

# CHANGING OF STUDENTS' VIEWS TOWARD ADDICTION BY SELF-INTRODUCED DRUG ABUSERS AND THEIR FAMILIES (ADDICTION AGAINST ADDICTION)

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## ABSTRACT

A group of high school students attended 7 educational sessions for a preventive drug abuse program. The students were exposed to drug abusers and their families. Drug abusers and their families informed the subjects about the consequences of addiction in their life: how they became addicted and how the addiction worsened their psychosocial life. Moreover their families explained to students the miserable situation of their family after addiction of one of the family members. Each session took about 70 minutes and the students were allowed to ask questions concerning addiction from drug abusers and their families.

The results of pre-test and post-test of students' views toward addiction showed significant differences between the students' views before and after attending the sessions, and their views became more negative than before attending the sessions. The results were interpreted through social comparison (downward)<sup>1</sup> theory and the Iranian proverb once again prevailed: If you would like to learn morality, you should learn it from people who don't behave on morality.

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**Keywords:** Addiction, social comparison, preventive program, Iranian proverb.

## INTRODUCTION

Numerous consequences befall teenagers who abuse drugs, including overdoses and accidents, early involvement in family creation and divorce, crimes such as stealing and violence, relatively less educational attainment, relatively less skilled employment with lower job stability, development of disorganized thinking, disability in problem solving and emotional functioning, relatively less adaptive coping, and relatively greater social isolation and depression.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that most adoles-

cents who use drugs do not abuse them later on.<sup>3,4</sup> Prevention programs should be focused on youths who are at high risk for drug abuse. This would provide a maximal social payoff.<sup>5</sup> Some psychologists believe that one of the important items in prevention programs for drug abuse is to provide information about the negative consequences of drug abuse, and the family /social context of drug abuse.<sup>6</sup> Providing information about the consequences of addiction is an important approach in any prevention program.<sup>7,8</sup> The program should provide an empathic and cognitive understanding of the negative consequences of drug abuse, permit active review of earlier acquired information, and teach the psychoso-

Self introduced drug abuser: Drug abusers who have voluntarily ceased drug abusing for at least 6 months.

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## Addiction Against Addiction

cial consequences of drug abuse. Adolescents learn that abuse occurs when one uses drugs to cope and when negative consequences result from use. Also they are discouraged from enabling drug abusers.<sup>9,2</sup>

It is essential to use social comparison as an eminent factor in preventive programs for drug abuse because social comparison is an active source of self-knowledge among youth.<sup>10</sup> One way to provide information for adolescents is downward social comparison, which can persuade adolescents to consider the miserable situations that drug abusers possess.<sup>1</sup> There are two kinds of social comparison: upward and downward.<sup>11</sup> Downward comparison can encourage people to avoid behavior and situations which may have negative consequences for them.<sup>1</sup> There is an Iranian proverb, which is interpreted through downward comparison: If you would like to learn morality, you should learn it from people who don't have on morality.

The proverb persuades people to realize the miserable situation of drug abusers and take more caution in exposing with addiction.

The comparison can be done by confrontation (in vivo) of self-introduced drug abusers and their families with adolescents. The adolescents can learn about the negative points of drug abusing through in vivo confrontation with drug abusers and their families. Research indicates that in vivo exposure can be more effective than in vitro exposure in changing views of people.<sup>12</sup> This pro-

cess can negatively change the views about addictions. This program can be carried out in the classroom of adolescents who are in high schools.

Objectives of the study were as follows:

1-To change the views of adolescents toward addiction.

2- To reduce the value of drug abuse among youth.

3- Immunize adolescents against any attempt for drug abusing.

4- Reducing the requests for drug abuse among adolescents.

Beneficiaries of the study:

-By the end of the study drug demand will be reduced among the young and adolescents who are at highest risk for addiction.

-By the end of the study, the adolescents will know all the negative aspects of a drug abuser's life and all the stresses which a drug abuser's family faces.

-By the end of the study, the adolescents' attitudes toward drug abuse become more negative.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

Downward comparison can persuade adolescents to consider miserable situations, which drug abusers possess.<sup>1</sup> Confrontation (in vivo) of self-introduced drug abusers and their families do the comparison with adolescents. The adolescents (15-16 years) can learn the

**Table I.** Frequency of subjects.

Gender	Experimental Group	Control Group	Total
Girls	543	362	905
Boys	464	306	770
Total	1007	668	1675

**Table II.** Means and standard deviation between total scores of pre-test and post-test (questionnaire).

Gender	Groups	Means	SD
Girls	Experimental	-18.01	41.27
"	Control	0.0856	36.46
"	Total	-10.7	40.38
Boys	Experimental	-39.70	52.13
"	Control	-3.87	30.50
"	Total	-25.46	48.10
Boys&Girls	Experimental	-28.01	47.81
"	Control	-1.73	33.90
"	Total	-17.53	44.69

**Table III.** Results of two-way analysis variance for pre-test and post-test.

Sources	Df	SS	MS	F	P
Group	1	290023.72	290023.72	164.51	0.00
Gender	1	65632.82	65632.82	37.23	0.00
Gender.Group	1	31376.02	31376.02	17.79	0.00
Error	1672	2945823.88	1762.91		
Total	1675	3858008			

negative points of drug abuse through in vivo confrontation with drug abusers and their families. This process can change their views on addiction.

About 1000 adolescents (15- 16 years) who attended high school (in all regions of Tehran), were involved in the project (boys and girls) as the experimental group (all were 10th grade high school students). Self introduced drug abusers and their families attended schools every week and had a session for about 70 minutes with students. Drug abusers or their families spoke with details about their experiences from addiction and negative consequences of addiction in their life. The adolescents were allowed to ask openly any question from drug abusers and their families' life. Each session included about 30 students. A psychologist explained to self-introduced drug abusers and their families the goals of the program before attending the sessions. All sessions were lead by educated psychologists. Students attended 7 sessions (4 sessions with drug abusers and 3 sessions with families of drug abusers). Students who were involved in the experimental group were asked to answer a standardized questionnaire about the views of adolescents toward addiction<sup>13</sup> before and after attending all sessions (pre-test and post test). The questionnaire consisted of 84 items, which measured the views of subjects towards addiction in different situations. The instrument was made by an Iranian psychologist<sup>14</sup> and possesses reasonable validity and reliability. Moreover the validity and reliability of the questionnaire was measured among high school students.<sup>13</sup> The overtime reliability (one week interval) was reasonable ( $r=.846$ ;  $p<.01$ ;  $N=275$ ). The internal reliability of the questionnaire was also found significant and reasonable ( $\alpha=.923$ ;  $N= 1675$ ;  $p<.01$  ). According to results of factor analysis the instrument was formed by 10 factors in measuring views of adolescents ( $N= 1675$ ) toward addiction, including:

1. General views toward addiction.
2. Views toward using the drug.
3. Views toward the reasons for drug abuse.
4. Views toward acceptance of drug abusers.
5. Views toward the personality of drug abusers.
6. Views of society toward addiction.
7. Views toward giving up addiction.

8. Views toward the consequences of drug abusing
9. Views toward avoiding addiction.

10. Views toward addiction as a problem solver.

In another group, the students (15-16 year old boys and girls) only answered the questionnaire two times with two month intervals without attending the sessions with drug abusers and their families (control group- about 680 subjects randomly chosen from the high schools- students in the 10th grade).

The results were computed and compared between the two groups (experimental and control).

All the sessions and programs were carried out in the high schools.

The hypothesis of the study was that views of students toward addiction in the experimental group are significantly more negative than the control group.

## RESULTS

Table I. shows the frequency of subjects (boys and girls) in the two groups.

In this study, after computing the scores in the questionnaire and getting possible differences in pre- and post-test in each group, the mean score of each group was measured. Analysis of variance was used to examine the hypothesis. Observed means and standard deviation between total scores of pre -test and post-test (questionnaire) have been demonstrated in Table II. And the results of two-way analysis of variance are shown in Table III.

## DISCUSSION

As shown in Tables II and III, there are significant differences between the two groups (experimental and control) in their views toward addiction ( $p=.00$ ). The experimental group shows more negative views toward drug abusing than the control group. It means that confrontation of the experimental group with drug abusers and their families caused more negative views among the adolescents. The results are in favor of the theories about prevention programs, which were suggested by some authors.<sup>6,7,8</sup> It seems that changing the views of students

## Addiction Against Addiction

toward addiction through downward comparison can be a useful approach in the prevention program.<sup>1</sup> However exposure of students with self introduced drug abusers may provide good reasons for avoiding drugs<sup>15</sup> but this program, in addition to other factors like family and social supports, social and life skills and other cognitive-behavioral elements can form an effective preventive program in reducing request for drugs among them. Moreover the results shows that a significant difference exists between boys and girls in their views toward addiction ( $p=.00$ ) in the experimental group. It means that the boys have developed more negative views than the girls have after attending the session with drug abusers and their families. Perhaps boys in Iran have more experience and information about addiction so they can understand the negative consequences of drug abuse in psychosocial life better than girls. However there is a need for further research in this area to see other factors which are involved in this finding.

Moreover it is necessary to investigate other methods of confrontation such as using video films for showing the experiences of drug abusers and their families to students.

It is suggested to have a follow up study for subjects who were involved in this study to see possible changes in their views toward addiction.

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