

*Original Article***The role of community health nurses in behavioral modification of parents of children**

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Mental health is of great importance in childhood and the foundation of personality of every individual is laid during this period. Moreover, behavioral problems are common in children, and a lot of the individual, familial, and social disorders originate from the fact that these problems are not treated at the right time. More important is that the behavioral problems of children are rooted in the behavior and upbringing of parents. Therefore, we carried out the present study to investigate the role of community health nurses in modifying the behavior of parents whose children have behavioral problems.

METHODS: This research was a pre- and post-training quasi-experimental study. The study was carried out with the participation of the parents of 44 first-grade primary school children with reported behavioral problems. The instrument used in the study was a self-made questionnaire. The data was analyzed by SPSS software, using descriptive and inferential statistical methods (t-test and repeated ANOVA).

RESULTS: The mean scores of parents' behavior before, immediately after, and one month after training exhibited a significant difference in both fathers and mothers ($p = 0.04$ in fathers and $p < 0.001$ in mothers). Moreover, the mean scores of mothers before and immediately after training and also before and one month after training showed a significant difference ($p < 0.001$ and $p < 0.001$, respectively). However, the mean scores of mothers immediately after and one month after training were not significantly different ($p = 0.53$). Furthermore, the mean scores of fathers before and immediately after training and also before and one month after training were significantly different ($p < 0.001$ and $p < 0.001$, respectively). But, the mean scores of fathers immediately after and one month after training did not show a significant difference ($p = 0.33$).

CONCLUSIONS: Since the group training of parents led to a change in their behavior towards children, it is advisable to prepare and implement such programs.

KEY WORDS: Behavioral problems, community health nurse, parents.

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Since the middle of the 20th century, valuable changes have occurred in identification and definition of behavioral problems in children.¹ Currently, mental health of children and adolescents is an important health issue and the World Health Organization (WHO) has predicted mental problems in children to be one of the main causes of illness, mortality, and morbidity in them.² The prevalence of behavioral problems in primary school students in

Abhar has been estimated to be 43.3%.³ This prevalence was 15.8% and 24.9% in Sari as reported by parents and teachers, respectively.⁴ Several factors contribute to behavioral problems of children, the most important of which are environmental factors such as moral problems of parents, inappropriate family atmosphere, lack of attention and care on the part of the parents, and similar factors. Parental training is one of the important approaches in pre-

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venting behavioral and mental health problems. Group discussion is a valuable educational method that gives participants equal chances of freely expressing their ideas and communicating their thoughts and is very effective in changing the insights and behavior of the participants.⁵ The International Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has studied the effectiveness of parental retraining programs in improving parental skills and reducing the symptoms in children susceptible to behavioral problems. The program found a significant effect on management of children's behavior.⁶ Moreover, Dan Force et al evaluated the effect of parental group training in families with hyperactive and aggressive children. They reported a significant decrease in the problems of these children.⁷ community health nurses have a lot of opportunities to work in groups, and parental groups are one of such cases. Therefore, these nurses can form group sessions, put forward parents' problems with the upbringing of children, and come to a conclusion by active participation. This study was carried out with the aim of determining the role of community health nurses in modifying the behavior of parents with behavioral problems.

Methods

This research was a single group pre- and post-quasi-experimental study. The study population included the parents of all children with behavioral problems studying in the first grade of primary schools of Isfahan who met other inclusion criteria of the study. Using random cluster sampling, 44 of the parents were selected. The following inclusion criteria were considered: the parents should be biological parents of the students, be able to communicate, have the required motivation for participating in the training sessions, be able to attend and cooperate with the training sessions, be able to observe the rules of the sessions, be available through a telephone line or a fixed address, have no known physical or psychological disorder, be literate, and neither the parents nor the children should have auditory, visual, or speech problems.

High risk families (divorced, single parent, and having disabled or chronically ill child) and children referred to consulting centers were excluded from the study. A two-part questionnaire was used to gather the information: the first part included personal and familial characteristics of the parents (age, occupation, educational level, study hours, type of books studied, and number of children); the second part consisted of 20 items on behavioral problems and the way parents behaved towards the child. The questionnaire had 140 items, with options scored based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from very little to very much. The questionnaire was content validated by the professors at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery (Department of Health and Department of Mental Nursing). We evaluated the reliability of the questionnaire by the split-half method, and the correlation coefficient between the two halves was calculated to be 89%. The reliability was calculated to be 92% using the Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient. The information was gathered before, immediately after, and one month after training.

Four training sessions of 120 minutes were held, in each of which 15-20 of the parents participated. In each session, the parents discussed five of the twenty frequent problems put forward in the questionnaire, and 30 minutes in each session was dedicated to questions and answers. In the sessions, the problem under discussion was defined, and its underlying causes as well as the appropriate management approach were discussed. Immediately after and also one month after the training, the questionnaires were redistributed. In order to analyze the data, independent t-test, paired t-test, and repeated measurement test were used.

Results

The results obtained from Kolmogorov test demonstrated that the data of the study has normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests were utilized to analyze the data. It was

observed that mothers at the age range of 26-30 and fathers at the age range of 31-35 had the highest frequency of age group (54.4% and 45.6%, respectively). With regard to occupation, 95.5% of the mothers were housewives and 56.8% of the fathers were self-employed. The most common books studied by the mothers were story books (27.3%) and those by fathers were scientific and social books (22.7%). The highest frequency of the study hours by mothers and fathers was less than one hour (40.9% and 50%, respectively). Out of the parents, 70.2% of mothers and 52.3% of fathers had education up to high school level. Out of the studied families, 45.5% had three children and 54.5% of the children with behavioral problems were first children. The mean behavior score of mothers before, immediately after, and one month after the training were 1.52, 3.55, and 3.54, respectively ($p < 0.001$), and these scores for fathers were 1.51, 3.42, and 3.40, respectively ($p = 0.04$).

Discussion

The study showed that the mean behavior score of fathers and mothers increased after the training. In this respect, the study carried out by Showman et al demonstrated that trained parents had better interaction with their children and were more successful in the upbringing

of their children as compared to untrained parents.⁸ Chronis believes that behavioral training of parents can be considered as one of the interventions effective in psychosocial treatment of children with behavioral problems and the training is effective in reducing parents' stress and improving children's behavior in the classroom.⁹ The results reported by Sonuga-Barke indicated that the participation of mothers in group sessions can reduce ADHD symptoms in children, and create a feeling of well-being and welfare in mothers. Furthermore, parental intervention is a valuable treatment for pre-school children with ADHD.¹⁰

The mean behavior scores of parents reduced one month after the training, which was not statistically significant. In this respect, a study by Zargari Nejad on parents showed that the behavioral problems of children decreased immediately after training sessions.¹¹ Considering the findings of the various studies mentioned above, one can conclude that, similar to the results obtained in this study, parental training in different studies has had significant effects on their behavior.

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this study.

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