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A Study of Life Skill Components in Clients Referred to Health and Counseling Centers

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Abstract

Background: Life skills include a set of abilities to increase the power of adaptability and positive behavior. The objective of this study was to determine the distribution of ten life skill components and their related factors among individuals referring to veterans' health and counseling centers in the city of Tehran.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among participants over the age of 20. The sample size was estimated based on the Morgan table and Cochran sampling formula. The present study utilized the shortened life skills scale including 10 subscales. Data were analyzed using statistical t-test, Pearson correlation, and one-way analysis of variance.

Results: The total mean of life skills was significantly higher among women (Pvalue=0.01). Age had a significant direct correlation with total life skills (r=0.19). There were significant differences between the three educational levels in 8 out of 10 components. The decision-making power had a significant correlation with "problem solving" and "creative thinking". "Critical thinking" had a high correlation with "effective communication", "coping with stress" and "attracting social support". "Coping with emotion" had a direct and high correlation with "coping with stress" and "self-awareness" but its correlation was reversed with "creative thinking".

Conclusions: The mean score of life skills among clients of veteran`s health and counseling centers was slightly higher than the average population; while the rate of enjoyment of life skills was different in this subpopulation. The results implicate an urgent need to improve life skills, especially for highly educated people.

Keywords: Life skills, Veterans, Cross-sectional study, Iran.
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Introduction

Despite changes in lifestyle, many people are still using their past inefficient and traditional education methods when faced with difficulties and problems. Learning ways to overcome anger and aggression would enable people to use such skills in other fields of their social life. A rational, healthy, purposeful and flexible lifestyle for dealing with challenges as a human goal can be achieved by gaining knowledge about life skills. These skills can affect an individual`s attitude, beliefs, and behavior. The concept of life skill was first introduced by the world health organization (WHO) in 1994.[1] Life skills include a set of abilities to increase the power of adaptability and positive behavior. As a result, people are able to behave responsibly and deal efficiently with life stress.[2,3] Unlike previous studies on life skills and general health that have covered some skills or parts of overall health;[1,4,5,6,7,8] the present research sought to investigate all the ten skills, namely decision-making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotion, coping with stress, and attracting social support.

In the present study, individuals who were clients of veteran`s health services were selected as the source population. The existence of a specific profile of the studied population, who were either at risk of physical and psychological harm due to the experience of war or were exposed to psychological, social and even physical damage due to the loss of at least one first-degree family member or living with such people doubled the need for the present research. Lack of epidemiologic information on this subpopulation will hinder health planners for implementing empowerment programs for the target audience and they will be confronted with serious challenges and unnecessary costs.

The present research was conducted with the aim to determine the distribution of ten life skills components and their associated factors among patients referring to veteran`s health and counseling centers (Bonyad-Shahid) in the city of Tehran. The present study has provided clear documentation for the appropriate use of empowerment methods to Bonyad-Shahid stakeholders for clients of health and counseling centers in Tehran.

Materials and Methods

The source population for the present cross-sectional study was defined as all people over the age of 20 referred to multiple health and counseling centers of Bonyad-Shahid in order to receive health and counseling services in Tehran during 2016. The final sample size was estimated at 600 subjects. The current study utilized the shortened life skills scale including 10 subscales. The questionnaire contained 62 questions measuring various domains of life skills including decision making (5 questions), critical thinking (6 questions), problem solving (4 questions), emotional management (9 questions), creative thinking (7 questions), social support (4 questions), effective communication (9 questions), stress management (5 questions), self-awareness (7 questions), and empathy (6 questions). The responses were presented on a 5-item Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always".

In the research, the content validity and reliability were measured using Cronbach's alpha test. The results indicated an overall high reliability (α=0.88); and high subscale reliability in all 10 subscales. The study questionnaire was administered to subjects who were randomly selected and contacted for a preplanned visit. At each stage of the recall, the purpose of the study was first described to the subjects; and volunteers who completed a consent form were included in the study. The collected data was analyzed using statistical t-test, Spearman and Pearson correlation tests, and the one-way analysis of variance.

Results

The present research investigated the gender, age, education level, and ratio of respondents to study samples. Less than one-third of the respondents were male (n=168 (28%)). The highest and lowest proportions of respondents belonged to the age group 31-35 and 20-25 years old (31% and 3%, respectively). In terms of educational level, less than 15% (n=89) of respondents had less than a diploma. About 57% (n=342) of the respondents were spouses and offspring of the veterans; while only 16.6% (n=99) were veterans.

Scores of life skill components were converted to 100, and then the mean and standard deviation of their scores were calculated based on the life skill component. Accordingly, the mean (SD) score for coping with emotion, critical thinking, social support, creative thinking, decision making, coping with stress, self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, and problem solving 59(12), 58(11), 58(12),57(57),55(11),53(8), 50(8), 50(11), and 48(11) (table 1).

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of the life skill components scores

Life skills	Mean	SD
Decision making	57	57
Critical thinking	59	12
Problem solving	48	11
Emotional management	65	09
Creative thinking	58	12
Social support	58	11
Effective communication	50	11
Stress management	55	11
Self-awareness	53	08
Empathy	50	08

The mean of total life skills in women was statistically significantly higher than in men (438 vs.167, Pvalue=0.01). There was a significant difference between gender-specific mean scores in 7 out of 10 skills. Men have significantly higher scores compared to women in problem solving (55+9 vs. 46+12, Pvalue<0.001) and self-awareness (57+11 vs.51+6, Pvalue<0.001). In contrast, women had significantly higher mean scores compared to men in critical thinking (59+13 vs. 56+8, Pvalue=0.01), social support (60+12 vs.53+7, Pvalue<0.001), effective communication (52+12 vs.45+5, Pvalue<0.001), coping with stress (56+11 vs.53+10, Pvalue=0.01) and empathy (66+9 vs.48+8, Pvalue<0.001) (table 2). The results of Spearman correlation coefficients showed that while age had a significant direct correlation with the total life skills (r=0.19), it had a significant correlation with 8 out of 10 life skills (table3). The results of the one-way ANOVA test showed that there were significant differences between the three education groups in 8 out of 10 components. Mean scores of respondents with less than a diploma were greater than the other two groups in critical thinking, social support, effective communication, coping with stress and self-awareness. Respondents with high-school diplomas had a significantly higher score in the decision-making component. Respondents with an education higher than a diploma had a significantly higher score in the empathy component (table 4).

Table 2. Distribution of life skill components in women and men

Life Skills	Men		Women		t	Pvalue
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Decision Making	57	8	56	8	1.88	>0.05
Critical Thinking	56	8	59	13	3.26	0.010
Problem Solving	55	9	46	12	-9.21	0.001
Emotional Management	65	3	66	10	0.91	>0.050
Creative Thinking	59	8	58	12	-1.07	>0.050
Social Support	53	7	60	12	7.08	0.001
Effective Communication	45	5	52	12	6.36	0.001
Stress Management	53	10	56	11	3.08	0.010
Self-Awareness	57	11	51	6	-5.14	0.001
Empathy	48	8	66	9	8.26	0.001
Total	52	9	59	10	3.84	0.010

The results of Pearson correlation coefficients between the life skill components showed that decision-making power had a significant correlation with the two components of "problem solving" and "creative thinking". In other words, problem solving and creative thinking could predict decision making and vice-versa. Critical thinking had a high correlation with "effective communication", "coping with stress" and "attracting social support". Problem solving had a significant correlation with empathy, coping with emotion and decision-making power. Coping with emotion had a direct and high correlation with coping with stress and self-awareness, but its correlation was reversed with creative thinking. Creative thinking had a reverse correlation with coping with emotion and stress. Attracting social support had a direct and high correlation with critical thinking, effective communication, and coping with stress. The effective communication had a correlation with critical thinking, empathy and coping with stress. Coping with stress had the highest correlation with critical thinking, empathy and social support. Self-awareness had the greatest correlation with coping with emotion. Empathy had the most correlation with effective communication, critical thinking and coping with stress (table 5).

Table 3. The relationships of age and component of life skills

Life Skills	Correlation Coefficient	Pvalue
Decision Making	0.10	0.01
Critical Thinking	0.05	-
Problem Solving	0.25	0.001
Emotional Management	0.35	0.001
Creative Thinking	0.32	0.001
Social Support	0.10	0.05
Effective Communication	0.06	-
Stress Management	0.12	0.001
Self-Awareness	0.20	0.001
Empathy	0.09	0.05
Total	0.19	0.001

Table 4. Distribution of life skills by Education levels

	Under-diploma		Diploma		Above-diploma		F	Pvalue
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Decision making	51	6	59	9	56	6	33	0.001
Critical thinking	65	11	53	9	61	13	51	0.001
Problem solving	48	11	49	12	46	11	3	>0.05
Emotional management	61	7	66	11	66	5	8.9	0.01
Creative thinking	57	5	58	4	58	9	0.58	>0.05
Social support	65	8	54	9	59	11	38	0.001
Effective communication	61	11	44	8	51	9	114	0.001
Stress management	63	13	51	8	56	10	55	0.001
Self-awareness	57	8	53	9	50	5	29	0.001
Empathy	52	12	47	7	54	6	45	0.001

Table 5. Correlation coefficients of life skills components with each other

Empathy	Self-Awareness	Stress Management	Effective Communication	Social Support	Creative Thinking	Emotional Management	Problem Solving	Critical Thinking	Decision Making	
0.10 *	0.11 *	0.50 --	-0.16 *	-0.24 **	0.30 **	-0.12 *	0.25 **	-0.07	-	Decision Making
0.49 **	0.009 --	0.54 **	0.84 **	0.51 **	0.05 --	0.03 --	0.10 *	-	-	Critical Thinking
0.33 **	0.19 **	0.12 *	0.008 --	-0.20 *	0.10 *	0.26 **	-	-	-	Problem Solving
0.11 *	0.37 **	0.34 **	0.15 *	0.12 *	-0.56 **	-	-	-	-	Emotional Management
0.21 *	0.10 *	-0.16 *	0.13 *	0.05 --	-	-	-	-	-	Creative Thinking
0.24 *	--0.06	0.43 **	0.34 **	-	-	-	-	-	-	Social Support
0.57 **	0.05 --	0.42 **	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Effective Communication
0.46 **	0.04 --	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Stress Management
0.08	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Self-Awareness
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Empathy

Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, the clients' mean skill was above the population average (about 56 percent). The overall value of life skills has been reported differently in various studies. For instance, Azari et al.[9] conducted research on students and reported high average skills. In a research by Farzamnia et al.[10] on school students, mean skills were satisfactory. Smith and Canter[11] reported a moderate level of awareness in school students. The highest levels of skills belonged to coping with emotion, critical thinking, social support and creative thinking. In a research by Farzamnia et al,[10] empathy, self-awareness, and critical thinking skills had the highest levels, which were not consistent with the present study. Comparisons of life skill components in men and women indicated that the mean of overall skills was higher in women. Critical thinking, social support attraction, effective communication, coping with stress, and empathy were reported in higher levels in women; nevertheless, the mean scores of problem solving and self-awareness skills were higher in men. This finding was consistent with a research by Azari et al.[9]. There was a significant difference between women and men in 7 out of 10 skills including self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, critical thinking, problem solving, coping with stress and social support attraction. In a study by Azari et al.[9], 3 out of 7 skills had significant differences including self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication. There was consistency in these three skills. The findings also indicated that some educational level groups (especially the diploma group) were likely to outperform in some skills than other study groups. The results indicated the urgent need for improvement of life skills among highly educated people and the men subgroup.

The large sample size was the strength of our study, which increased the power of the study. Our study differed from other similar studies by investigating all 10 life skills among clients referring to health and canceling centers across Tehran. On the other hand, the lack of similar epidemiologic findings in this specific group of the population in Iran has restricted interpretations for the present study.

The present study indicated that ten life skills in clients of veteran`s healthcare services was above the population average and was likely to affect their health and well-being in various ways. Therefore, levels of skills in groups, as well as relationships of components with the general health levels should be taken into account in order to prioritize life skills education and awareness programs. This prioritization may further contribute to the specification of financial resources for educational efforts more efficiently.

Acknowledgement

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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