this research, 364 teenage girls participated who were in the age range of 12-14 years. The results of frequency distribution of baseline characteristics showed that 29.9% (n=104) of fathers had junior high school degree, 19.5% (n=69) were employees, and the rest were unemployed, self-employed, farmers, or workers. The findings indicated that 41.6% (n=147) of mothers had elementary

education degree, and 93.4% (n=337) were housewives. We found that 91.7% (n=332) of the teenagers lived with both parents and 8.4% (n=30) of them lived with one parent or other relatives due to parents' separation, death, imprisonment, and travel. In this regard, 47.8% of participants lived with one parent because of the death of the other parent (**Table.1**). The results of the study on life skills scores showed that the highest mean score was related to the interpersonal relationships (15.07 ± 2.99), and the lowest mean score was related to problem-solving skills (12.09 ± 3.53). The total mean score of life skills was 138.23 ± 26.80 (**Table.2**). The results showed that the mean score of self-esteem was 4.98 ± 4.41 . Furthermore, the examination of self-esteem in teenagers indicated that 81.4% gained scores higher than zero; whereas, 18.6% achieved scores lower than zero.

Table-1: Frequency distribution of demographic variables of participants

Variables		Number	Percent
Father's education	Illiterate	13	3.7
	Primary School	94	27
	Secondary School	104	29.9
	Diploma	101	29
	Academic	36	10.3
Father's occupation	Unemployed	15	4.2
	Farmer	7	2
	Self-employed	186	52.7
	Worker	71	20.1
	Employed	69	19.5
	Other	5	1.4
Mother's education	Illiterate	18	5.1
	Primary School	147	41.6
	Secondary School	86	24.4
	Diploma	83	23.5
	Academic	19	5.4
Mother's occupation	House wives	337	93.4
	Self-employed	14	3.8
	Employed	8	2.2
	Other	2	0.6
Type of life	Parents	332	91.7
	Mother	18	5
	Father	6	1.7
	Other	6	1.7
Reason	Parents' separation	6	26.1
	Death of a parent	11	47.8

Table-2: The mean scores of life skills' dimensions and self-esteem in participants

Variables	Mean \pm Standard deviation	Acquired score range
Self-awareness	13.96 \pm 3.24	4-20
Having a goal	14.04 \pm 3.57	4-20
Human relationships	15.04 \pm 3.08	4-20
Interpersonal relationships	15.07 \pm 2.99	4-20
Decision making	13.52 \pm 3.56	4-20
Mental health	12.99 \pm 3.34	4-20
Problem-solving	12.09 \pm 3.53	4-20
Participation	13.54 \pm 3.89	4-20
Creative thinking	13.58 \pm 3.40	4-20
Critical thinking	14.37 \pm 3.14	4-20
Total life skills	138.23 \pm 26.80	40-200
Total self-esteem	4.98 \pm 4.41	0-10

The results of one-way ANOVA showed no significant relationship between mothers' education level and the scores of life skills and self-esteem in students. In addition, the results of T-test indicated that mothers' occupation did not have any significant relationship with the scores of life skills and self-esteem in participants

(**Table.3**). The results of the correlation test showed a direct and significant relationship between life skills and self-esteem scores ($r = 0.5$, $P < 0.001$). The estimation of linear regression model for prediction of self-esteem based on life skills is presented (**Table.4**).

Table-3: The total mean scores of life skills and self-esteem in terms of mothers' education and occupation and fathers' education and occupation

Variables		Life skills	Self-esteem
Mother's education	Illiterate	138.44 \pm 17.14	5.55 \pm 3.46
	Primary School	135.76 \pm 28.57	4.38 \pm 4.34
	Secondary School	137.69 \pm 26.12	5.47 \pm 3.96
	Diploma	144.30 \pm 24.66	4.86 \pm 5.12
	Academic	138.84 \pm 28.39	4.22 \pm 4.98
	Statistical test result (ANOVA)	F=1.39 P=0.23	F=0.51 P=0.73
Mother's occupation	Housewife	138.64 \pm 26.86	5.05 \pm 4.36
	Employed	133.22 \pm 26.09	4.07 \pm 4.94
	Statistical test result (t-test)	T=1.01 P=0.31	T=1.09 P=0.28
Father's education	Illiterate	148.1 \pm 22.7	4.61 \pm 4.9
	Primary school	130.9 \pm 24.8	4.85 \pm 4.2
	Secondary school	134.6 \pm 25.5	4.28 \pm 4.6
	Diploma	143.4 \pm 28.1	5.55 \pm 4.3
	Academic	147.2 \pm 25.2	5.55 \pm 4.3
	Statistical test result (ANOVA)	F=4.91 P=0.001	F=1.54 P=0.19

Table-4: Estimation of linear regression model for prediction of self-esteem based on life skills

Variable	R Correlation	R ² R-Squared	B Unstandardized regression coefficient	A Fixed coefficient	F	P-value	Std. Error of the estimate	Beta Standard coefficients
Life skills	0.5	0.25	0.084	-6.59	117.1	<0.001	3.83	0.5

4- DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to determine the status of life skills and self-esteem among teenage girls in Birjand city, Iran. The highest mean score was related to "interpersonal relationships" dimension; whereas, the lowest score was related to the "problem-solving" dimension. A similar study on the status of life skills among the students of Iran University of Medical Sciences showed that the lowest score was related to the "problem-solving skills" dimension, which is in line with our findings (16). Another study conducted on orphan teenage girls showed that the lowest score was related to the dimension of "confronting stress", whereas the highest score was attributed to the dimension of "confronting excitement" (17). These results were against the findings of our study. Furthermore, the skill of "confronting stress" had the lowest score; whereas the "empathy skills" dimension received the highest score in another study (18). These discrepancies in the findings can be justified by considering the differences in the measuring tools, the populations, as well as the culture and society of participants. Therefore, with regard to the personality, demographic, social, and economic differences in different societies, the status of life skills and self-esteem differs among people. The mean score of self-esteem and the total mean score of life skills obtained by adolescents were less than the average. In this regard, a study on the relationship between anxiety and self-esteem reported that 10.1% of participants had scores lower than the average rate; however, in our

study, this rate was 18.6% (19). A study carried out in Nigeria indicated that the participants' self-esteem was lower than in the participants in the present study (20). Differences in research tools for measuring self-esteem as well as the demographic and social differences could cause these discrepancies. The result of this study showed a significant relationship between life skills and self-esteem. The findings of another study showed that the skill of training assertiveness affected self-esteem (1). Results of another study showed that training (self-awareness, anger control, problem-solving, communication skill) students based on social learning model increased their self-esteem (10). Considering the significant relationship between life skills and self-esteem, we recommend the authorities to implement educational courses and train teenagers regarding all dimensions of life skill, so that they can improve their self-esteem.

4-1. Study Limitations

This study had some limitations: the statistical population was limited to the teenage female high school students in the age range of 12–14 years and the questionnaire was too long. Therefore, we suggest other researchers to conduct similar studies on other teenage groups, especially teenage boys and adolescents who quit school.

5- CONCLUSION

The mean scores of life skills and self-esteem in teenagers indicate that appropriate interventions are necessary on this subject. Considering the significant relationship between life skills and self-

esteem, we can design appropriate interventions on life skills in order to improve teenagers' self-esteem. Consequently, we can ensure the improvement of the physical, psychological, and mental health of teenagers.

6- CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

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