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Teaching problem-solving for parents: effects on children's misbehavior

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Abstract

The ability to solve problems is one of the crucial skills in our life. Along with brisk changes in new societies, social demands and standards have been changed, and human being, now is facing new and more complicated challenges. Resolving many of these new problems require a higher level of thinking abilities. Since many individuals possess potential ability to solve problems, but they are not able to apply such skills to their daily life activities, teaching problem solving skills seem indispensable. The main objective of the present study is to assess the efficacy of teaching problem-solving skills in the form of workshops. Each workshop consists of 10 sessions, two hours each, in which experienced mediators will present lesson plans to parents. In each lesson plan, a difficult situation will be presented to parents and they have to seek a solution for it. In this study, 255 individuals (216 female and 39 Male) participated in 12 workshops. 176 pairs of questionnaires (pre and post-test) were gathered and analyzed and the rest were omitted due to missing pre or post testing results. The present research is a semi-empirical with pre and post-testing method without control group. The efficiency of these workshops was assessed by using two custom-made questionnaires, before and after the workshop sessions. Findings show that teaching problem solving skills was especially effective for female participants and the adjustment of their children's behaviour. At the end, the application of the present outcomes, limitation of the study, and suggestions for further research are presented.

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1. Introduction:

Problem-solving skill is one of the crucial skills of life. Today, in developing countries, teaching problem solving strategies is part of the educational curriculum in school. Learning Problem-solving methods could improve overall performance of students. In today's world, where human knowledge will almost double every 5/5 years, the higher order of thinking skills are needed to increase our comprehension. Taking advantage of higher order of thinking requires usage of knowledge in different domains, critical analysis skills and problem-solving skills [1].

Problem solving approach has recently become an interesting subject for researchers and scholars. Every individual will face various difficulties and problems in life, and learning proper ways to resolve these problems is important. Some individuals are not even able to resolve their simple daily problems and every time they have to solve a problem or make a decision, they will panic and get frustrated. In contrast, other individuals perceive

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challenges as the stepping-stone to reach a deeper level of self-conscious and an opportunity to work on their weaknesses. The key to their success can be contributed to the fact that they are using a systematic (step-by-step) method to make a decision. Every challenging situation naturally creates stress in the person, and as long as the individual has not resolved the problem, the stress level will increase and consequently negative emotions will build up inside.

One of the parents' responsibilities is to teach proper methods to identify and solve different problems to their children. Based on problem solving approach, parents try to help children to ponder upon their challenges, seek various resolutions and choose the best one. In addition, children will learn how to approach their problems and their failures without creating a stressful situation [2].

A body of research has shown that parent-oriented interventional programs could reduce many problems including aggressiveness in children. Some children, by showing aggressive / antisocial behaviors try to manipulate others and get their way. Studies show that most of these children have a convincing power over their own families and can impose their ideas to their family members [3]. Many of parents of aggressive children surrender to their children but at the same time feel inept [4]. The process of socialization in such children develops very slowly. This tardiness could increase the risk of future serious maladjustments such as juvenile delinquency, criminality in adulthood, substance abuse, and family and professional problems [5, 6, 7].

Parent management Training (PMT) is one of the approaches that could reduce behavioural problems such as aggressiveness in children. PMT is a therapeutic approach, in which parents will learn useful skills to manage difficult behaviours [8]. The style, usage, and the content of PMT programs, based on the target population, would be different but the objective remains the same, which is enhancing parental control [7, 8].

PMT is the first step for teaching behaviour modification approaches to parents. Therapists use this method to rehabilitate the social environment of children [9, 10, 11]. Studies done on PMT prove its long-term effects on reducing behavioural problems in children [12].

Considering the importance of parenting and its crucial role in the mental health of families, and eventually the mental health of the society, offering comprehensive programs for educating families in the form of workshops, seem indispensable. Hence, the main objective of the present research is to study outcomes of implemented workshops entitled "raising a thinking child".

2. Methodology

The present study is a semi-experimental one with pre and post-testing without control group. Sample included a total of 255 (216 Female and 39 Male). Subjects were parents of students attending private schools in Tehran. This group volunteered to participate in these workshops after the announcement of schools' authorities. Workshop facilitators explained the program of Raising a Thinking Child in one session, and at the end, volunteering parents were enrolled in the program. Overall, 216 mothers enrolled in 10 workshops and 39 fathers in two other workshops. All fathers in our sample, compared to 64 mothers (%30), were employed. 139 of these mothers (%64) and 20 fathers (%51) had some higher education. Mean for mothers age was 34.5 and for fathers 39.5.

Based on the research plan, data was gathered in two steps, before and after the training. Two different custom-made questionnaires were prepared, Educational Strategies for Parents (ESP), and Behavioural Problems of Children (BPC). These questionnaires were completed before the workshop. The same questionnaires were given to the participants in the last session of the workshop as well. It is necessary to mention that some of the parents missed some sessions, and therefore, their questionnaires were not considered in the final analysis. Overall, 176 questionnaires taken from the participants were analyzed.

2.1. Instruments

Two different custom-made questionnaires were used to evaluate the workshops. The first questionnaire-Educational Strategies for Parents (ESP), made upon lesson plans of the workbook, and have 15 multiple choice

questions, each with 4 answers. Each question assesses parents’ approach toward difficult behaviour of their children.

Questionnaire for Behavioural Problems of Children has (BPC) 18 items in Lickret type scale, which evaluates children’s behaviour at home. In this questionnaire, parents should rate their children’s behaviour on the 5-degree scale of "Always" to "Never". For example, in response to the item” my child put his/her belongings in the allocated place”, parents have the option of “Always”,” Most of the time”, “Sometimes”, “Seldom”, and “Never” to choose.

The reliability of the Educational Strategies for Parents based on Chronbach Alpha method was between 0.80 and 0.81; and for Behavioural Problems of Children from 0.85 to 0.91.

2.2. “Raising a Thinking Child” Program

Raising a Thinking Child [13] program with the specially designed workbook was used to teach problem solving skills to parents. This program was designed for children aging from 4 to 7–years-old. In the workbook, different lesson plans are presented invoke thinking process in children. Participating parents, based on the training received, will help their children to solve their everyday problems. This program is also useful for children with a wide range of IQ, in various cultures and different ethnicity groups.

The main objective of the workshop is to encourage parents to use problem solving method. In this method, parents will use different tasks to enhance their children’s skills for problem solving, to explore possible options, and to choose the best solution for their problems. As mentioned before, enhancing children’s ability to think properly is another objective of these workshops. To fulfil this goal, different lesson plans were designed to be done at home by the parents. Each lesson plan, utilizing different pictures, was designed to teach at least one skill to children. These plans help children to think properly when facing problems, enabling them to choose the best solution.

Workshops were presented in 9 sessions of 1 hour and minutes each. The beginning of each session, some time was allocated for parents to share their success stories or questions that they may encounter during exercises of the workbook. Facilitator’s responsibility was to guide the participants to achieve a better evaluation of their work. For the same purpose, in the workbook, a ladder logo was used to show the position of parents in achieving their goals. Step, in this ladder were divided into four sections: The first step is the problem solving skill, the second one is any suggestion along with explanation, the third one represents any suggestion without explanation, and the last one is for the disciplining the child and punishment. In each lesson plan, parents find themselves in a hypothetical difficult situation in which they have to explain their approaches toward their children; and at the end, they have to find their positions on the ladder. In this system, parents are able to verify their parenting styles and attempt to move toward the first step, which is the problem solving approach.

3. Result

As one may notice, the mean of scores in post-testing in both groups (male and Female), and in both questionnaires has increased.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of participants’ scores in pre and post tests with gender differentiation

Group	ESP				BPC			
	Pre-test		Post-test		Pre-test		Post-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Female	38.53	8.27	53.49	5.68	42.14	9.64	45.3	6.81
Male	39.68	9.78	50.73	9.43	42.86	5.11	43.86	10.35
Total	38.68	8.42	53.12	6.29	42.24	9.17	45.19	7.36

ESP: Educational Strategies for Parents
 BPC: Behavioural Problems for children

The results of dependent t-test in table 2 showed that the difference between pre-testing and post-testing of the in Educational Strategies for Parents in both groups (male and female) was significant. (P<0/01).

Table 2. Comparing means for pre-test and post-test scores on ESP with gender differentiation

Groups	Mean dif.	SD	SE	Limit		T	Df	Sig
				High	Low			
Female	-14.95	8.15	0.65	-13.06	-16.25	-23.76	153	0.00
Male	-11.05	13.23	2.82	-5.18	-16.91	-3.91	21	0.00

Table 3. Comparison of means for pre test & post test scores on BPC with gender differentiation

Groups	Mean dif.	SD	SE	Limit		T	Df	Sig
				High	Low			
Female	-3.23	10.65	0.85	-1.53	-4.92	-23.76	315	0.00
Male	-1	10.94	2.33	3.85	-5.85	-0.43	21	0.67

As one may notice in table number 1, participating in the “Raising a Thinking Child” workshops significantly enhanced parenting strategies and problem solving skills in both groups of participants, mothers as well as fathers. Results presented in table number 2, show that participation of parents in the workshops, has positive affects on children’s behaviour, i.e. decreasing their maladjusted behaviours. This difference in the fathers’ group and overall is statistically significant.

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