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## **Effectiveness of problem-solving skills training in the attributional style and socialization of divorced women**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research was a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study design with a nonequivalent control group, which was conducted with the aim of investigating the effectiveness of problem-solving skills training in the attributional style and socialization of divorced women in Kashmar. The research sample consisted of 30 divorced women (18 in the control group and 12 in the experimental group) who were selected voluntarily and through available sampling method. The research tool included Peterson and Seligman Attributional Style Questionnaire and Social Skills Scale of Life Skills Questionnaire. After selecting and randomly dividing the experimental and control groups, a pretest was initially administered for both groups and then, the pilot intervention (problem-solving skills training) was conducted during 8 sessions of 90 minutes for the experimental group. After the completion of the training program, both groups took a posttest. For data analysis, analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used. The results obtained from data analysis demonstrated that problem-solving skills training leads to improved attributional style and enhanced socialization among divorced women of the experimental group compared to the control group.*

**Keywords:** Problem-solving skills, attributional style, socialization

### **INTRODUCTION**

Divorce phenomenon is considered as an important social damage in different societies and following this phenomenon, individuals are faced with enormous psychological pressure after separation from the spouse. Problems after divorce, depending on social, familial and cultural conditions and even gender, are different. In the meantime, issues of divorced women are more various than men. Undoubtedly, divorced women who are faced with different social and cultural constraints encounter greater difficulties and experience mental pressure [1]. In the face of their problems, these women have a lot of concerns and their work and social and psychological pressures make them faced with multiple challenges[2].

According to the studies conducted, it has been found that the attributional style of divorced women is unstable. Tadayyon (2012) in a study showed that there is a difference between divorced and ordinary women in terms of internal-external, stable-unstable and global-specific attributions and divorced women show more internal, stable and global attributional style and less external, unstable and specific attributional style in a failure situation and show less internal, stable and global attributional style and more external, unstable and specific attributional style in a success situation[3]. Individuals' response to situations is affected by their perceptions and cognitive assessment of those situations. Styles or methods of explaining people and stressful events can have a crucial role in mental health[4]. Here, the following questions are raised: How are the behaviors and incentives of others understood and

changed? How do people's beliefs and attitudes form? Why do people behave in this way? To answer these questions, we should use the attribution process and attribute the individuals' behavior to a combination of causes. People always put the blame of their failure on others or different external factors and instead of considering that failure as the result of their own actions and assuming responsibility for it, they attempt to provide an acceptable justification for their failure and thereby avoid the creation of a negative self-image in the minds of others[5].

The purpose of attribution theory from the perspective of its founders is to examine how to provide causal explanations by people and how to answer the questions that begin with "why" by people. Attribution theory states the processes of explaining events and emotional and behavioral consequences of these explanations[6]. Seligman is among the pioneers who applied attribution theory in mental health and raises two issues regarding the attributional style: First, pessimistic attributional style, i.e. attribution of negative events to internal factors, which is followed by depression; and second, optimistic attributional style which means the attribution of positive events to internal factors. This attributional style prepares the ground for happiness (Peterson, 1996). In other words, attribution of negative events to internal, stable and global causes and attribution of positive events to external, unstable and specific factors (i.e. maladaptive or pessimistic attributions) are accompanied by psychological and physical problems [7]. On the other hand, another problem of divorced women in society with regard to social and cognitive challenges is socialization. Socialization and social interactions require knowledge and communication skills. Socialization affects practical abilities and personal and social life and originates from the analysis of social needs and demands and daily and ordinary requirements in social life[8].

Bayani (2008) came to the conclusion that problem-focused coping style has a significant positive relationship with social adjustment of divorced women and emotion-focused and avoidant coping styles have a significant negative relationship with social adjustment of divorced women [9].

Sadeqi (2005) revealed that there is a significant negative relationship between social and psychological stress with social adjustment and women with more mental pressure caused by life stresses less applied problem-focused coping style and had weaker social adjustment[10]. Downey et al. (2012) argued that problem-focused coping style has a significant relationship with social adjustment and problem-focused coping style is able to predict a high level of social adjustment [11].

Socialization is considered among life skills because it makes an impact on mental and social capabilities and enables people to effectively face life demands and struggles, have independent and successful performance, be in communication with the society in some way and not to be unsociable and isolated [12].

But it should be said that training problem-solving skills in relation to issues and difficulties of life and identifying them in divorced women can have a positive effect on the cognitive constructs of these individuals. Wiliyamz (2014) carried out a study and demonstrated that problem-solving training is effective in the problems of divorced women and leads to increased social adjustment. Dien et al. (2013) reported that educational measures in the field of life skills are highly effective in the creation of individuals' social adjustment. Ley (2012) suggested that problem-solving skills training reduces internal, stable and global attributional style and increases external, unstable and specific attributional style in failure situations and increases internal, stable and global attributional style and reduces external, unstable and specific attributional style in success situations. Janson (2012) in a study revealed that life skills training has a decisive role in increasing divorced women's adaptability to the environment. Cot (2010; cited in Saqqazadeh, 2010)[13] stated that problem-solving training to divorced women causes an increase in their personal and social adjustment. Shar (2010) performed a study and observed that problem-solving methods improve the attributional style of divorced women. In a research, White (2000) stated that if effective coping skills are taught, social adjustment is enhanced. Soudani et al. (2012) conducted a study on a sample of 44 women and demonstrated that problem-solving skills training increases individual and social adjustment of divorced women[14].

Problem-solving skill is one of the most effective ways to cope with problems and means a regular and logical thought process which helps the individuals search for multiple solutions when faced with problems and then choose the best solution. Training this skill is used in various mental health promotion programs including increased compatibility, self-efficacy belief, improved social relationships and enhanced quality of life [14]. The ability to solve the aforementioned problems is among the important and useful skills which under the title of life skills have a decisive role in providing the mental health and success of individuals and consequently effective and healthy life [14].

Problem-focused skill training can be an important tool to deal with many problems. Among the dimensions that can be affected in divorced women by problem-solving skill training, are attributional styles and socialization of these individuals. Thus, it can be stated that since divorced women are faced with numerous mental, social and emotional

problems and damages and sum of these pressures can create stress in different aspects, it is necessary to prepare the ground for enhancing internal positive attributions and reducing external positive and negative attributions of divorced women in the face of life challenges and also strengthening their socialization through problem-focused training to solve the difficulties in the mentioned society. Therefore, the question in the present study is whether problem-solving skills training influences the attributional style and socialization of divorced women? Accordingly, the following hypotheses arise:

First hypothesis: Problem-solving skills training is effective in the attributional style of divorced women.

Second hypothesis: Problem-solving skills training is effective in the socialization of divorced women.

### **Research methodology**

In this research, a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study design with a nonequivalent control group has been applied. Because the present study sought to examine the change caused by the implementation of problem-solving skills training and its effect on the attributional style and socialization of divorced women, this design was used. The target population comprised all divorced women who referred to Welfare Organization in Kashmar in the first quarter of 2014. The research sample included 30 divorced women who were selected voluntarily and through available sampling method from among the women who referred to the loan employment and prevention unit of Welfare Organization in May and June. Then, of the research sample, 18 individuals were randomly assigned to the control group and 12 to the experimental group.

### **Data collection tools**

**Attributional Style Questionnaire:** This questionnaire is a self-assessment tool and was first developed by Peterson and Seligman (1984) to measure the attributions of individuals for uncontrollable events. Attributional Style Questionnaire consists of twelve hypothetical situations (six good events and six bad events). For each event, four questions have been raised. The first question which is about the most important cause of this event is crucial though it is not applied in scoring so that the subject responds to the next three questions based on the following cases. These cases include three dimensions: internal/external, stable/unstable and global/specific. Scores can be considered for each of the three dimensions. EslamiShahrBabaki (2007) reported the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha method as follows: For internal failure situation= 0.75, stable failure= 0.43, global failure= 0.73, internal success situation= 0.74, stable success= 0.77 and global success= 0.76. Additionally, he estimated the questionnaire validity to be between 0.58 and 0.66 through correlating with Anderson and Arnoult Attributional Style Questionnaire (1985). In the present study, the reliability coefficient of Attributional Style Questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha method as follows: For internal and external failure situation= 0.79 and 0.78, stable and unstable failure= 0.82 and 0.81, global and specific failure= 0.77 and 0.78, internal and external success situation= 0.78 and 0.75, stable and unstable success= 0.80 and 0.81 and global and specific success= 0.81 and 0.80.

**Socialization Questionnaire:** To measure socialization in this study, Social Skills Scale of Life Skills Questionnaire was employed. This questionnaire comprises 19 subscales whose social skills consist of communication skills and interpersonal relations. It includes 23 questions which are scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very strong) [15]. In order to evaluate the questionnaire validity, after developing the questions, 10 experts were used to assess its internal and external validity and its face and content validity was approved. The reliability coefficients of the questionnaire on social skills in the studies by Qiyasi (2001) and Yousefi (2008) have been reported to be respectively 0.88 and 0.83 using Cronbach's alpha [15]. In the present study, the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire on social skills was obtained to be 0.82. This coefficient was 0.80 for interpersonal relations and 0.84 for socialization.

### **Problem-solving skill training sessions**

Training sessions based on Klinke practical guidance on life skills were held during 8 sessions of 90 minutes for divorced women, which include the following:

First session: Implementation of the pretest, rudiments of problem-solving including the identification of problem-solving skill, problem-solving pathology, identification of problem-solving levels and use of problem-solving skills.

Second session: Problem-solving skill training including problem-solving steps, different solutions, identification of factors, symptoms and effects of stress and providing solutions and assessment of the solution.

Third session: Identification of problem-solving dimensions, how to identify the ability for the problem-solving process, development of problem-solving, defense mechanisms and coping and problem-solving skills.

Fourth session: The ability to solve problems in social life including the ability for problem-solving and stress relief, problem-solving and coping strategies and planning for problem-solving.

Fifth session: Factors affecting problem-solving including the factors influencing the adoption of problem-solving styles and components of ten life skills to solve problems.

Sixth session: Characteristics of individuals in problem-solving including the strategies for fostering the problem-solving process, rational decision-making and problem-solving methods and problem-solving goals to increase the quality of life in society.

Seventh session: Practical problem-solving training including training problem-solving skills and happiness formula, acceptance skills, problem-solving method and analysis of problems and problem-solving and social adjustment.

Eighth session: Summing up, asking for opinions and providing final recommendations, implementation of the posttest.

### Research findings

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of pretest scores of the questionnaires on attributional style and socialization of groups**

Variable	Step	Statistical indicator	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
		Group			
Internal style (failure)	Pretest	Experimental	6.26	1.22	12
		Control	6.27	0.96	18
External style (failure)	Pretest	Experimental	1.93	0.59	12
		Control	2.33	0.60	18
Stable style (failure)	Pretest	Experimental	7.40	0.50	12
		Control	6.93	0.70	18
Unstable style (failure)	Pretest	Experimental	2.33	0.48	12
		Control	2.46	0.51	18
Global style (failure)	Pretest	Experimental	6.66	0.72	12
		Control	6.20	0.67	18
Specific style (failure)	Pretest	Experimental	6.46	0.83	12
		Control	4.47	0.74	18
Internal style (success)	Pretest	Experimental	1.66	0.48	12
		Control	2.06	0.45	18
External style (success)	Pretest	Experimental	7	0.65	12
		Control	6.06	0.79	18
Stable style (success)	Pretest	Experimental	2.26	0.59	12
		Control	2.33	0.48	18
Unstable style (success)	Pretest	Experimental	2.53	0.63	12
		Control	7.13	0.70	18
Global style (success)	Pretest	Experimental	2.53	0.51	12
		Control	2.33	0.48	18
Specific style (success)	Pretest	Experimental	6.73	0.59	12
		Control	7.26	0.70	18
Communication skills	Pretest	Experimental	20.33	1.58	12
		Control	20.60	1.18	18
Interpersonal skills	Pretest	Experimental	20.33	1.98	12
		Control	20.32	1.90	18
Socialization	Pretest	Experimental	41.60	2.79	12
		Control	41.93	2.08	18

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of posttest scores of the questionnaires on attributional style and socialization of groups**

Variable	Step	Statistical indicator	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
		Group			
Internal style (failure)	Posttest	Experimental	1.46	0.51	12
		Control	6.26	0.96	18
External style (failure)	Posttest	Experimental	6.80	0.67	12
		Control	2.33	0.61	18
Stable style (failure)	Posttest	Experimental	2.13	0.63	12
		Control	6.40	0.82	18
Unstable style (failure)	Posttest	Experimental	6.86	0.74	12
		Control	2.20	0.56	18
Global style (failure)	Posttest	Experimental	1.93	0.45	12
		Control	6.66	0.72	18
Specific style (failure)	Posttest	Experimental	1.93	0.70	12
		Control	6.46	0.63	18
Internal style (success)	Posttest	Experimental	7.33	0.61	12
		Control	2.13	0.35	18
External style (success)	Posttest	Experimental	1.86	0.51	12
		Control	6.20	0.94	18
Stable style (success)	Posttest	Experimental	7.06	0.79	12
		Control	2.53	0.51	18
Unstable style (success)	Posttest	Experimental	2.06	0.45	12
		Control	7.06	0.70	18
Global style (success)	Posttest	Experimental	7.66	0.72	12
		Control	2.40	0.50	18
Specific style (success)	Posttest	Experimental	1.66	0.48	12
		Control	7.20	0.86	18
Communication skills	Posttest	Experimental	33.93	1.86	12
		Control	20.13	1.45	18
Interpersonal skills	Posttest	Experimental	35.06	1.38	12
		Control	20.66	1.39	18
Socialization	Posttest	Experimental	69	2.67	12
		Control	40.80	2.07	18

**Table 3: Results of multivariate analysis of covariance on the mean posttest scores of attributional style and socialization of groups**

Test name	Value	Hypothesis DF	Error DF	F	P	Effect size	Statistical power
Pillai's trace test	0.99	13	1	600.70	0.01	0.96	1
Wilks Lambda test	0.001	13	1	600.70	0.01	0.96	1
Hotelling's trace test	8.71	13	1	600.70	0.01	0.96	1
Roy's largest root test	8.71	13	1	600.70	0.01	0.96	1

As shown in Table 3, by controlling the pretest, the significance levels of all tests indicate that there is a significant difference between divorced women in the experimental and control groups in terms of at least one of the dependent variables (attributional style and socialization) ( $F= 600.70, P< 0.01$ ). To understand in terms of which variable a difference exists between the two groups, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted in the context of MANCOVA, whose results have been provided in Table 4-10. The effect size or difference is equal to 0.96. In other words, 96% of individual differences in the posttest scores of attributional style and socialization of divorced women are related to the impact of problem-focused training.

**Table 4: Results of the one-way ANCOVA in the context of MANCOVA on the mean scores of attributional style and socialization of groups**

Variable	Sum of squares	DF	Mean Square	F	P	Effect size	Statistical power
Internal style (failure)	62.62	1	62.62	87.74	0.001	0.87	1
Internal style (success)	75.32	1	75.32	351.30	0.001	0.96	1
External style (failure)	45.85	1	45.85	99.46	0.001	0.88	1
External style (success)	61.90	1	61.90	243.30	0.001	0.94	1
Stable style (failure)	60.40	1	60.40	82.71	0.001	0.86	1
Stable style (success)	57.78	1	57.78	133.95	0.001	0.91	1
Unstable style (failure)	35.65	1	35.65	119.37	0.001	0.90	1
Unstable style (success)	59.03	1	59.03	128.74	0.001	0.90	1
Global style (failure)	60.03	1	60.03	97.81	0.001	0.88	1
Global style (success)	69.15	1	69.15	135.96	0.001	0.91	1
Specific style (failure)	39.50	1	39.50	179.60	0.001	0.93	1
Specific style (success)	64.80	1	64.80	135.65	0.001	0.91	1
Communication skills	476.46	1	476.46	143.99	0.001	0.91	1
Interpersonal skill	494.50	1	494.50	172.59	0.001	0.93	1
Socialization	1941.76	1	1941.76	2560.06	0.001	0.95	1

As has been provided in Table 4, by controlling the pretest, there is a significant difference between divorced women in the experimental and control groups in terms of internal style (failure) ( $F=87.74$ ), internal style (success) ( $F=351.30$ ), external style (failure) ( $F=99.46$ ), external style (success) ( $F=243.30$ ), stable style (failure) ( $F=82.71$ ), stable style (success) ( $F=133.95$ ), unstable style (failure) ( $F=119.37$ ), unstable style (success) ( $F=133.95$ ), global style (failure) ( $F=97.81$ ), global style (success) ( $F=135.96$ ), specific style (failure) ( $F=179.60$ ) and specific style (success) ( $F=139.65$ ). The amount of differences suggests that high percentages of individual differences in the posttest scores of the attributional style are related to the effect of problem-focused training. Hence, the first research hypothesis is confirmed. That is, by controlling the pretest, a significant difference exists between divorced women in the experimental and control groups in terms of communication skills ( $F=143.99$ ), interpersonal communication skills ( $F=172.59$ ) and socialization ( $F=260.06$ ). In other words, with regard to the mean of communication, interpersonal and socialization skills of divorced women in the experimental group compared to the control group, problem-focused training has increased these skills in divorced women of the experimental group.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As stated in previous sections of the research, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of problem-solving skills training in the attributional style and socialization of divorced women. Given the results of Table 4, it was found that with regard to the mean of attributional style of divorced women in the experimental group relative to the mean of the control group, problem-focused training leads to reduced internal, stable and global styles and increased external, unstable and specific styles in failure situations and enhanced internal, stable and global styles and decreased external, unstable and specific styles in success situations of the experimental group. The result of this hypothesis is consistent with the findings of the following studies: the research conducted by Saqqazadeh (2010) who revealed that life skills training leads to reduced internal, stable and global attributional styles and increased external, unstable and specific attributional styles in failure situations and increased internal, stable and global attributional styles and decreased external, unstable and specific attributional styles in success situations; the research performed by Li (2012) who demonstrated that problem-solving skills training reduces internal, stable and global attributional styles and enhances external, unstable and specific attributional styles in failure situations and also increases internal, stable and global attributional styles and reduces external, unstable and specific attributional styles in success situations; the research carried out by Shar (2010) who argued that problem-solving methods improve the attributional style of divorced women [14].

In explaining this research hypothesis, it should be mentioned that according to Weiner's theory (1986), behavioral outcomes of attribution can have motivational and affective consequences with regard to the conditions. It should be reported that problem-focused training is a useful solution for divorced women to cope with various problems since it caused divorced women to behaviorally and cognitively learn potentially effective responses to problematic situations and use their effective cognitive skills to cope with problematic interpersonal situations and experience less intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. Further, this skill made divorced women have a more realistic assessment of situations and attribute pleasant events to internal factors and perceive unpleasant events as the result of external causes. Moreover, this training caused them to attribute their ability to deal with problems to the factors of their abilities and attribute negative events to temporary or short-term factors. Owing to this training, divorced women also learned to less attribute their problems to general failure in different situations and circumstances and attribute their failure to a limited and specific case.

Problem-solving approach training created a sense of struggle in divorced women to change the internal and external conditions (i.e. determination and strong and invincible spirit in the face of disasters and difficulties) through changing the attribution style and made them believe that they are in control of their conditions and have the ability to control adverse social and individual events. Besides, this skill caused the divorced women to further trust their will power to achieve their goal and success. Also, these women learned to effectively deal with problems and maintain and even promote their feeling about health status and satisfaction based on individual desires and values. With the help of this approach, we are able to create the goals and provide efforts through which individuals can identify their own attitudes and needs and learn skills and appropriate coping responses to life problems and difficulties and ultimately feel that they are in control of their life.

In this way, individuals engage in comparing the living conditions of the past with recent events with all their positive and negative aspects and perceive their life status instead of considering others' reports and try to create balance in satisfying the biological and human needs and integration in social situations and arenas. Accordingly, due to the aforesaid features particularly in addicted people who are grappling with emotional, cognitive and social problems, problem-solving skills training can prepare the ground for increased quality of life.

Thus, it can be said that problem-focused training in divorced women caused them to maintain and promote their personal and social competence despite being exposed to severe tensions and made them feel that they can control the situation. Additionally, this training led to their reduced internal, stable and global attributions and increased external, unstable and specific attributions in unpleasant situations and also increased internal, stable and global attributions and decreased external, unstable and specific attributions in pleasant situations. As a result, it can be stated that problem-focused training is effective in improving the attributional style of divorced women.

Further, considering the results of Table 4, it can be mentioned that by controlling the pretest, a significant difference exists between divorced women in the experimental and control groups in terms of communication skills, interpersonal communication skills and socialization. In other words, with regard to the mean of communication, interpersonal and socialization skills of divorced women in the experimental group compared to the mean of the control group, problem-focused training enhanced the mentioned skills in divorced women of the experimental group. The result of this research is congruent with the following studies: the research by Soudani et al. (2012) who showed that problem-solving skills training increases the social adjustment of divorced women[14]; the research by Safaei (2009) who revealed that life skills training improves the socialization of divorced women; the research by Williams (2014) who demonstrated that problem-focused training in divorced women leads to increased social adjustment; Dean et al. (2013) who observed that educational measures regarding life skills have a great impact on creating social adjustment[16].

In explaining the research findings, it can be stated that divorced women perceive a great psychological burden due to encountering socio-psychological and economic challenges and their socialization is reduced because of their family environment and life stresses. But in this study, it was determined that problem-solving skill training enhances the socialization of these women. Also, it can be argued that since this skill empowered the women in mental dimensions and improved their mental health and given that in problem-focused training, a set of effective skills to assess, cope with and solve problems was emphasized, these women recognized the stress when faced with different dimensions of problems in socialization and individual life.

In this training, divorced women learned to promote their cognitions, feelings and reactions towards the emotional state of the community and communication with society and increase their tolerance and flexibility in the face of social challenges due to their conditions while looking at the clear side of issues and making realistic and positive assessments. Problem-focused training in divorced women changed the consequences of not controlling the stress in relation to society. It also changed the focus of these women on their mind and through establishing peace for people in individual and social situations, it caused that these women, with regard to their conditions, have high attitudes, feelings and awareness towards themselves and show positive perceptions of themselves and society.

In problem-solving skills training sessions, the members were helped to correct false beliefs and inappropriate ways to deal with stresses through reinforcement and feedback and providing appropriate practices. With the aid of this skill, more social interest was formed within these women, which had a considerable impact on the rate of communication and interpersonal skills and also their adjustment and increased social interactions, acceptance and catharsis in the family community and social life outside the family environment and caused the divorced women to find more ability to have belonging to different groups.

Finally, it can be mentioned that problem-solving skills training can play a crucial role in divorced women's approach to their goals, duties and challenges. Through this skill, these women obtained greater socialization in solving problems and applying their skills and showed more tendency towards challenging business and social issues because they learned to control mental pressures and focus on problems. Therefore, it can be said that problem-solving skill training caused an increase in communication, interpersonal and socialization skills of divorced women.

One of the research limitations was that the implementation of training sessions was cancelled two times due to the personal problems of some of the divorced women. Thus, an interval occurred between sessions 5 to 8, which caused the sessions to be held in approximately two months. In the end, it is recommended that organizations in charge, in collaboration with other organizations including visual media and through providing visual facilities, prepare a package and educational films from the training sessions and attempt to reduce the problems of divorced women through making CDs and educational packages available to people. Further, it is suggested that counseling and treatment centers and family court have more communications and cooperation to promote and develop the effectiveness of problem-solving skill training in different aspects of divorced women's life.

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