

Personal Empowerment among Al-Anon/Nar-Anon Members in Iran

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Abstract: As addiction affects not only on addict person but also on family members, so relationship behaviors is an important part of codependents' life which needs to recover in order to achieve health promotion. This study investigates to find whether the "12-Step Program" empowers families of addicts/alcoholic in term of relationship with others or not. In other words, this study aims to find differences of relationship behaviors by comparing families of addicts/alcoholics who practice the "12-Step Program" and who do not. Theory of empowerment is the key theory to conduct this study. The findings of this study indicate that the "12-step program" is an effective program to enables codependents to improve their relationship with others in comparison with those who do not practice this program (control group). In other words, independent samples t-test reveals that codependents' relationship behaviors are recovered duo to practicing the "12-Step Program" in Al-Anon/Nar-Anon groups in Iran.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bournes (2008) defined codependency as the tendency to put others needs before own needs. A codependent ignores his/her feelings, enquiries and desires for others' sake. In fact their satisfaction depends on how well other people satisfy with them. Moreover, their self-esteem constructs based on taking care and solving problems for others.

Co-dependency may be obvious in various conditions. But, most simply recognized in families of addict/alcoholic (Beattie, 1989). On the other side, the results of various surveys carried out by the *Islamic Culture Ministry* (2007), showed that addiction is the first social harm in Iran (Iranian Attitude toward Drug Abuse, 2004 & 2008). Although the area of substance abuse and alcoholism was studied globally, but there is not much research about codependency syndrome particularly in Asia.

To discovering more about codependency, the following characteristics were found by Weinhold and Bradshaw (2008), which are related to their relationship with others such as clings to others, other-centered, addicted to people, craves intimacy and closeness.

Moreover Weinhold and Bradshaw (2008), stated some characteristics related to controlling behavior for recognizing Co-dependency. They believe people with codependency troubles are people-pleasers who try to control others' understandings and make a good influence on them. They have a lot of skills in

controlling others. They try to control everything and everywhere, but their efforts will be failed because it is an impossible task.

In this situation, certain tools are needed to empower codependents so that they will be able to find themselves and return to the reality. The empowerment theory states that individuals can control their own lives by empowering or improving their resources (Rowlands, 1997).

Based on this theory, families need to gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998). In fact, empowerment is about seeking to increase awareness about the issues surrounding codependents and trying to provide general education for families, which means that codependents need to empower themselves through education and support.

As stated above, troubled relationship is one of the problems among codependents and they need to recover their wrong relationships with others. In other words, empowerment is the process by which people come to have control over their lives. improvement of individual power or strength, the capability of taking action, or developing the ability of communication are the further implication of empowerment phenomenon at the individual level (Schultz, 1980).

Also Weinhold and Bradshaw (2008) in *Breaking free of the Codependency Trap* mentioned that people who is recovered from codependency have close relationship with others without fearing that they

would forget their needs.

Additionally, Patty Simko (2006), in her documents about codependency, mentioned two important behaviors. She believes if codependents worked on accepting others as they are without trying to change them for their needs, they can help their recovery process. When they learn to accept others' faults, failures and inadequacies, they can refrain from giving advice or trying to fix others unless they are asked for help.

In terms of recovery programs, Al-Anon & Nar-Anon are two community resources (founded in 1951) that provide support to anyone affected by a relative or friend's drinking or drug abuse (Fisher & Harrison, 1999). The concept of this program is back to the 12-step program designed by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) which was founded in 1935 (Lowinson, et al., 2004).

One essential core of Al-Anon/Nar-Anon groups is the sense of friendship with those who have same problem. As Rowlands believed that sharing experience with others who have same problem is one important way to empower a person (ÖSTE, 2003). So that, based on two reasons the most important tool of this recovery program is the fellowship of the group. Firstly, this factor gives the person an opportunity to be with people who are talking about the disease and recovering from it. Secondly, 12-step groups such as Al-Anon/Nar-Anon are the most likely place to surround him/herself with those who will support him/her in his/her efforts, and those who are striving to live by new rules. Such environments will support their efforts to recover (Greenberg, 1994).

Consequently, this study examines the practicing of the 12-step program and finding its result on "relationship with others". Comparing Experimental group and Control group to each other attempted to answer whether there are any significant differences in relationship with other behaviors between two groups of codependents or not.

2. METHODOLOGY

Shiraz City in southwest of Iran was chosen as the research scope because of the high rate of addiction in this city. As this research was designed based on causal comparative design so, two sets of data were chosen from two populations (Gay, Mills and Airasian, 2006).

Four meetings of Al-Anon/Nar-Anon groups in Shiraz city were considered as the first population. The second population was families who conveyed their addicts/alcoholics to the recovery camps. They did not practice 12-step program. As in causal comparative design 30 person for each group is an

accepted number as a sample size (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001) so 60 families were chosen randomly for two groups.

One important factor in causal comparative design is homogeneity between two groups as experimental and control groups. Based on this factor, groups should be matched to each other on one or more criteria. By this way these important criteria can be controlled by researcher and making sure that only independent variable has effected to group (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Use of Tranquilizers by families, participate in other programs (except of 12-step program) and attending psychotherapy continually were considered as three control variables which were controlled by researcher.

Five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly agree" to (5) "strongly disagree" was employed to measure each item of questionnaire. As all items are negatively worded so the score is started from 1 to 5.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main subject of this study is family of addict. Families who suffered from addiction show some signs of codependency in their relationship which is needed to recover by appropriate program like the 12-step program. Based on the literatures codependents have many problems in their relationship with others.

Fifteen items were analyzed individually in the relationship part. The mean ratings, standard deviations, t-value and p-value were run for both experimental and control group. Based on literature the most important subject which is considered in this part is external focus such as: importance of other judgment, other needs-centered, controlling behavior and lack of self-esteem.

Table 1 shows significant differences in fourteen items between families who practice the 12-step program and families who do not practice this program. In other words, families of addicts who practiced the 12-step program were normal in their relationship with others. On the other hand families who did not practice this program had problems in their relationship with others.

Bibee (2005) believes rescuer in codependency is one of the roles that codependents play. In other words, a rescuer takes responsibility for someone else's problems. At first glance, this may not seem to be a bad thing, but this role is like an arsenal of weapons that defend the codependent contracts and helps to keep these relationships stable.

Table 1: Relationship Items of Two Groups

Statement	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
I always have an intention to help the people in need				
Ex-group	2.70	1.23	1.94	0.05
Co-group	2.13	1		
I lose my self-esteem confronting capable people				
Ex-group	3.97	0.92	5.68	0.000
Co-group	2.40	1.19		
Others behaviors is not acceptable for me				
Ex-group	4.13	0.73	6.48	0.000
Co-group	2.60	1.07		
I am excessive generous for my family				
Ex-group	3.13	1.33	4.35	0.000
Co-group	1.83	0.95		
My family can make me angry or sad by their behavior				
Ex-group	3.43	1.30	6.83	0.001
Co-group	1.60	0.67		
Saying No is too difficult for me				
Ex-group	4.27	0.78	9.66	0.000
Co-group	2	1.01		
I try to satisfy others				
Ex-group	3.07	1.46	5.39	0.000
Co-group	1.50	0.63		
My family's preference is more important than mine				
Ex-group	3.50	1.22	3.49	0.003
Co-group	2.43	1.13		
I am ready to help anywhere, anytime for anyone				
Ex-group	2.97	1.12	4.06	0.000
Co-group	1.80	1.09		
I often change my behavior for compatibility with others				
Ex-group	3.47	1.40	3.51	0.002
Co-group	2.27	1.20		
My relationship with my family is going down the hill(trouble)				
Ex-group	4.10	0.48	6.64	0.000
Co-group	2.57	1.16		
Other's judgment about my behavior is important to me				
Ex-group	3.53	1.10	5.12	0.000
Co-group	2.13	1		
I try to solve people problems				
Ex-group	3.57	0.93	7.93	0.000
Co-group	1.83	0.74		
I feel responsibility toward others' mistakes				
Ex-group	4.30	0.79	9.76	0.000
Co-group	2	1.01		
I must control everything otherwise we encounter with troubles				
Ex-group	4.10	0.96	8.32	0.000
Co-group	2.03	0.96		

In this study, the researcher examined differences between two groups of families and found out the 12-step program made significant differences in codependents' behavior in terms of responsibility for others' need. On the other hand, families who did not have experience of the 12-step program, play rescuer role in their life. They are excessive generous for their family. It means family members preference are definitely more important than theirs (Ajri & Shatar, 2010). Moreover they are ready to go wherever their help is needed, and feel responsibility towards others' mistakes. Furthermore they try to satisfy others by solving their problem.

To support this finding, Wise and Ferreiro (1995) found common elements through their seeking process on nurses. They found that external focus, caretaking and boundary problems are the main characteristics of nurses as codependents. Another significant finding in this study was control, particularly when nurses dealing with non-compliant patients. This study also found the significant difference in terms of controlling behavior between ex-group and co-group.

Based on the present research's findings, families who did not practice the 12-step program felt that, it is an obligation for them to control everything otherwise they encounter with troubles, and they cannot accept other's behaviors. On the contrary families who practice the 12-step program do not have controlling behavior about people or family. In other words, they recovered their relationship with others. The mean scores of two groups show significant differences between families who practiced the 12-step program and those who did not practice this program.

Moreover, Gehert (1993) stated family of special child tell themselves their personal needs and desires are unimportant next to their child's. Codependents find themselves saying yes when they mean no, doing things they do not want to, and not doing the things they desire. This can extend beyond the immediate family into all codependents' relationships, so that they let everyone take advantage of them. Finally stress, feeling used, depressed, and angry are appeared (Ajri & Shatar, 2010).

In this study, relationship with others was examined to identify differences between families in ex-group and co-group. Researcher found families who did not practice the 12-step program show signs of codependency in their relationship. For example they lost their self-esteem confronting capable man, saying no was too difficult for them, they often changed their behavior for compatibility with others, and other's judgment about their behavior was important to them.

On the other hand, independent samples t-test

revealed families who practiced the 12-step programs differed significantly from another group in their relationship with others. In other word, codependents that practice the 12-step program were improved in relationship with others rather than another group.

The only item that Independent samples t-test showed no significant difference in the mean score was: *I always have an intention to help the people in need*. This item among other items had similar answer among experimental group (mean = 2.70., SD = 1.23) and control group (mean = 2.13., SD=1) with $t(60) = 1.94, p < 0.05$ (refer to Table 1).

4. CONCLUSION

Health promotion occurs in processes of enabling people to grow personal skills, to support and develop helpful situations and communities in order to represent community development. One important part of health promotion approach is self-help group which needs to consider in every community. In other words, health promotion is about empowering people to have more control over their lives, which can be occurs in self-help groups such as Al-Anon/Nar-Anon.

One of the most common themes in the self-help group research is empowerment (Cheung, Mok & Cheung, 2005). Personal empowerment happens after an individual joins the self-help group. Many findings have supported a positive relationship between self-help group participation and empowerment, and its consequences. As members interact with each other to make meaningful changes, empowerment occurs. If group members are empowered, they achieve the ability of collecting the profits of self-help group activities (Cheung, Mok & Cheung, 2005).

The present study, which was conducted in Iran, found significant differences between personal empowerment among participants' and non-participant codependents of the 12-step program.

The result of this study suggests that empowerment can refer to the occurrence of changes of the individual in personal qualities such as relationship with others. Changes in attitudes and skills related to interaction with other people such as the ability to say No to others, not be a controller, not be responsible for the problems of others, not be eager in caring too much for others, which may be classified as interpersonal empowerment (Rowlands, 1997)

As community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people, by the skills they need to defend on their own behalf, improve their healthy lives, consequently self-help groups like "12-step program" can be one of the most important components to reach these goals.

Moreover sharing the experience with other

members who have same problems in their life in Al-Anon/Nar-Anon groups will empower families to solve their difficulties through practicing 12-step program (Ajri & Shatar, 2010). The present study revealed that personal qualities were changed among codependents in experimental group by practicing 12-step program and it leads to promote their relationship with others despite of control group.

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