

The effect of empowerment program on students' attitude towards addiction

Robab Rahmati

phD. Assistant professor at Farhangiyen University. alborz, Iran.

Correspondence: Robab Rahmati, Farhangiyen University. alborz, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Today, drug use by teenagers is a major social problem. The evidence suggest that there is an association between individuals' life skills and their reduced inclination to use drugs. Therefore, the present study examines the effect of psycho-social empowerment programs on the attitudes of Iranian students towards drugs and the rate of drug use in students. Material and Methods: This study is a quasi-experimental study which is conducted on 380 students at the age range of 14-16 years who are living in Malard (Iran) during 2014-2015. The samples are chosen using cluster random sampling. After offering 11 sessions of teaching psycho-social empowerment program during 70 days, the effect of training on variables such as attitudes towards drug use and drug use rate are investigated. Data analysis is done through covariance test. Results: Data analysis results suggest that the scores of the test group regarding negative attitudes toward drugs was significantly ($p < 0.05$) more than that of control group. Moreover, the training course had a significant effect on the rate of drug use by Iranian students ($F = 20.94$, $p < 0.01$). Discussion: According to the findings, psycho-social empowerment programs could increase the negative attitudes of students towards drug use, and decrease the drug use rate. Therefore, this program can be used as an effective method in increasing the performance of adolescents and preventing the tendency and rate of drug use at schools.

Keywords: Prevention, drugs, psycho-social empowerment, attitude

Introduction

During the last three decades, designing a successful program for preventing the use and abuse of drugs has drawn the attention of numerous researchers and politicians from different countries and various projects have been designed and executed in this regards. According to the epidemiological studies of Velco (2010), the use of psychedelic drugs such as ecstasy and crystal as well as cigarette and alcoholic drinks have increased considerably during recent years in the world and this has turned into to a global challenge^[1]. conducted a research on students in Tehran (Iran) and showed that the highest percentage of drug use was at the age of 14-15 years.^[2] In the last thirty years, organized efforts have been made for developing effective approaches to prevention of drug abuse at schools. These approaches include teaching resistance skills in which practical skills are trained, and people can use these skills to resist against social situations encouraging them to use drugs.^[3] The main objective of present study is to examine the

effects of psycho-social empowerment programs on preventing students from drug use and improving their attitudes towards drug use in an Iranian sample.

Material and Methods

The present study was conducted based on a quasi-experimental method in which two groups (i.e. control and test groups) were evaluated twice during the study namely before and after training. The participants included 380 individuals (190 females and 190 males) at the age range of 14 to 16 years who were living in Malard during 2014-2015. The students were at the risk of drug use because they were chosen from a region which had low social and economic status due to emigration, and the prevalence of drug use and committing crimes was high in the neighborhoods. In this region, many families use drugs, drugs are found easily, and many students have the experience of drug use at lower ages.

This training course was conducted by expert consultants (trained consultants) and police officers. We used the police officers beside of consultants because they were more familiar with drugs, they could show real drugs to students, and the presence of these officers for training and introducing drugs and explaining the punishment law for drug use was an important factor in prohibition and reinforcement of the law.

This program was conducted for students at the age range of 14-16 years. The reason behind choosing this group was that the first year of high school starts right after junior school and it is at the beginning of high school that teenagers feel they are

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grown up. In their life, this period is accompanied by certain characteristics such as social growth and being free of family control, tendency to be accepted in groups, spending the leisure time with friends, etc. all of which may expose them to some risks.

For conducting this program, the approval of announced justification for executing the program was received from the education organization. Then, among all high schools, 4 schools were chosen randomly, and among them 8 classes were chosen to be included in the sample. The experiment group included 4 classes and consisted of 190 students. The control group was also made up of 190 students. The psycho-social empowerment program was offered to the test group, and the control group received typical educational courses. At the end of the course, the two groups were compared.

Empowerment Program

According to the empowerment approach, drug use is an adopted social behavior which is the result of the interaction between personal and social factors. With regard to this approach, teenagers have weak personal and social skills of resisting against factors that encourage drug use. As a result, they are vulnerable and tend to use drugs as a substitute for compatible confronting approaches [4]. For dealing with this problem, the empowerment approach emphasizes on the prevention of drug abuse, and enhancing general personal and social skills beside of resistance skills.

This training program is designed based on risk factors and protective factors associated with drug abuse by teenagers. The main aim of this study is to realize a change in three fields namely knowledge, attitude and behavior of students. The psycho-social empowerment program is an educational package composed of certain parts namely guidance books for training the teacher (preventing the drug abuse and training life skills) and teachers' workbook [1].

This program included 8 topics (i.e. health value, healthy decision making, risk taking and drug use, confronting stress and negative excitement, effective communication, healthy communications among people, insistence of friends, and skill of refusing and self-confidence) which were trained in 11 sessions. The training sessions were held at schools and in the workshop saloon. Training of intended topics was conducted by an interaction method using active training techniques such as brainstorming, group discussion, group activity, raising questions, role play, and behavior practicing.

Table 1: Life Skills for Students at the Risk of Drug Use and Units of Training Program

Number of sessions	Topic	Number of Students	Time (min)
1 Session	Health value	190	90
1 Session	Healthy decision making	190	90
1 Session	Risk taking and using drug	190	90
2 Sessions	Confronting stress and negative emotions	190	180
2 Sessions	Effective communication	190	180
2 Sessions	Healthy communication between people	190	180
1 Session	The insistence of friends and rejection skills	190	90
1 session	Self-confidence	190	

The research tools included two questionnaires as detailed in the following.

This questionnaire had 50 items with three-choice answers which were scored based on the three-point Likert scale. From this questionnaire, five factors namely tendency to use, attitudes towards risks, attitudes towards physiological effects, attitudes towards psychological effects and attitudes towards social effect were extracted. The reliability of scales was verified through Cronbach's alpha test. The minimum reliability was obtained for physiological effects of drugs ($\alpha=0.77$) and the maximum reliability belonged to tendency to use drugs ($\alpha=0.77$) [5].

The following is an example of questions used.

Drug use for fun and entertainment....

A- does not cause any problem in the short time.

B- is somewhat dangerous.

C-will definitely cause addiction.

Self-Report Questionnaire of Drug Use

This questionnaire included 12 questions about the experience of using different drugs and the experience of drug use in the last 6 months. One of the questions is as follows:

Have you ever used drugs? When was the first time that you use drug?

The collected data were analyzed by using covariance analysis and SPSS software.

Results

The descriptions of all kinds of drugs experienced by students is represented in Table 2. As one could easily note, the rate of experiencing drug use was higher in boys than girls, and alcoholic drinking and 'cannabis' were rated as the top drugs experienced by the students.

Table 2: Rate of Experiencing Different Kinds of Drugs by Male and Female Students

Experiencing the drug use	Rate of using experience	
	Girls	Boys
Hashish and Marijuana	2%	5%
Opium	1%	3%
Glass	2%	4%
Heroin	0%	3%
Metadone	1%	3%
Tranquilizers and pain killers	2%	4%
Alcoholic drinking	3%	6%
Ritaline	1%	2%

In order to compare the drug use rate in the test and control groups, and to determine the primary differences of these two groups, the covariance analysis was used. In this analysis, investigating the effect of training course on preventing drug use by the students in the last 6 months and with controlling the primary differences of the experiment group and control group in the drug use rate were taken into consideration. The mean use frequency for students in the experiment group was 0.31 and for the control group it was 0.73. Leven test suggested the equality of variance of dependent variable for the two groups ($P=0.82$).

The results of covariance analysis showed that offering a training course after controlling the drug use rate at the pre-test stage had a significant effect on the drug use rate ($f=20.94$, $P<0.01$). Therefore, the first hypothesis was supported and the null hypothesis was denied. Moreover, the value of η^2 suggested that the education course can explain 5.3% of the drug use rate variance at the post-test stage.

On the other hand, the drug use rate at the pre-test stage (the control variation) had a significant effect on drug use rate at the post-test stage ($f=522.821$, $P<0.01$) and this explained more than 58% of drug use variance at the post-test stage ($\eta^2 = 0.581$). The results are presented with further details in table 3.

Table 3: Covariance Analysis of Effect of Training Course on Drug Use Rate among Students

Criteria	Mean		SD		Leven's test	
Variable	Experiment	Control	Experiment	Control	Experiment	Control
The frequency of drug using at the post-test	0.31	0.73	0.855	1.658	0.82	1.378
The source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean Squares	F	P	η^2
The drug use rate at the post-test	382.353	1	382.353	522.821	0.01	0.581
Training Course	15.316	1	15.316	20.942	0.01	0.053
Error	275.71	377	0.731			
The total modified	674.905	379				

To compare the test and control groups in regard to attitudes towards drug use and to control the primary differences of these two groups in the given variable, the covariance analysis was used. The average scores at the post-test for the test and control groups regarding their attitude towards drug use were 49.07 and 27.02 respectively. The results of Leven's test on the equality of variances of the two groups for the same variable suggested that there were no significant difference between the variance levels of the two groups ($P=0.48$).

Despite of controlling the primary differences of the groups in regard to attitudes towards drug use, the results of covariance analysis showed that the training course can have significant effect on the attitudes towards drug use ($f=22.017$, $P<0.1$). The results supported the second hypothesis and denied the null hypothesis.

Moreover, the separation indicator of η^2 was equal to 0.22 which implied that the training course may explain 22% of the variance in the scores of attitudes towards drug use. The detailed results are shown in table 4.

Table 4: Covariance Analysis of Effect of Training Course on Attitude towards Drug Use.

Criteria	Mean		SD		Leven's test	
Variable	Experiment	Control	Experiment	Control	Experiment	Control
The attitudes towards drug use at the post-test	27.02	49.07	19.721	21.012	0.48	1.378
The source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	P	η^2

The attitudes towards drug use at the pre-test	69172.948	1	69172.948	220.885	0.01	0.369
Training Course	33286.926	1	33286.926	106.293	0.01	0.22
Error	11806.42	377	313.163			
The total Modified	232688.884	379				

Discussion

First Hypothesis. In order to study the effect of training course on the drug use rate among students, two groups (i.e. test group and control group) were compared and the primary differences among these two groups were controlled by the method of covariance analysis. These primary differences were reflected in the reports of 6 months drug use rate at the pre-test stage. The comparison of mean drugs use rate for six months in the test and control groups suggested the significant effect of the preventive intervention on the drug use rate in the students ($f=20.942$, $p<0.01$). In other words, the drug use rate in the test group was reduced considerably and this reduction was attributed to participating in training courses.

Numerous previous studies suggest the significant effect of interventions done based on the approach of training resistance skills [6-9].stated that they managed to reduce the rate of taking marijuana in one-year follow up by offering courses for training life skills. conducted a study on 9 schools in the suburb areas and reported that life skills training courses can reduce the rate of drinking alcohol, taking marijuana and inhaling drugs in students.

Some studies in Iran such as [1, 10, 11] suggest that training life skills can change the attitudes of students towards drugs, and their results were contrary to the ones offered by [8].since they suggested that training these skills did not have any significant effect on the attitudes of the test group.

Second Hypothesis. In order to examine the effects of training course on the attitudes of students toward drugs, the two groups (i.e. test group and control group) were compared. The primary differences among these two groups were omitted from the variance of attitudes toward drug use by using covariance analysis. These primary differences were reflected in the pre-test scores of attitudes towards drug use. The comparison of typical attitudes towards drug use within the test and control groups suggested the significant effect of the training courses on the attitudes of students towards drug use ($=22.017$, $p<0.01$). In other words, the scores of attitudes towards drug use in the test group increased considerably in comparison to the control group, and this was attributed to participating in training courses.

[12, 13] conducted a study on implementing an intervention based training the life skills and suggested that the attitudes of students towards drug use had promoted.

Our findings suggest that psycho-social empowerment program could change the attitudes of students towards drug use and decreased drug use rate. However, this study had some limitations. For example, this study was conducted in a sectional manner, and the families did not participate in the training sessions held at schools [14].

For further studies in this field, it is suggested to perform this program at school in the extracurricular courses, identify the students who are at the risk of drug use and teach them. Families should also be trained. The follow-up studies should be conducted precisely so as to examine the effect of this program on other criteria.

Conclusion

Based on the results of present study, the psycho-social program can increase the negative attitudes of students towards drug use, and decrease the rate of drug use. Since there is a positive relation between people's skills level and their negative attitudes towards drugs, it is necessary to perform psycho-social empowerment programs in all schools especially in Mallard (Iran) where the students are more exposed to a higher risk level.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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