

# A Brief Overview on Life Skills Training Preprogram, Applications, Experiments and Challenges

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**Abstract**— Life skills is considered effective and beneficial because it enables people to change their knowledge, attitudes and existential values into real and actual and perceived ability and be able to make use the existential forces for succulence and happiness and crating a positive life for oneself and those of others, and this is the same as feeling being and taking steps towards becoming. Those who are fully acquired with life skills are achieved to successes and make himself enable to reduce individual and social damages. It has been attempted in the current study to have a brief overview on performed studies in life skills training and the effectiveness of this training program in different periods of life as well as the challenges faced with this training program.

**Index Terms**— life skills, academic levels, psychology.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

HUMAN kinds had been aware from long time ago that if life problems and requirements are to be dealt with appropriately, the dominance over sciences and skills beyond common skills and sciences will be a necessity. The best example of this speech is what Rumi said in the story of an executive and a mariner. In this story the mariner was reproached because of not knowing the science of syntax, while he himself is put in danger in sinking the ship due to not knowing how to swim.

World Health Organization designed for the first time a comprehensive life skills program in 1993 towards the primary prevention and improving mental health. The design of life skills training program was programmed and applied in various countries including Iran in accordance with this plan [1].

Geff Goodwin maintains that the issue of life skills is not inflexible and it can be changed in various educational and family conditions and also between the two genders. In addition, assessing the skills must be performed according to cultural and social gender differences [2].

Life skills is a set of abilities provides the background for compatibility and positive and useful behavior. These abilities make people empowered to take the social responsibilities and are faced with requirements, expectations and daily problems, especially in interpersonal relationships efficiently without impairing himself and others [3].

Social life, industrial developments and major evolutions in information technology and math medias have turned today's humans to a confused and complicated situation which becoming aware of how to deal with these problems are required to be adopted to these conditions. Dealing with life stresses and getting acquired with individual and social skills are always parts of realities of human life and is manifested to various forms in different periods of life [4].

There are many definitions made regarding life skills. Ac-

ording to Stephen and colleagues (1980) practical abilities and success are focused in life skills and is deduced from analyzing structures and social requirements and daily necessities of life in which some are related to interpersonal relationships and some to daily activities [5].

Pit Fan (1997) maintains that life skills are the abilities, knowledge and behaviors that are leant for feeling of happiness and getting succeed in life. These skills enable people to be adopted with life situations and be dominant over them. People can be easily lived with others through developing these abilities, express their feelings securely and make love to life. Similar definitions are presented by other scholars regarding life skills [6, 7, 8, 9].

In an study conducted in United States in 1997-1998 concerning the effect of training on anti-social procedure repetition, the obtained result indicated that most people who participated in educational classes prevented from committing crime and are often participated in social activities. Life skills training had also been prepared for inmates in United States and it had been mostly focused on family relationships and controlling anger and stress in these classes. the inmates participated in these classes are learnt how to make up what they had done in the past and maintain and improve their family relationships. These inmates were more adopted to prison's disciplinarian system and their returning again to prison was highly reduced [10].

## 2 LIFE SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM

Life skills education program is an incentive and a preventive program. This program has been prepared to promote mental health level and prevent social-mental trauma. Perhaps, it is better to have a definition of mental health, preventive and enhancing program before getting familiar with life skills program training.

Mental health simply means the ability to have a happy, productive, healthy and without trouble and problem living. According to World Health Organization (WHO), not only does mental health mean not having mental illness, but rather,

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it is associated with some kind of mental health [11]. Mentally healthy individuals are those who deal with living and its changes and problems that come along, they also control their living and be responsible for it, and they are able to use their mental abilities and establish a good relationship with others and engaged in constructive and beneficial activities [11].

Mental health has a wide range, and there are no guarantees that if anyone has a relative mental health today, this health will be permanent. All of us are dealing with small and big pressures and stresses such as growth stages, maturity, diseases, economic stress, job loss, noise and bustle, etc. For this reason, we experience some problems and troubles throughout our life. These problems and troubles have an effect on our satisfaction and joy feelings, and gradually affect our social-mental health. To achieve a desirable level of mental health and maintain it, different programs have been offered, which these programs generally revolve around two main axes named incentive and prevention. But, what does it mean by incentive programs, and what kind of programs are preventive ones?

Any action that that increases the people's mental health and welfare within the community is called incentive program. For example, programs such as proper use of leisure, sports, recreation, etc. are included among incentive a program that makes a person feel happy, satisfied and more capability. Preventive programs refer to any interference that performed before starting the basic social problem or starting any disease in order to prevent growing of problem or social harm or growing any kind of disease [12].

The reality is that having skills is a matter in all fields. Because having skills mean the necessary abilities to properly perform a job. So carpentry, driving, cooking painting, etc. all are a kind of skill. But because the goal of life skills training program is to promote people's mental health level and preventing social harm, those kinds of skills will be offered in this training program that is appropriate with the program's goal [12].

What kinds of skills are trained in life skills training program?

To promote mental health level and prevent social harms, basically ten basic and primary skills are used which include:

Ten aspects of life skills include:

1. Problem solving ability:

We're constantly solving problems in our life. Some of these problems are simple ones, but some others require a complex thought. Problem solving abilities help us solve our life's problems in a desirable way. If important problems our life remains unresolved, we'll face with mental stress and our physical and mental health will be put at risk.

2. The ability to make decisions:

Although we are all make decisions, not always make intelligent ones. Some wrong decisions lead to unpleasant consequences. Decision-making skills help us decide correctly on our actions, and ponder upon various aspects of positive and negative consequences of each of them. Appropriate and realistic decisions lead to higher levels of mental health.

3. The ability to have an intelligent thinking:

This kind of thinking helps us understand issues from different angles and evaluate different solutions to the problem

and its consequences, and finally find new solutions to the problems. By using this skill, we make better decisions and problems are resolved more practically.

4. The ability to think critically:

By this skill, we analyze and evaluate our thinking and others and achieve more clear understanding. This ability helps us analyze the information and experiences we're faced with and resist against the values and pressures we're imposed on and know that the behaviors of others are not always right.

5. The ability to interact with others:

Most of our time during a day is assigned to interact with others to express our needs even more, and to understand the need of others. Interaction capabilities help us have a verbal and non-verbal communication more effectively, and express our ideas to others by overcoming the embarrassment. If we acquire this kind of skill, we can

disagree with unsuitable demands of others, if necessary.

6. The ability to have an interpersonal relationships:

Interpersonal relationship ability help us have better cooperation and participation with others, and also trust them and identify the boundaries of our relationships, and maintain good friendships and behave more effectively at the beginnings and end of communications.

7. Self-consciousness ability:

It means self-cognitive ability and awareness the strengths and weaknesses of our desires, fears, willingness and desires. This ability helps us have a realistic view of ourselves and know our rights and responsibilities better.

8. The ability to empathy:

The ability to empathy means to be able to understand other's lives, even not present at those circumstances. Empathy help us accept those who are different from us and respect them. Those who have more empathy to others, have more interests towards them and tolerate different people, and have less aggression and are lovelier. This skill improves people's social relations.

9. The ability to deal with emotions:

This skill includes the ability to identify our emotions and of the others, and also identifying the effects of emotions on behaviors. This skill helps us show an appropriate reaction in times of failure, anger, depression, and anxiety.

10. The ability to deal with psychological pressure (stress):

This ability includes identifying various life stresses and its impact on our behavior. This skill also enables us to identify mental stress resources and to follow the correct ways to reduce stress.

### 3 LIFE SKILLS TRAINING IN CHILDHOOD AND PRIMARY SCHOOL PERIODS

In a research conducted by Esmaili (2001), the effects of life skills training course in interacting with parenting styles in Ardebil Province student's self-esteem was considered, and the results indicated that self-esteem (self-concept) of the students who passed the life skills course was higher than those who did not pass this course. These findings are compatible with the one performed by Psychology Association of America; that is to say, life skills training has a positive effect on stu-

dent's increased self-esteem [13].

There are some studies conducted in life skills training in 1984 in Texas State of America performed by education center and it had been concluded that women more conceptualize their activities and requirements in the future than men [14].

Almost 30percent of children and adolescents are experienced a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, however, 70 to 80% are not received the appropriate interventions. These disorders are led to dysfunction in school, education and in family. It may be finally led to academic failure, expelling from school and incidence of criminal behaviors which may be the cause of long-term adverse consequences [15].

Smith and Gary (2005) showed in a study that life skills training has an effect on learner's feelings towards oneself and those of others, and this issue has a meaningful effect on leadership abilities, management and student's self-assertiveness [16].

Psychiatric counseling in school, initial identification referral makes easy the troubled students. Psychiatrist, as a collaborator in school, can play a significant role in policies and mental health planning in school [17].

#### **4 LIFE SKILLS TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS DURING GIRLS AND BOYS ADOLESCENT PERIODS**

In an study performed by Koutman and Watson (2001) on adolescent boys and girls, it has been found out that there is gender differences in self-esteem in such a way that boys has a little more self-esteem than those of girls. These findings are compatible with the one conducted by Oubrin and colleagues (1996). Boys was significantly higher than girls in some facets of self-esteem including general self-awareness, competence, personal, academic and familial skills. They also less affected by mental reactions than girls in dealing with life challenges and cope more skillfully with problems [18].

Social psychologists maintain that anxiety, as a destructive and devastating factor, are dictated through learning and modeling, therefore, it can be controlled and/or reduced using training methods and modeling. Among these trainings is life skills training. Therefore, anxiety and its components can be substantially reduced or controlled using life skills training [19].

#### **5 LIFE SKILLS TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS DURING YOUTH**

Unfortunately, humans are not always included in normal ways of social and mental upbringing and many youths are not able to be received the external stimulants and establishing balance among the effects of these stimulants and their internal motivations for various reasons. Thereby, a balanced and comprehensive upbringing, which is the main aim of human's balance towards completely or relatively would not be realized. The more complicated the society and the more extensive the interpersonal and social information, the more internal and environmental differences which are led to perplexity and disturbance. Getting addicted to smoking, alcohol and narcotics, getting help from various kinds of nerve medicines, various and complex anti-social behaviors and different kinds of

mental and emotional disorders are the results of such process [20].

On the other hand, adolescence and youth are critical periods which significant changes in mental, cognitive and physiological factors and interpersonal environments (peers pressure, being transferred from a small environment of school to a bigger environment of society and being faced with norms) are made within them. Education and mental stresses are among the issues that most adolescents and youths faced with [21].

Having the ability to cope with the above-mentioned problems and similar ones are useful skills that have determining roles in providing mental health, success, and as a result, an effective and healthy life [21].

In a study conducted in 2002 to prevent narcotics misuse on preliminary and high school students, it has been shown that those who are learnt the life skills developed the training within themselves and it has been very unlikely to be involved in risky problems [22].

Foun (1990) maintains that life skills consist of a wide range of knowledge and interpersonal interactions that are essential for adult life [23].

#### **6 LIFE SKILLS TRAINING DURING COLLEGE PERIODS**

The youths studying in universities and high education centers, influenced by social, cultural and economical conditions governing on the society, are not appropriately able to cope with problems and challenges in most cases and are affected by many behavioral and ethical abnormalities and damages. Obtaining life skills along with obtaining knowledge and appropriate changes in attitudes, values and enhancing suitable behaviors are led to healthy behaviors that problems and obstacles related to health are by themselves reduced and as a result mental health are increased [24].

Life skills are social and personal skills that should be learnt by people to have an effective and assured behavior towards themselves, others and all the community in an appropriate way [25].

The studies indicated that there is a relationship between factors such as self-esteem, interpersonal skills, making desirable relationship, determining objectives, decision-making, problem-solving and determining and identifying the personal values in preventing or reducing people's getting affected to types of personal abnormalities and mental disorders and increased level of mental health.

Lack of these skills cause people are inclined to ineffectual and incompatible behaviors against pressures and stresses incurred upon them [26].

Concerning the issue of life skills, psychological capacity is a key and significant term which means one's ability in dealing with life problems and expectations [27]. High psychological capacity makes possible people to maintain their life in a desirable mental level and display this ability as an adoptable, effective and positive behavior. If youth's life skills are high, they will become responsible to their health and appropriate health decisions are taken and generally a healthy life will be continued during their life. This issue enables them to be acted according to their potential talents and are made ready to be faced with future's life changes and requirements [28].

Various studies indicate that most health problems and socio-mental disorders are rooted in socio-mental aspects. All of us are faced with challenges and problems during life. However, the issues are responded in their own special ways. Those who deal successfully with these challenges are acquired with three skills namely: 1. Flexibility, 2. Foresight, and 3. Being reasonable. In fact, life skills training give people coping attitudes to have a more control on their life [29].

## 7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Essential skills are the requirements of continuity of life including self-esteem and it enables us to effectively deal with issues and problems. Motivation causes people to be stable in their life and the needs are achievable by the power of problem-solving and benefitted by common tolerance granted by God through enhancing creative thoughts and creativity. The ways can be paved through achieving self-assertion skill and being considerate towards others and the sympathy lied within us, and our success can be guaranteed by focusing what we are doing [30].

What is known as life skills today is not the result of contemporary researchers, but most of these skills are indicated within religious teachings, especially Koran and innocent's narrations. The well-known expression as "anyone knowing his self would also know his God" narrated by Imam Ali (PBUH), is the pattern of being benefitted from a desirable and effective kind of life and life skills is meaningless without self-recognition. If a set of life skills are considered, it will be found out that none of them are left untold in Quran teachings and religious elders. These skills are also paid attention to by psychologists in practice and based on research planning and divine evidences are presented to prove them [31].

Four patients affected to psychosomatic diseases are undergone in self-assertiveness training in a research conducted by Matosoda and Ouchiama (2006) in which one of them is life skills training. The results indicated that patient's self-assertiveness and self-confidence are increased after having been trained [32].

Diter (2005) pointed out after performing an study that training the skills of how to cope with anxiety can play a role for the anxious mothers who are able to decrease the amount of anxiety within themselves and their children.

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