The effect of social skills training on aggression of mild mentally retarded children

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of social skills training on aggression of mild mentally retarded children at Ahvaz city. The sample was comprised of 40 boys mentally retarded students eight to ten years old (20 experimental group, 20 control group), who were selected and assigned by random sampling. The Arnold H. Buss and Mark Perry aggression questionnaire was first executed on both groups as a pre-test, then the experimental group were trained for ten sessions of two hours under social skills, and the performance of the two groups were compared in the post-test. The results showed the positive effect of social skills training on decreasing aggression of mentally retarded children.

Keywords: social skills, aggression, mentally retarded children

1. Introduction

Study of special children has drawn more attention of psychologist in recent years. The main focus of researches is actually investigating the differences between them and normal children. Among special children mentally retarded children, because of complexity of their behaviour, are of particular attention in psychological studies (Hallahan, Kauffman, 2002). There are many different definitions for mental retardation but the one presented by American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) is, “mental retardation is a level of general intelligence function which is considerably lower than average level and causes deficiencies in the child's adaptive behaviour and, it manifests itself in the process of development” (Shea, 2006). The criteria used by most of the experts to classify mentally retarded children is severity of their problems (Luckasson, Reeve, 2001). Most of people who are recognized as mentally retarded are classified as mild retarded. These children faced many mental and behavioural problems including inability in learning, personality problems, and deficiency in adaptive behaviour. They may not be able to control their behaviour (Shea, 2006).

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Aggression, is one of the problems of mentally retarded children. Aggressive behaviour manifests itself as a violent behaviour against others. It means intentionally annoying others (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Aggression has many possible negative consequences including fear, stimulation, mutual aggression, losing control, guilt feeling, loneliness, and problems in mental health as well as social life (Asher et. al, 1990). Community care providers find it difficult to manage such individuals because they often exhibit low frequency but high intensity aggressive behaviours targeted at staff and peers (Singh et. al, 2002).

Several researches mentioned the positive relationship between social skills deficit and behavioural problems (Frey, 2005). Aggressive behaviours can be managed in a number of ways, like psychotropic medication, cognitive-behavioural intervention or their combination (Singh et al, 2002). It seems that social skills training can be useful for dealing with maladaptive behaviour like aggression.

Based on previous research social behaviour influence all aspects of people's life, particularly their mental health, adaptation, and happiness in future. The child's ability in adapting himself with others and doing acceptable social activities determine his level of popularity among peers, teachers, parents and other adults. The level of a person's ability in social skills directly relates to his social growth and is demonstrated in his socially acceptable behaviour (McClelland, Morrison, 2003). The concept of social skills has been variously defined by the psychologists. Schneider et al., (1985) define social skills as an instrument for connecting a person to the environment. They believe that this instrument is used for initiating and continuing a desirable relationship which is an important aspect of mental health. Ilknur and Bulbin (2007) define desirable social skills as the acceptable social pattern of behavior which helps children gain social reinforcement and acceptance. Social skills also help them avoid annoying situations, set positive feedback from the social environment, and improve interpersonal relations.

Social skills training for people with intellectual disabilities have received a great attention over the last several decades (O’Reilly, Lancion, Sigafoos et al, 2004). Lovett and Harris (1987, cited in Kuhn et al, 2001) had shown that social skill deficits are commonly observed among the population of individuals diagnosed with mental retardation. According to Matson and Boisjoli theory (2008), lack of social skills is a barrier for independent life and it is related to mental retardation. Doffenbacher et al., (1987) have shown that social skill training programs have a positive effect on the reduction of anger and its negative manifestations, and control of excitement.

Considering the importance of social skills in mentally retarded student's growth, this research aims at investigating the effects of social skill training on the aggression of these children. It is supposed that social skills training has a positive effect on reduction of aggression in mentally retarded children.

2. Method

This research is a kind of quasi-experiment researches. The design was pre-test, post-test with control group. The participants include 40 eight to ten years old male students with mild mental retardation who were studied at exceptional children school in Ahvaz city. Students were selected by convenient sampling method and randomly assigned in experimental and control groups. Homogeneity of the samples in experimental and control groups was determined based on the student’s ages and IQ scores.

1.1. Procedure

Firstly, students were given Arnold H. Buss and Mark Perry's aggression questionnaire as the pre-test. Secondly, those students who got higher scores were selected as the subjects of the research and randomly divided into the experimental and control groups. Thirdly, students in the experimental group took part in ten sessions of social skills training. Each session lasted 2 hours. The program of training is illustrated at table 1.
Table 1. The program of life skills training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Skill Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Physical and mental self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Understanding others feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recognition of suitable situation for self-assertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Emotional self-awareness and different ways and stages of anger management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How to make friendly relations with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Listening and understanding others when they are talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Types of questions and the role of question in having effective relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The factors which should be noticed in making friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Importance of cooperation and take responsibility and different types of social cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Review all skills practiced in the previous session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social skill training program. We used the program of social skills training presented by Guglielmo and Tryon (2001). Applying this program, we divided the skills into three main groups; personal skills (self-awareness, self-assertion, and anger management), interpersonal skills (effective relationship, listening, making friends, and empathy), and environment-related skills (cooperation and responsibility). It should be noted that before beginning the training program, a meeting was held with the aim of making students familiar with the concepts of social skills as well as the purpose and the necessity of the program.

At the beginning of each session, applying brain storming method, the researcher asked students some questions and makes them familiar with the subject. Then, we thought students how to use the specific social skill of that session. After that, it was the students’ turn to practice using that skill. In order to practice more, at the end of each session, students were given some extra assignments. They had to do the assignments and report its result in the next session.

1.2. Instrument

Arnold.H.Buss and Mark Perry’s aggression questionnaire. Aggression questionnaire that was prepared by Arnold.H.Buss (1992) has been extensively used by the researchers. The questionnaire was derived from a repertoire of 52 questions and most of its questions were selected from hostility questionnaire through factor analysis method. This questionnaire includes 29 items in 5-Likert scale and has 4 sub-scales as: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility.

In order to verify the reliability of the questionnaire, Choronbach’s alpha coefficients were 0.89 and for each sub-scale were 0.85, 0.72, 0.83 and 0.77 respectively. In the other hand, scores of the subscales showed a significant correlation, therefore the fact that the relation among physical, verbal, and hostility sub-scales depends on their correlation with the anger, proves the formal validity of the questionnaire. Moreover, scores obtain from the four aggression sub-scale revealed a correlation with competition and decisiveness, and being impulsive. The correlation between this questionnaire and the observation of aggression, shyness, and sociability by peers is an evidence for construct validity. The questionnaire was scored from 1 to 5 based on Likert’s scale.
3. Results

Descriptive statistics and Independent-sample t-test were applied in order to analyze data, and the following results were gained:

Table 2. Mean scores and standard deviations for experimental and control groups at pre-test and post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th></th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experimental</td>
<td>94.85</td>
<td>8.72</td>
<td>69.70</td>
<td>7.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control</td>
<td>101.30</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>96.30</td>
<td>6.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To verify the hypothesis, the differentiation between pre-test and post-test scores was calculated. In addition Independent-sample t-test was carried out to compare the means of the control and experimental groups. The results revealed that, considering t-value (t=14.49) and df =38 with the significant level of P=0.0001, there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Therefore, it can be concluded that social skill training reduced students' aggression in experimental groups.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of social skill training on reduction of aggression of mentally retarded students. Results of the study showed that social skill training reduced the aggression in the experimental group in comparison to the control group. This study confirms findings of other research carried out in many countries. Findings of different studies indicate that social skill training can reduce social anxiety, delinquency common depression, anger, social disorder, maladjustment, negative behavior toward peers, and many other emotional and behavioral problems (Coie , Terry, Lenox et al, 1998). For example, Doffenbacher et al., (1987) found out that social skill training positively affected students' behavior including reducing anger and its negative consequences, controlling excitement and feeling relieved. Result of this study are consistent with Ilknur and Bulbin ,2007;Matson and Boisjoli ,2008; Singh et al., 2002; O’Reilly et al., 2003; Gundersen et al., 2006; and Morgan et al., 1994. Morgan et al., (1994) who showed that social skills provide the opportunity for initiating continuing positive mutual relationship with others. Nangle et al (2002) also mentions that social skills training is based on assumption that negative behaviors including aggression are often the result of a deficit in the skills needed for socially competent interaction with peers. Accurate social perception enables children recognize when a social problem is present and when and how an adjustment to one’s social behavior is required in order to produce a successful social outcome (Spence, Donovan, Brechman, 1999).

In general, according to the findings of this study and many other similar ones prove the importance and the role of the social skills in having desirable relation with peers, parents, teachers and the society on the whole. Lacks of social skills in mentally retarded students indicate the necessity of including these skills in rehabilitation and training programs. These students often have problem in making friends, additionally, their inability in reasoning brings about problems in their social perception and most of the time this inability manifests itself in their social relations and causes behavioral disorders. Therefore, teaching social skills, methods of making relation with friends, parents, and teachers and ways of controlling anger and aggression to the mentally retarded students making aware of these students' problems provide healthy condition for their growth.
References


