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## Efficacy of Teaching New Parenting Strategies based on Problem Solving Approach

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### Abstract

The objective of the present study is to evaluate the workshops for teaching new parenting styles based on problem solving approach. One of the advantages of these workshops is the fact that parents along with their children participate in various activities and are encouraged to ponder upon issues. Each session consists of a lesson plan presenting parents with a challenging situation and they have to seek a proper solution. In this study, 45 parents (33 Mothers and 12 fathers) were trained. Each workshop comprised of 9 sessions of one hour and 45 minutes each. The present study is a semi-empirical research with pre and post-testing without control group. The effectiveness of this study was measured by comparing the results of Robinson questionnaire on parenting and the custom-made questionnaire of behavioural problems for children, before and after the workshops. Results showed that these workshops were significantly effective on parenting styles, and insignificantly reduced children's behavioural problems. At the end, the application of such findings and suggestions for further research are discussed.

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### 1. Introduction

Developmental Psychologists were always interested in studying the effect of parenting on the development of social skills. One of the major subjects in this field is "Parenting Style" [1]. Parenting style is a complex process consisting of methods and special approaches which individually or altogether have an effect on the child's development. Indeed, the base of parenting is the hard work and efforts of parents to control and eventually enhance the process of socialization in their children [2]. Despite different approaches to parenting, it seems that parents still play a major role in such process.

Problem solving skill is one of the highest functions of the brain and its acquisition requires proper training. Despite the fact that human being is facing different problems in various domains, the essential remains the same. Problem solving is a cognitive process and consists of five steps. Using the first initials of each step, the name of IDEAL was chosen for this process [3]. These steps are as follow:

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1. Identifying the problem, 2. Defining the problem and comprehending the core of it, 3. Exploring various solutions 4. Acting based on the found solutions, 5. Looking back and evaluating the results.

Currently, many researchers show interest in subjects such as problem solving skills. Life in general is full of challenges but the key is to have the proper approach to these difficult moments. Some individuals are not even able to deal with their daily routine problems and as soon as they face any difficulties, they will panic and their anxiety level will rise. As for some others, the challenging moments, not only do not cause any anxiety but also make them to get in touch with the deeper level of their self-conscious. Every challenging situation for this group is considered a stepping-stone to identify their weaknesses and present an opportunity to seek some solutions for it. The key success for these individuals is the fact that they use a systematic method for dealing with the encountered problems.

The first group lacks such ability and therefore any challenging situations will create a high level of anxiety in them and as long as the problem lasts, the stress level would continue to increase.

One of parent's responsibilities is to teach necessary skills for identifying and solving problems to their children. In our current workshops, parents learn how to help children to think about encountered problems and seek various solutions without degrading their self-esteem. In addition, children will learn how to approach their problems, and possible failures will no longer cause any stress in them [4].

## 2. Methodology

Sample in this study comprised of 45 parents (33 women and 12 men) of students of some private schools in Tehran. This group volunteered to participate in these workshops after the announcement of school's authorities. Workshop facilitators explained the raising a program of thinking child in one session and at the end, those parents who expressed their willingness was enrolled in the program.

The present study is a semi-empirical with pre and post testing without control group. The effectiveness of teaching new parenting strategies has been studied as the main objective of this research. According to the study plan, data was gathered before and after the workshops. For this purpose, two questionnaires of Robinson et al., [5] and Behavioral Problems in Children (custom-made questionnaire) were distributed before the workshops. The same questionnaires were presented in the last session, after the end of the workshops too. At the end, data from these pairs of questionnaires were analyzed.

### 2.1. Instruments

**Parenting Styles and Dimension Questionnaire** [5]. This questionnaire has 32 items and cover three factors of Authoritative parenting (15 items), Authoritarian parenting (12 items), and Permissive parenting (5 items).

In this questionnaire, parent's choices as answers are: "Always", "Most of the time", "Sometimes", "Seldom", or "Never". Some of the items, because of the ambiguity or cultural differences, were omitted, and the remaining items (18) were used in the present study. According to the study done by Winsler, Madigan, & Aquilino (2005), the reliability coefficient for the authoritative factor for mothers is reported to be 0.82 and for fathers 0.88; for authoritarian factor for mothers 0.79 and for fathers 0.87 and for the permissive factor for mothers 0.84 and for fathers 0.73.

**Questionnaire for Behavioural Problems in Children:** This questionnaire has 18 items using Lickert scale, evaluating 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 expressing "my child put his/her belongings in the appropriate place (allocated place)"; parents have the options of "Always", "Most of the time", "Sometimes", "Seldom", and "Never" to choose. The option of "Always" will have a numeric value of 5, and for "Never" a value of 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficient estimates the reliability of this study to be 0/93, which is a very satisfying score.

### 2.2. Workshop for raising a "Thinking Child"

In the workshop for raising a thinking child [6], a workbook for teaching methods of problem solving was provided to parents. This program was designed for parents having children from four to seven-years-old. In this workbook, various exercises were formulated that could inspire thinking process in children. This program can be used for children with any range of IQ, and special needs, in various cultures and ethnic groups.

The main objective of this workshop is to encourage parents to use problem-solving strategies. In this method, parents use different tasks to enhance their children’s skill for problem solving, to explore possible options, and to choose the best solution for their problems. Lesson plans are also designed to be done at home with parents’ cooperation. Each lesson plan is designed to teach at least one skill to children, through different sets of pictures. These lesson plans help children to think properly when facing with problems.

Workshops were presented in nine sessions for one hour and 45 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 practice at home. In the workbook, a ladder logo was used to show the position of parents in achieving their goals. Steps in this ladder were divided into four sections: The first step is the problem solving skill, the second one is suggestions given by parents along with explanations, the third one represents suggestions without explanation, and the last one includes disciplining and punishment. In each lesson plan, parents find themselves in a hypothetical difficult situation in which they have to explain their approaches to 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**

In this section, first the descriptive findings, then the differential results are presented. Table 1 represents demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Levels of variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	33	73.3
	Male	12	26.7
Employment Status	employed	16	35.6
	Unemployed	29	64.4
Education	HS Diploma	24	53.3
	BS & higher	21	46.7
of Children	1-2	36	80
	3-4	9	20
Gender of Children	Girl	10	22.2
	Boy	35	77.8
Age of Children	4-6 Yrs	35	77.7
	7- 9 Yrs	10	22.3

The effectiveness of workshops was assessed with the dependent t-test, and through the comparison of different groups based on variables in table 1. The difference between the results of pre and post-test for variables such as gender, employment status, level of education, number of children, and children’s age in both questionnaires were compared. Results does not support a significant difference between men and woman, employed and unemployed parents, high school diploma holder and higher, parents with one child and those with more children regardless of their gender. However, it seems that the age of children has an effect on the success of these workshops. Findings show that these workshops were more effective for parents with younger children and there is a significant difference ( $P < 0/05$ ) in the function of parents with children at the age of 4, 5, and 6 with parents who have children of 7, 8, and 9 years-old. It is necessary to mention that this significant difference was only observed in parenting style and not in the questionnaire of behavioural problems.

Statistical analysis shows that there is a significant difference between the means of the pre and post test scores in all three factors of PSDQ. As one may conclude from table number 2, mean for post-testing compared to pre-testing, in the area of authoritative parenting increased but in permissive and authoritarian parenting diminished.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Standard Error of Measurement for PSDQ

factors	Mean	N	SD	SE
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Authoritative (pre-test)	35.07	45	3.19	0.47
Authoritative (post-test)	36.76	45	3.86	0.57
Authoritarian (Pre-test)	12.80	45	2.90	0.43
Authoritarian (post-test)	10.64	45	2.65	0.39
Permissive (pre-test)	8.18	45	1.91	0.28
Permissive (post-test)	7.27	45	2.17	0.32

Mean of scores for each factor was compared in the pre, and the post-testing utilizing dependent t-test procedure. The results show a significant difference in the means for all three factors (see table 3).

Table 3. Results of Dependent t-test for PSDB Pre & Post Test Scores

factors	Mean Difference	SD	SE	Confidence interval		t	df	sig
				Low	High			
Authoritative	-1.68	3.47	0.51	-2.72	-0.65	-3.29	44	0.002
Authoritarian	2.15	2.58	0.38	1.37	2.93	5.59	44	0.000
Neglectful	0.91	2.13	0.31	0.27	1.55	2.86	44	0.006

One can conclude that teaching new parenting strategies enhanced behaviours related to authoritative parenting style and lessen authoritarian and permissive styles. Finally, comparison of pre and post testing results for behavioural problems in children did not show any significant difference ( $P > 0/05$ ).

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