

**The Necessity for Psychosocial and Social Perspective in Education:
A Quantitative Study of Life Skills among the Young Iranian Married
Clients**

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Abstract

The present study investigated the relationship between demographic characteristics and marital life skills of the young Iranian clients using descriptive-survey method in 2017. The studied population was all young married people in Shiraz. The sample included 384 individuals who were selected by cluster sampling method. Data was measured by a researcher-made questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of descriptive statistics indicate that the participants benefit from desirable life skills. The inferential results showed that there was no significant difference between the life skills variables and gender, and marriage length and occupational status at the p value <0.05. On the other hand, there is a significant difference between the variables of age, education and life skills at the p value <0.05. Regarding the impact of the underlying variables of age and education, there is a direct relationship between the efficiency of life skills in married people and the three variables: age, education and experience. Since life skills raise self-awareness, it is likely to make individuals aware of their cognitive layers in the behavioral rightfulness or wrongfulness. As a matter of fact, life skill is a prerequisite for educating individuals and empowering them to employ them. These skills will result in both individual and social development.

Keywords: Life skills, Demographic characteristics, Marital life.

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1. Introduction

As Brooks (1984) states, life skills comprise the behaviors that are learned and acquired as essential to an effective life, including the development of self-sufficiency to solve problems, to communicate socially, to receive social support, and to control personal emotions. The World Health Organization (WHO), in 1994, defines life skills as skills that promote mental health, enrich human relationships and improve healthy behavior. According to the given definitions, life skills are a range of skills that support positive and productive behavior and adaptation. These skills enable individuals to meet their social responsibilities while effectively addressing daily needs, expectations and problems, especially in interpersonal relationships, without hurting themselves or others.

Though, it seems that the psychological faces of life skills have been more accentuated than that of others' perspectives, which enable individuals to cope successfully with the demands and difficulties of daily life by their own efforts and enable them to deal appropriately with their fellow human beings (WHO, 1994). So, what about external and social factors, such as contextual variables?

In responding to the above question, we are firstly required to identify these skills, which were introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO). This organization developed life skills in terms of ten main areas: self-awareness, communication, interpersonal relationships, problem solving, creative thinking, dealing with emotions, dealing with stress, empathy, decision-making and critical thinking skills. On the other hand, we are required to meticulously weigh several definitions and classifications proposed within life skills. A look at what has been discussed can reveal the scope and concepts involved in the discussion of life skills that indicate a variety of desirable life skills. Therefore, there appears a wide range of views in explaining life skills that include the views of Maass, Wilken, Jordan, Culen & Place (2006), Boleman (2004), Loeser, Bailey, Benson & Deen (2004) and Sawi and Smith (1997).

In fact, the approach of promoting general life skills, which was developed to a large extent by the working group around Gilbert Botvin in New York (e.g. Botvin & Griffin, 2001; Botvin & Tortu, 1988; Dusenbury & Botvin, 1990), is based on Akers' (2017) social learning theory as well as Jessor's (2016) theory

that is focusing on that risky behaviors of young people should be viewed within a socially learned and functional behavior that results from the interaction between social environment and personal factors such as cognitions, attitudes and convictions. To fill the bio-cognitive gap, Mangrulkar (2001) uses an evolutionist approach to explain the developmental facts that affect the process of learning. In other words, he clarifies how human beings' learning and behaving form the basis of life skills.

It seems that life skills were traditionally used to educate people about health hazards ("risky communication") in order to avoid health-related risks and risk-related behaviors, and to keep health consequences as low as possible; however, life skills have begun to focus on the concept of "Affective Measures" to address weaknesses in personality and self-esteem. For example, *Affective Measures* are echoed within the development of feelings and awareness of personal values and goals, or of offering an alternative to drug use through psychosocially attractive (Bailey, Vermeiren, & Mitchell, 2007).

Numerous studies (e.g. Franzkowiak, 1987; Jessor, Donovan & Costa, 1990) have shown that young people's risk behavior is to be understood more as social behavior than as health behavior, which stands in the way of motivational training for health-promoting behavior (Bailey, Vermeiren, & Mitchell, 2007). Health-risk behaviors such as smoking, alcohol and drug consumption are perceived as development-related problem behaviors that indicate an absence of coping strategies to solve everyday problems (Jessor, 2017). Based on the assumption that the nature and goals of concrete behavior depend on the social environment in which children and adolescents grow up and how well they manage to cope with everyday demands in their search for identity, meaning of life, social recognition, self-acceptance and the satisfaction of individual needs, it is not regarded as sufficient to highlight health risks and promote health-protective behavior.

As a matter of fact, life skills programs are designed to promote a range of skills, usually with a focus on general social competences and coping strategies, which differ from programs aiming to teach individual problem-based competences, such as stress management programs (Johnson & Rae, 2008). The training is to teach the adolescents how to cope with situations

which are prone to conflict on the basis of their own resources and skills, so that positive experiences occur which are similar to those which occur with recourse to risky behavior (e.g. inhibition of social fears, reduction of stress), recognition of "peers" (feelings of togetherness).

The life skills programs comprise, in different combinations, the promotion of cognitive resources (e.g. knowledge, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, self-perception), motor-sensory resources (e.g. movement skills, relaxation skills), social resources (e.g. communication skills, resistance to group pressure, self-assertion), emotional resources (e.g. dealing with feelings, taking on perspectives) and the ability to self-regulate in order to coordinate these competences and render them into action in a targeted manner (Vaidya, 2014).

Knowledge of the short-term consequences of a particular problem behavior will be provided, which should lead to a change in the attitudes and values of children and adolescents, as these can influence the formation of behavioral intentions (e.g. the desire to smoke) and actual behavior; intrapersonal and interpersonal life skills will be promoted and programs will reinforce newly learned behaviors. The omission of risk behavior is regarded as a desirable side effect of successful personality development (Vaidya, 2014).

It seems that the relatively sparse research on life skills has left room for further research. First, much of the research has focused either on young and adolescents. Second, most of studies fail to employ both psychological and societal perspectives of life skills while considering more varied skills to study on the participants.

To bridge this gap, employing a *psychosocial* approach to life skills seems vital because it uses a perspective to find out the unrevealing relationships between external and internal variables that participate in helping the individuals to cope with their career challenges. Also, such a relationship may be more critical in the contextual variables, especially, it is investigated within a family due to its dependency on the contextual and demographic characteristics.

Therefore, the current study helps us respond the following questions: What is the status of life skills among the married people in the community? - Is

there any significant difference between the indicators of life skills within gender variable? - Is there any significant difference between the indicators of life skills within age, the marriage length, occupational status, number of children, and education?

In other words, the following hypotheses will be articulated on the basis of the above questions:

1. There is a significant difference between the life skills of young married people and the gender.

2. There is a significant difference between young married life skills and age.

3. There is a significant difference between young married life skills and the marriage length.

4. There is a significant difference between young married life skills and job status.

5. There is a significant difference between young married life skills and education.

2. Method

The present study is a descriptive survey. The statistical population includes all young married people residing in Shiraz in 2016-2017. The sample size was 384 using Cochran formula. Due to the geographical extent and heterogeneity of the population, multistage cluster sampling method was used. The data was collected through a questionnaire developed by researchers based on WHO life skills indicators while they used theoretical foundations on life skills and their domains, which include eight indicators corresponding to ten dimensions of life skills, supported by WHO reports:

- Decision Making (DM)
- Problem Solving (PS)
- Creative Thinking (CT)
- Critical Thinking
- Effective Communication (EC)
- Interpersonal Relationships (IP)
- Self-awareness (SA)

- Empathy (E)
- Emotional Coping (EC) ,and
- Stress Coping (SC)

This questionnaire was administrated based on the five-point Likert scale so that the participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale of 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and 'always' that each of the questions was scored from one to five, which is the reverse for negative questions. Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the reliability of indicators and items used in this study. The results can be seen in Table 1. The results show that each of the indicators has validity for measuring the variables in question while having an acceptable validity. The mean Cronbach's alpha is 87%.

Table1.Cronbach's Alpha

	<i>Indicators</i>	Questions Number	Alpha value
Life Skills	PS	9	70%
	CT	8	86%
	E	8	71%
	SA	9	71%
	S	6	78%
	EC	9	64%
	IP	9	91%
	DM	6	62%
	Total/Mean	64	87%

In the present study, the data obtained from questionnaires after coding and converting raw data into experimental data, were analyzed in two parts: descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS software ver.20.

3. Results

Distribution of data about the characteristics of the statistical population showed that in terms of gender, 197 persons (51.3%) were female respondents and 187 persons (48.7%) were male. In terms of age, the largest number belonged to the age group of 30-40 with 148 (38.5%). In terms of education, 35.9% of the respondents had bachelor's degree, which was higher than other

educational groups. In terms of occupational status (59.4%) of the respondents were employed. Most of the population was under the age of 10 years with 47.9%; the lowest was over 20 years with 24.2%.

Here, the questions and hypotheses of the research are called upon to present elaborately and meticulously results:

Question1: What is the status of life skills among respondents in the surveyed community?

This question examines the status of the life skills of the respondents. Given that life skills consist of eight indicators (problem solving, creative thinking, empathy, self-awareness, stress coping, effective communication, interpersonal communication, and decision making. To examine this question, a t-test was used. In order to analyze demographic characteristics, the following table was used:

Table2. The t-test results of respondents' life skills

Indicators of Life Skills	Mean	SD	T statistics	Sig	Lower limit	Upper Limit	Result
PS	3.2031	0.82174	4.844	.000	.1207	.2856	Desirable
CT	2.9792	0.84486	1.631	.104	-.1551	.0145	Moderate
E	3.5527	0.84890	14.463	.000	.4776	.6279	Desirable
SA	3.6782	0.54851	24.230	.000	.6232	.7333	Desirable
SC	2.9918	0.54518	-.296	.767	-.0629	.0465	Moderate
EC	3.4592	0.77627	11.592	.000	.3813	.5371	Desirable
IP	3.7289	0.71925	19.585	.000	.6567	.800	Desirable
DM	3.1957	0.61408	6.247	.000	.1341	.2574	Desirable
Main variable	Mean	SD	T statistics	Sig	Lower limit	Upper Limit	Result
Life Skills	3.3689	.55040	13.134	.000	.3137	.4241	Desirable

Table 2 shows that the significance value for the indicators of problem solving, empathy, self-awareness, effective communication, interpersonal communication and decision making is less than 0.05 and, on the other hand,

the lower and upper limits are positive for all of these indicators, thus the mean value for these indices were greater than the test value, namely, the value of 3, indicating that the status of these indicators was desirable. On the other hand, the level of significance for creative thinking, stress coping was greater than 0.05 (p value > 0.05) while the lower limit was negative and the upper limit was positive; therefore, the mean values for these two indicators were not significantly different from the test values, indicating that the status was moderate for the main variable of life skills, the significance value is 0.000 and the lower limit is 0.3137 and the upper limit is 0.4241, which both of them are positive. Furthermore, the mean value is 3.3689, which indicates the desirable life skills status among the respondents.

Hypothesis1: There is a significant difference between the life skills of married people and the gender.

In this hypothesis, regarding to gender variable, the responses of the participants to the questions of problem solving, creative thinking, empathy, self-Awareness, stress coping, effective communication, interpersonal communication, and decision making is examined. Since gender is a dichotomous variable, independent Samples t-test was used.

Table 3. Independent Samples t-test of respondents' life skills based on gender variable

Variables	T-Statistics	Sig.	Means Difference	SEM	Lower Limit	Upper limit	Result
PS	.000	.774	.02416	.08400	-.14100	.18932	No significant difference
CT	.359	.720	.03103	.08636	-.13877	.2008	No significant difference
E	-.734	.463	-.05617	.07651	-.20660	.09426	No significant difference
SA	.197	.845	.01089	.05607	-.09927	.12123	No significant difference
SC	-1.540	.124	-.08557	.05556	-.19481	.02368	No significant difference
EC	-.689	.491	-.05463	.07931	-.21056	.0131	No significant difference
IP	-.493	.622	-.03625	.07351	-.18078	.10827	No significant difference
DM	-3.294	.001	-.20391	.06190	-.32563	-.08219	There is a significant difference

Main variable	T-Statistics	Sig.	Means Difference	SEM	Lower Limit	Upper limit	Result
Life Skills	-.678	.498	-.03812	.05623	-.14869	.07245	No significant difference

As Table 3 shows that the significance value for all of life skills indicators, except decision making, are greater than 0.05 (p value > 0.05), and also upper limit is positive and lower limit is negative; thus there is not any significant difference between the mean scores of problem solving, creative thinking, empathy, self-Awareness, stress Coping, effective communication, and interpersonal communication. On the other hand, the significance value for the indicator of decision making is equal to 0.001, which was less than 0.05, and indicates that there is a significant difference between mean scores of gender variable and Decision Making indicator.

Since the lower limit is 0.32563 and the upper limit is -0.08219 and both are negative, it is found that the mean scores related to women's responses to this indicator is lower than the mean scores of men's responses. For the main variable of life skills, the results show that the level of significance is greater than 0.05 error, the lower limit is negative and the upper limit is positive.

Is there a significant difference between respondents' life skills in terms of variables (age, marriage length, occupational status, and education)?

In order to examine the role of variables of age, marriage length, occupational status, and education in responding to the questions of life skills indicators, which include problem solving, creative thinking, empathy, self-awareness, stress coping, effective communication, interpersonal communication, and decision making; analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used (Table 4).

Table4. ANOVA Test of the Question 4

Indicators	Age		Marriage Length		Occupational Status		Education	
	Sig	F statistics	Sig	F statistics	Sig	F statistics	Sig	F statistics
PS	2.890	.035	1.813	.165	3.035	.049	4.205	.001
CT	5.329	.001	.875	.418	.450	.638	1.132	.343
E	4.046	.008	1.783	.170	1.531	.218	2.942	.013
SA	.764	.515	2.196	.113	.645	.525	2.257	.048
SC	1.495	.215	1.717	.181	.064	.938	2.859	.015

Main variable	Age		Marriage Length		Occupational Status		Education	
	Sig	F statistics	Sig	F statistics	Sig	F statistics	Sig	F statistics
EC	4.586	.004	1.856	.158	2.632	.073	3.708	.003
IP	1.914	.127	1.581	.207	2.100	.124	2.439	.034
DM	1.439	.231	.096	.908	7.108	.001	2.089	.066
Life Skills	3.748	.011	1.297	.275	2.277	.104	3.490	.004

According to the above table, the variables of age, marriage length, occupational status, education, and life skills are demonstrated as following:

3.1. Age

The significance value for the indicators of problem solving, creative thinking, empathy and effective communication are less than 0.05, thus the mean scores related to the responses, based on the age variable, between the life skills indicators is significantly different. On the other hand, the significance value for the indicators of self-awareness, stress coping, interpersonal communication and decision making is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), thus the mean scores related to the responses, based on age variable, between these indicators are not significantly different.

3.2. Marriage Length

The significance value for all of the indicators is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), thus the mean scores related to the responses, based on marriage length variable, between these indicators are not significantly different.

3.3. Occupational Status

The significance value for the indicators of problem solving, and decision making is less than 0.05, thus the mean scores related to the responses, based on the occupational status variable, between the life skills indicators is significantly different. On the other hand, the significance value for the indicators of creative thinking, empathy, self-awareness, stress coping, effective communication, interpersonal communication is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), thus the mean scores related to the responses, based on

occupational status variable, between these indicators are not significantly different.

3.4. Education

The significance value for the indicators of problem solving, empathy, self-awareness, stress coping, effective communication, and interpersonal communication is less than 0.05, thus the mean scores related to the responses, based on the Education variable, between the life skills indicators is significantly different. On the other hand, the significance value for the indicators of creative thinking and decision making is greater than 0.05 (p value > 0.05), thus the mean scores related to the responses, based on Education variable, between these indicators are not significantly different.

3.5. Life Skills

Since the significance value of life skills, as a main variable, for the variables of age and education are less than 0.05, i.e., 0.011 and 0.04; respectively, there is a significant difference between the scores of life skills and age and education. On the other hand, since the significance value for the variables of marriage length and occupational status is greater than 0.05, i.e. 0.275 and 0.104, respectively; there is not any *significant* difference between the scores of Life Skills, and marriage length and occupational status.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Family issues are an important subject in sociology for several reasons: some relate to the importance of family institutions in today's societies, others to the likely impact of marital relationships on other aspects of life: Today, life skills are considered as one of the most appropriate practices for reducing marital conflicts and preventing divorce.

These practices can reduce the negative symptoms of behavioral disorders in couples by reducing the symptoms of behavioral and compatibility disorders while simultaneously reducing the emotions, self-image, self-efficacy, social and emotional adjustment of couples, and the anxiety and sexual impotence of

couples. Life skills also increase self-esteem, resistance to change, control of problems and relaxation (Williams, Lim, & Rivero, 2006).

In this regard, this paper investigates the relationship between demographic characteristics and life skills of married people in Shiraz in 2017. The demographic analysis showed that there were no significant differences between the mean responses of men and women to the indicators of problem solving, creative thinking, empathy, self-awareness, stress coping, effective communication, and interpersonal communication. However, there is a significant difference between the response of men and women to the indicator of decision making, i.e, the performance of male participants seemed to be more significantly efficient than that of female ones.

Age-related results showed that there is a significant difference between the indicators of problem solving, creative thinking, empathy, effective communication whereas there is no significant difference between the indicators of self-awareness, stress coping, interpersonal and decision making, and age. The variable of marriage length showed no significant difference between the scores of life skills indicators and marriage length.

The results that were based on occupational status showed a significant differences between indicators of problem solving, and decision making, and occupational status; however, there was no significant difference between indicators of creative thinking, empathy, self-awareness, stress coping, effective communication, interpersonal communication, and occupational status. According to the results that were based on education variable, there is a significant difference between the indicators of problem solving, empathy, self-awareness, stress coping, effective communication, interpersonal communication, and education; however, there was no significant difference between the indicators of creative thinking and decision making, and education. Overall, the results demonstrated that there was a significant difference between the main variable of life skills and the variables of age and education ($p\text{-value}<0.05$); however, there is not any significant difference between the main variable of life skills and the variables of gender, marriage length and occupational status ($p\text{-value}>0.05$).

As age and education increase, life skills in married people are getting more established because life skills practices help them to raise their self-awareness, so that it helps them to be aware of his or her cognitive layers of rightfulness or wrongfulness behavior. Besides, life skills may be applied within the family institution to empower the individuals for participating more effectively in social activities. It can be argued that if people within family structure receive the necessary training in life skills, they can make significant progress in enhancing their mental abilities at the community level. By means of acquiring these skills, one becomes more aware of their own abilities, and realizes that paying attention to norms and values will lead to a healthier life both at the family and community level. As a matter of fact, life skills bridge the discursive gaps between spouses in terms of stable marital relationships. Vaidya (2014) believes that human beings are social, and their behavior must be examined in the light of social relations, so that life skills can be taught according to social learning theory. Similarly, a series of workshops can be organized for couples in order to raise their life satisfaction, promoting their family members' psychosocial health, and reducing emotional problems among couples. Although this paper attempted to investigate the most important contextual variables affecting life skills through the survey method, other factors could also influence married life skills. It is suggested that future studies evaluate the role of other variables on married life skills.

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