The Effect of Assertiveness Training Skill on Feelings of Happiness and Mental Health of Students in Iran

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Abstract

Background and objective Assertiveness is one skill that it can change interpersonal relations and cause happiness. Hence, the aim of present study is the effect of assertiveness training skill on feelings of happiness and mental health of students. Methods and materials the method in this study is empirical method with control group. Statistical population in this study consists of all male high school students of Radar City by 2016. Among those students identified with low assertiveness by their teachers and those with low scores in Mental Health Questionnaire, 30 students were selected randomly and were placed in two experimental and control groups. The experimental group received sessions of assertiveness training and control group was remained in waiting list. Both groups fulfilled Happiness Questionnaire and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) before and after intervention. Data analysis was done using analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) using SPSS-22. Results The results showed that there is significant difference statistically between two groups in terms of amount of happiness and mental health after training assertiveness training (p<0.01). Conclusion Training assertiveness skill can enhance happiness and mental health of students.

Keywords: Assertiveness methods, Happiness, Mental health.

Introduction

Mental health refers to feelings of wellbeing and ensuring of self-efficacy, self-esteem, compatibility, intergenerational belonging and self-actualization of potential thinking and emotional capabilities [1]. Moreover, mental health is one of the most important factors affecting improvement and evolution of people and in fact, an aspect of total concept of health and is relied on methods and decisions used to prevent mental illnesses and rehabilitating the illnesses [2]. A person is mentally healthy, who is away from anxiety and symptoms of disability and can make constructive relationship with others and is able to cope with life stresses and pressures [3]. According to report of World Health Organization (WHO) on mental health status of Iran population, level of prevalence of mental disorders is reported to 21.9% A person is mentally healthy, who is away from anxiety and symptoms of disability and can have constructive
Relationship with others and is able to cope with life stresses [3-4] have found in a study that mental health is correlated to desirable performance in all aspects.

Happiness can create energy and vitality and can protect human against mental pressures like a barrier and guarantee human's mental health [5]. Moreover, happiness is recalled as a series of emotions and cognitive evaluation of life and is regarded as a degree of quality of life, which is evaluated generally in positive way [6-7] believes that happiness can result in positive energy and high mental health in people [7].

Assertiveness training is a behavioural approach that is prevailed abundantly nowadays. Such training is useful especially for those people with interpersonal problems [8] the goals of assertiveness training methods is to help people to change their attitude to self and enhance their assertiveness, express their thoughts and emotions reasonably and enhance their self-confidence through this. Such training is widely used for different age groups [9] there are many problems such as conduct behaviours for loss of assertiveness in adolescents [10].

People with low assertiveness skill have very low self-expression skills anr interpersonal conflict to others. They behave passively and don't take risk. Such passiveness can show hostile and anger and negative thoughts in some cases [11] in study of Abootorab and Bayat [12] on effectiveness of assertiveness training and self-esteem of students, it was shown that assertiveness training can be effective method to increase assertiveness style and self-esteem of students with low assertiveness skill.

Harried and Dickson [13] have conducted a study to determine effect of assertiveness training on enhancement of assertive behaviors of women. Obtained results showed that training assertiveness skills can enhance assertive behaviors in interpersonal and intrapersonal relations of participants of experimental group under critical conditions; although no significant change was observed in control group statistically. Moreover, the results obtained by Cohn et al [14] showed that problem solving training, stress

Management, self-expression, anger control and emotional self-consciousness can cause higher happiness for individuals. According to the effect of assertiveness skills training on enhancement of happiness and mental health, The aim of this study is effectiveness of assertiveness training skill on feelings of happiness and mental health of students.

Method
The method in this study is empirical method with pretest posttest to control group. Statistical population in this study consists fall male high school students of Radar City by 2016. Among those students identified with low assertiveness by their teachers and those with low scores in Mental Health Questionnaire, 30 students were selected randomly and were placed in two experimental and control groups. The experimental group received sessions of assertiveness training and control group was remained in waiting list. Both groups fulfilled Happiness Questionnaire and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) before and after intervention. Data analysis was done using analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) using SPSS-22.

Research Instrument
Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI)
OHI was made by Argyle and Lu by 1990. The inventory has 29 items and each item includes 4 options. The option 1 gains point 0; option 2 gains point 1; option 3 gains point 2 and option 4 gains point 3. Finally, every person gains a point in range of 0-87 and higher point show higher level of happiness.

The lowest point in this scale is point 0, which refers to dissatisfaction of participants by life and depression of person. Normal point of this test is in range 40-42. Argyle and Lu (1990) have showed reliability of the inventory to 90% using Cranach alpha and have reported reliability of retest to 78% during 7 weeks. The concurrent validity of the inventory is 43% using evaluations of friends of the participants. Noorbala [15] reported validity of the inventory to 92%.

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)
The questionnaire was made by Goldberg and Hillier [16] and measures general health in 4 fields including (physical symptoms), (anxiety and sleep disorder), (social
performance dysfunction) and (depression). The questionnaire contains 28 items and 4 subscales and each scale contains 7 questions. The instrument is one of the most well-known screening instruments and is designed in 60, 30, 28 and 12-item forms. In this study, 28-item version of the instrument is used. Out of the 28 items, somatic symptoms (items 1–7); anxiety/insomnia (items 8–14); social dysfunction (items 15–21), and severe depression (items 22–28) are included. The GHQ-28 has a 4-item response scale anchored (typically) with ‘Not at all’ (point 0), ‘No more than usual’ (point 1), ‘rather more than usual’ (point 2), and ‘Much more than usual’ (point 3). Goldberg et al [17] have reported reliability of the test about 80%. Khal'atbari et al [18] have obtained validity of the scale to 87% using Cranach Alpha. Yaghoubi et al [19] have measured reliability of the questionnaire (GHQ-28) and have reported reliability of the scale to 88% using test- retest.

Educational Package

In this study, we use educational package of assertiveness skills The package is presented in 10 sessions with 60min per session and the summary of sessions is presented as follows:

Session 1: Introducing the teacher to members and explaining reason for holding the educational sessions; introducing members and making intimate relationships between group members and the teacher; explaining goals, total tasks of members to the end of sessions.

Session 2: giving information and introducing concept of "self-expression" and its importance in relations; familiarity with behavioral traits of self-expressions and practicing it; introducing types of communicative styles and showing response to others including passive, aggressive, authoritarian and assertive styles; creating self-consciousness in members about self-communicative styles

Session 3: identification of individual rights, short introduction of concepts of self-expression; familiarity with types of assertive behavioral styles and practicing them

Session 4: making members familiar with one method of increasing self-expression; cognitive reconstruction; creating assertion to express positive points and features of self and increasing emotional expressions and practicing; familiarity with skills (be praised) and practicing it

Session 5: practicing requesting for something and rejecting request; expression of positive and negative emotions under different conditions (using the word "I") and practicing it; practicing to say "No" with no sense of guilty

Session 6: short definition of logical-emotional principles and investigation of illogical thoughts; anger control skill and practicing it; familiarity with skills like "listening", "open and close questions" and practicing them

Session 7: short definition of individual differences and differentiating people from each other; accepting and believing in being different from others and expressing it with no feelings of deficit; practicing on self-expression to express ideas even different ideas from others

Session 8: practicing offering and receiving offer; creating skill to begin and continue conversation and coping with silence and probable problems in conversations and practicing it

Session 9: coping with criticisms of others (the therapist has explained the method of coping with criticism and has modeled it) and practicing it; the manner of criticizing others and practicing it

Session 10: review of last sessions; encouraging continuing practices; saying Good bye and determining the date of posttest for 2 days later

To observe rights of participants, they fulfilled written consent letter and they were ensured that their personal information would remain private.

Findings

The participants in this study include 60 high school male students in age range of 16-18 years old. Moreover, in terms of IQ, they were in moderate level and in terms of economic level of parents they were in middle social class.
In continue, the descriptive information of research variables (mean value, SD and variance) in two control and experimental groups in pretest and posttest are presented.

### Table 1: Descriptive Information of Research Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Descriptive Information</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61.3333</td>
<td>15.2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67.6667</td>
<td>19.8667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13.6312</td>
<td>4.42719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.78781</td>
<td>2.99682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>185.810</td>
<td>23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>138.952</td>
<td>8.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66.4667</td>
<td>13.7333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66.5333</td>
<td>14.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.47597</td>
<td>4.93481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.68723</td>
<td>4.84031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>variance</td>
<td></td>
<td>305.410</td>
<td>24.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>312.838</td>
<td>23.429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 1, it could be observed that mean value of variables of happiness and mental health is increased in posttest and this shows effect of assertiveness methods on increase in level of happiness and mental health of experimental group.

### Table 2: Testing Normality of Distribution of Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Elongation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S.E</td>
<td>S.E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pretest</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>63.9000</td>
<td>15.61906</td>
<td>-1.262</td>
<td>0.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mental health</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>14.4667</td>
<td>4.66634</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>0.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>posttest</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>81.00</td>
<td>67.1000</td>
<td>14.77985</td>
<td>-1.498</td>
<td>0.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mental health</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>16.9333</td>
<td>4.95451</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.427</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, skewness and elongation values for research variables are in range (-2, +2) and hence, they have probably normal distribution.

### Table 3: Homogeneity of Variance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Levene Stat</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pretest</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>0.944</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mental health</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>posttest</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>2.102</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mental health</td>
<td>1.807</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 3, sig level is higher than 0.05 and hence, it could be mentioned that variance of groups includes homogeneity.

### Hypothesis 1: Assertiveness Training Methods Can Affect Happiness of Students

### Table 4: Analysis of Covariance of Happiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>6698.145</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6698.145</td>
<td>1.0113</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group</td>
<td>297.186</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>297.186</td>
<td>44.847</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>error</td>
<td>178.922</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.627</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4, according to obtained F value (44.84) and sig level (0.000), it could be found that at probability level of 99%, training assertiveness methods can increase happiness in experimental group (p<0.01). Hence, hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

### Hypothesis 2: Assertiveness Training Methods Can Affect Mental Health of Students
Table 5: analysis of covariance of mental health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>source</th>
<th>sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>mean squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mental health</td>
<td>536.534</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>536.534</td>
<td>183.841</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group</td>
<td>115.381</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>115.381</td>
<td>39.535</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>error</td>
<td>78.799</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.918</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 5, according to obtained F value (39.535) and significant level (0.000) with probability level of 99%, it could be found that assertiveness training methods can improve health of experimental group (p<0.01). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

Discussion

The results showed that assertiveness training methods can increase happiness and can also improve mental health of students. This finding is in consistence with findings of Paeezi [20] on the effectiveness of training assertiveness on happiness and education achievement among female students in Tehran. The study showed that assertiveness training methods can enhance mean value of academic achievement and happiness of students significantly. Khodabakhshi Kolayi et al [21] based on effectiveness of group training of assertiveness skills on mental health and self-esteem of students showed the same findings. Also Karagözoglu et al [22] showed that self-expression skill improves educational performance in students. Lin et al [23] showed in their findings that positive effect of assertiveness skill training on self-esteem and mental health of individuals. Our finding is appropriate with findings of Bayrami [24] based on effect of assertiveness training methods on general health of students and with findings of Makhija and Singh [25] on this basis that effectiveness of assertiveness training methods in increase in self-esteem of children and with findings of Cohn et al [14] based on effect of problem solving training, stress management, self-expression, anger control and emotional self-consciousness on increase in happiness of students and with findings of Stoner et al [26] and Buback [27] based on useful effect of assertiveness training skills on empowerment of interpersonal skills and improvement of sexual relations and findings of El Gawad et al [28] based on effect of assertiveness training methods on improvement of coping strategies of nurses under stressful conditions and improvement of interpersonal relations and with findings of Rasetsoke [29] and Timmins and Mc Cabe [30] showing that assertiveness training methods can affect improvement of communicative skills, decision making and self-confidence of students.

In order to discriminate the results, it could be mentioned that assertiveness is a skill that enables person to express emotions and ideas freely and defend the rights and say No to other if necessary [31] Moreover, assertiveness helps individuals to accept the responsibility of their behaviors and choices and increase their self-esteem. Also it can give students positive feelings, thoughts and attitude to self and others and behave honestly and explicitly with others [32]

Conclusion

Assertiveness training methods can increase happiness and mental health. Hence, it is suggested to researchers and officials of education to use this skill to improve happiness and mental health of students.

Acknowledgments

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