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Development of a coping skills educational package and its effectiveness on awareness, attitude, and behavior regarding group conflicts among male adolescents

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Abstract

Introduction: This study addresses group conflicts among Iranian adolescents, developing an educational package to enhance coping skills, awareness, attitudes, and behaviors.

Materials and Methods: This mixed-methods research collected data from April 2023 to March 2024 in Tehran, Iran. The qualitative part included a systematic review and semi-structured interviews to identify skills. The quantitative part involved a Delphi method for validating the package. So, 365 adolescents were randomly selected and completed the Ramzi Collective Violence Questionnaire. Thirty individuals with the highest scores in collective violence were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. The experimental group received training over ten weeks in 20 sessions. One week later, both groups completed the questionnaire again. Qualitative data were analyzed using inductive content analysis, and quantitative data were analyzed using Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) with SPSS 21.

Results: The extracted qualitative codes included practical training, coping skills, cognitive skills, communication and social skills, time and stress management, decision-making and resilience, self-control and creativity, crisis and worry coping, and coping with changes and pressures. In post-test, we found significant increase in awareness (t= -9.76, P= 0.001), improved attitudes (t= -10.17, P= 0.001), and a decrease in conflict-related behaviors (t= 5.73, P= 0.001). These results indicate a significant positive effect of the coping skills training on the awareness, attitude, and behavior of male adolescents regarding group conflicts.

Conclusion: The educational package improved male adolescents' coping strategies for managing group conflicts.

Keywords: Adolescent, Behavior, Conflict, Coping skills, Education

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Introduction

Group conflict, or group fighting, refers to violent confrontations between two or more groups of individuals, usually over ethnic, tribal, ideological, or conflicting interests (1). These conflicts can manifest in various forms, such as street fights, riots, or tribal wars (2). Factors influencing this phenomenon include economic poverty, social discrimination, cultural inequalities, and lack of access to resources and services (3,4). The consequences of group conflicts can include physical injuries, property damage, disruption of public order, and negative impacts on mental and social welfare (5).

Global statistics show that group conflicts are among many countries' most significant security and social issues (6,7). In Iran, especially among adolescents, these conflicts are increasing due to rapid social and cultural changes and sometimes due to a lack of appropriate spaces for the healthy expression of emotions and needs (8-10). This requires special attention from authorities and policymakers to prevent and mitigate this phenomenon with suitable solutions.

Methods of dealing with group conflicts are diverse and include preventive measures, legal interventions, and educational programs (11). Coping education, in particular, can effectively reduce these types of conflicts, as it teaches individuals, especially adolescents, the necessary skills for emotion management, conflict resolution, and positive relationship building (12-14). These educational programs can be offered as workshops, school programs, or community-based activities. However, more research is needed on coping educational packages in Iran, especially for adolescents. Many existing programs focus less on practical and applied skills for dealing with real-life challenges. This gap indicates a need to develop and evaluate educational packages that directly address the needs of adolescents.

From a scientific and practical standpoint, conducting research in this area is essential, as it can increase our knowledge and understanding of the factors influencing group conflicts and methods of dealing with them. This research aims to compile an educational package on coping skills and examine its effectiveness in enhancing adolescents' awareness, attitude, and behavior regarding group conflicts. The research question is whether an educational package can have a positive impact on reducing group conflicts among adolescents and lead to changes in their attitudes and behaviors.

Materials and Methods

In this article, we examine a sequential exploratory mixed-methods research approach conducted in two main parts: qualitative content analysis and determining the effectiveness of the educational model. The research was conducted in Tehran from April 2023 to March 2024.

Qualitative part:

• Systematic review: A systematic review began by defining the research question regarding coping skills and preventing group conflicts among adolescents. The review protocol included objectives, methods, and expected outcomes. A search of sources in reputable databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science was conducted using keywords like "adolescents," "group conflict", "prevention," and "coping skills." Studies were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and data were extracted. The quality of the studies was evaluated using standard criteria, and the data were analyzed.

• Semi-structured interviews: Semi-structured interviews with experts in group conflicts were conducted to identify the necessary coping skills for prevention. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and held at a suitable time and place to ensure participant comfort. The population included experts with experience or expertise related to the research topic. Sampling was purposive and snowball, reaching theoretical saturation after five interviews. Inclusion criteria included having relevant expertise and experience, the ability to provide useful information, and consent to participate in the interview. Exclusion criteria included unwillingness or inability to provide relevant information and non-consent for audio recording.

Analysis was used to dissect the information from the systematic review and interviews. This included careful reading of texts, coding meaningful units, categorization of codes, and analysis of categories to identify patterns and key concepts. This analytical method helped in a deeper understanding of the data and interpretation of the results.

The research team prepared an educational package after extracting and categorizing

concepts. The package was developed based on the findings from the systematic review and semi-structured interviews. The research team included three child psychologists with Ph.D. and two psychometricians with Ph.D. The validity of this educational package was confirmed through the Delphi method with the help of ten experts. The Delphi panel consisted of five child psychologists, four educational planners, and one psychometrician, all holding PhDs.

Quantitative part:

Initially, the Delphi method with ten experts was used to evaluate the educational package. The panel consisted of five child psychologists, four educational planners, and one psychometrician, all holding PhDs. The effectiveness of the educational model of coping styles on adolescents' awareness, attitude, and behavior in Tehran in the face of group conflicts was examined.

Table 1. Summary of the educational program

Week	Educational content
1	Introduction to the program, goals, expectations, and explanation of progress evaluation Review of current status and personal experiences of participants regarding group conflicts
2	Practical training to strengthen communication skills such as eye contact and tone of voice Workshops and group exercises to enhance cooperation and teamwork
3	Techniques for coping with anxiety and failure through breathing exercises and mental imagery Practical exercises for managing tension and sudden changes using simulated scenarios
4	Critical thinking workshops and strengthening positive relationships through debate and group discussion Perspective-changing techniques to address prejudices and biases
5	Developing communication and conflict resolution skills through role-playing games and negotiation Advanced social skills workshops including networking and building effective relationships
6	Time management techniques such as prioritization and planning Stress management workshops and practical exercises to reduce psychological pressure
7	Strengthening decision-making ability and resilience through decision-making exercises Resilience workshops and coping with failure using controlled failure exercises
8	Enhancing self-control and creativity through artistic and creative activities Workshops on finding innovative solutions for common and unusual problems
9	Skills for maintaining calm and effective performance in crisis situations through crisis management exercises Coping with worry and anxiety reduction exercises
10	Exercises for dealing with sudden changes and peer pressure through group games and debate Conclusion, program evaluation, and participant feedback for improving future programs

To determine the sample size for the effectiveness section of the educational program, Cochran's formula was used ($n= Z^2(P*q) / (d^2)$). In this formula, n is the required sample size, Z is the value corresponding to the confidence level (in this study, with a 95% confidence level, Z equals 1.96), p is the expected proportion (in this study, $P= 0.05$), and d is the desired precision (in this study, $d= 0.052$). By substituting these values into Cochran's formula, the sample size was calculated to be 365 participants.

This model was employed in a quasi-experimental study with control and experimental groups. For this purpose, 365 adolescent boys with a history of group conflict were randomly selected, and questionnaires related to awareness, attitude, and behavior were distributed. The 30 adolescents with the highest scores were selected as a sample and placed in two experimental and control groups. The experimental group received training, and the control group remained untrained. After the training, both groups completed the questionnaires again to assess potential changes.

Research instrument

A) Awareness, Attitude, and Behavior Questionnaire by Ramzi (2019): It includes 30

questions on a 5-point Likert scale. This questionnaire assessed awareness, attitude, and behavior in group conflicts. Ramzi validated the content using CVI and CVR. The Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was also found to be 0.91. The correlation coefficient for the test-retest reliability was 0.81 (15). In Iran, the face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed, and Cronbach's alpha was also found to be 0.89 (16). In the present study, the content validity and reliability of this questionnaire were obtained as 0.89 and 0.91, respectively.

To analyze quantitative data, the Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) test was used with SPSS software version 21 to evaluate the effectiveness of the educational model on the variables of interest.

Results

Regarding age, 21.1% of the individuals were 15 years old, 20.5% were 14 years old, 20.3% were 18 years old, 19.2% were 17 years old, and 18.9% were 16 years old. Regarding the fathers' education, 47.9% had a university education, while 52.1% had a diploma or lower. Similarly, 52.1% of the mothers had a university education, and 47.9% had a diploma or lower. Regarding employment, 73.7% of the fathers were employed, 19.7% were retired, and 6.6% were unemployed. Additionally, 64.4% of the mothers were employed, 26.3% were homemakers, and 9.3% were retired.

In the source reviews and interviews, numerous codes were extracted that address the classification of coping skills and personal development. These codes include practical training to strengthen applied skills, coping skills for confronting psychological challenges, cognitive skills such as critical thinking and fostering positive relationships, communication, social skills for improving interpersonal interactions, and time and stress management techniques. Additionally, codes from interviews include strengthening decision-making and resilience, self-control and creativity for initiative in problem-solving, coping with crisis and worry, and coping skills for changes and social pressures. These codes indicate the diversity and breadth of skills that can be used in educational programs and personal development (Table 2).

Table 2. Integrated codes derived from literature review and interviews

Source	Category	Description
Literature review	Practical training	Exercises to strengthen practical and applied skills
	Coping skills	Techniques and methods for dealing with anxiety, failure, tension, and sudden changes
	Cognitive skills	Critical thinking, strengthening positive relationships, and techniques for changing perspectives
	Communication and social skills	Development of communication skills, conflict resolution, and advanced social skills
	Time and stress management	Techniques for time and stress management
Interviews	Decision making and resilience	Enhancing the ability to make decisions and withstand difficulties
	Self-control and creativity	Strengthening self-control and developing creativity to find innovative solutions
	Crisis and worry coping	Skills to maintain calm and effective performance in crisis situations
	Coping with changes and pressures	Exercises for dealing with sudden changes and peer pressure

Extracted educational program: The following coping skills educational program is designed based on a summary of codes from interviews and source reviews. It aims to be effective in increasing the awareness, attitude, and behavior of adolescent regarding group conflicts, as summarized in Table 3.

The Delphi method was used to develop and validate an educational program to enhance coping skills and prevent group conflicts among adolescents. This systematic approach, executed in three phases, focused on gathering and converging experts' opinions. In each phase, questionnaires with varied content relevant to the educational program were distributed to the experts, who were then asked to rate each section on a scale from 1 (least agreement) to 5 (most agreement). The first Delphi stage showed significant agreement among experts, with average scores ranging from 4.05 to 4.65 for the educational content. In the second stage, mean scores decreased from 3.93 to 4.73, possibly due to more precise expert feedback. The third stage saw an

increase in mean scores from 4.18 to 4.91, indicating greater agreement and convergence of views in the final assessment of the educational content. The correlation test between the Delphi stages showed significant correlation, especially in the third stage, with higher correlation coefficients and lower *P*-values, indicating a stronger consensus among

experts after completing the Delphi process (17). Based on these results, the educational program was successfully validated. It can be recognized as an effective tool for strengthening adolescents' coping skills in preventing group conflicts, with the potential to be implemented in educational and training environments.

Table 3. Summary of the educational program

Week	Session	Educational content	Example
1	1	Introduction to the program, goals, expectations, and explanation of progress evaluation	Introduction of a success story of an adolescent who has succeeded in difficult situations using coping skills
1	2	Review of current status and personal experiences of participants regarding group conflicts	Group discussion about personal experiences and sharing stories related to group conflicts
2	3	Practical training to strengthen practical skills such as eye contact and tone of voice	Practical exercises to improve eye contact and tone of voice in hypothetical situations
2	4	Practical workshops and group exercises to enhance cooperation and teamwork	Team games that require cooperation and mutual trust
3	5	Teaching techniques and methods for coping with anxiety and failure through breathing exercises and mental imagery	Workshop on breathing exercises and mental imagery to reduce anxiety
3	6	Practical exercises for dealing with tension and sudden changes using simulated scenarios	Simulated scenarios where participants must quickly react to changes
4	7	Critical thinking workshops and strengthening positive relationships through debate and group discussion	Debate on a controversial topic with the aim of practicing critical thinking and respecting different viewpoints
4	8	Workshops on perspective-changing techniques to deal with prejudices and biases	Role-playing exercises where participants must look at situations from different characters' perspectives
5	9	Developing communication and conflict resolution skills through role-playing games and negotiation	Role-playing games where participants must seek constructive solutions in conflict situations
5	10	Advanced social skills workshops including networking and building effective relationships	Group activities where participants practice how to build effective social networks
6	11	Teaching time management techniques such as prioritization and planning	Workshops where participants learn how to prioritize their daily goals
6	12	Stress management workshops and practical exercises to reduce psychological pressure	Group exercises where participants practice stress reduction methods
7	13	Strengthening decision-making ability and resilience through decision-making exercises	Decision-making games that prompt participants to make quick and responsible choices
7	14	Resilience workshops and coping with failure using controlled failure exercises	Activities where participants face small failures to learn how to learn from them
8	15	Enhancing self-control and creativity through artistic and creative activities	Art workshops where participants create artworks using recycled materials
8	16	Workshops on finding innovative solutions for common and unusual problems	Idea generation competition where participants must present creative solutions for given challenges
9	17	Skills for maintaining calm and effective performance in crisis situations through crisis management exercises	Simulation of a crisis situation and group practice for managing reactions
9	18	Workshops on coping with worry and anxiety reduction exercises	Discussion sessions and calming exercises to reduce worry in stressful situations
10	19	Exercises for dealing with sudden changes and peer pressure through group games and debate	Group games for practicing resistance to peer pressure and sudden changes
10	20	Conclusion, program evaluation, and participant feedback for improving future programs	Group and individual evaluations to measure progress and determine next steps

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results indicated that in the control group, for all three variables of awareness, attitude, and behavior in both the pre-test and post-test, the *P*-values were greater than 0.05 (respectively 0.79, 0.76, 0.58 for the pre-test and 0.85, 0.76, 0.81 for the post-test). These results suggest that the data distribution for both the pre-test and post-test stages is normal (10). Similarly, the results showed that in the training group, the p-values

for all three variables in the pre-test and post-test were greater than 0.05 (respectively 0.90, 0.48, 0.97 for the pre-test and 0.85, 0.80, 0.99 for the post-test). These findings also indicate a normal distribution of data in both stages. Therefore, based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, it can be concluded that the distribution of the variables of awareness, attitude, and behavior in both the control and training groups is normal in the pre-test and post-test stages.

For the analysis of the homogeneity of variance assumption, Levene's test showed that the F-values for awareness (post-test), attitude (post-test), and behavior (post-test) were respectively 0.78, 1.54, and 0.01 with degrees of freedom 1 and 28, and the related *P*-values were respectively 0.39, 0.23, and 0.91. These results indicate that the homogeneity of variance assumption for the variables under study in the post-test stage is confirmed (*P*> 0.05) (18).

The MBOX test was conducted to analyze the homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrix assumption. It showed an MBOX value of 12.06, an F-value of 1.78 with degrees of freedom 6 and 5680.30, and a significance level of 0.10. These results indicate that the homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrix assumption is also confirmed in the post-test stage (*P*> 0.05; F= 1.78) (19).

In response to the research question asking whether training in the coping skills package improves awareness, attitude, and behavior, data analysis was performed using the MANCOVA test. This test is appropriate in conditions where therapeutic interventions exist, and more than one dependent variable is examined, as well as when the assumptions of normal data distribution, homogeneity of error variance, and homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrix have been confirmed. The results showed that the group effect on improving awareness, attitude, and behavior was very significant. The statistical values of Pillai's trace, Wilks' lambda, Hotelling's trace, and the largest root were all 0.99 with an F-value of 551.19 and a significance level of 0.001 for the actual degrees of freedom three and error degrees of freedom 23. These results indicate that there is a significant difference in the improvement of the variable indices between the groups that underwent training in the coping skills package and the control group (F= 88.25, *P*< 0.05) (20). In other words, the training in the coping skills package generally explains 99 percent of the variance in improving the research variable indices in the post-test stage. These findings confirm that coping skills training positively improves awareness, attitude, and behavior (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of MANCOVA

Test	Value	F	Actual df	Error df	P	Effect size
Pillai's Trace	0.99	551.19	3	23	0.001	0.99
Wilks' Lambda	0.01	551.19	3	23	0.001	0.99
Hotelling's Trace	71.90	551.19	3	23	0.001	0.99
Largest Root	71.90	551.19	3	23	0.001	0.99

The multivariate test indicated a significant group effect on the dependent variables after the test. These results indicated a positive and significant effect of group-related programs on improving awareness, attitude, and behavior. The high effect sizes suggest that the observed changes in the dependent variables are primarily due to the group's influence, not random factors (Table 5).

Therefore, the two groups are different from each other, and an independent two-sample t-test has been used to determine this difference, which is mentioned in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of multivariate test results for improvement of research variables

Source of variation	Dependent Variable (Post-test)	Sum of squares Between groups	df	Mean squares	F	P	Effect size
Group	Awareness	1165.88	1	1165.88	1078.02	0.001	0.98
	Attitude	722.53	1	722.53	448.86	0.001	0.95
	Behavior	729.36	1	729.36	212.39	0.001	0.89

Based on the results of the independent t-test, the mean awareness scores in the post-test for the training group (48.13) with a standard deviation of (5.083) and for the control group

(30.47) with a standard deviation of (4.824) show a significant difference. The mean difference with an F-value of (-9.764) and a significance level of ($P< 0.001$) indicates a significant impact of the training package on awareness. The large effect size (0.98) confirms that the training package has a meaningful impact on increasing awareness (21). Data analysis showed that the mean attitude scores in the post-test for the training group (33.93) with a standard deviation of (3.127) and for the control group (20.73) with a standard deviation of (3.936) indicate a significant impact. The F-value of (-10.169) and a significance level of ($P< 0.001$) demonstrated the significant effect of the training package on attitude. The effect size (0.95) indicated a strong impact of the training package on improving attitude.

The findings showed that the mean behavior scores in the post-test for the training group (26.47) with a standard deviation of (4.704) and for the control group (37.93) with a standard deviation of (6.158) indicated a significant impact. The F-value of (5.731) and a significance level of ($P< 0.001$) indicated the inverse effect of the training package on behavior. The effect size (0.89) indicated a considerable impact of the training package on reducing behaviors related to group conflicts (Table 6). Overall, these results indicated that the coping skills training package had a positive effect on awareness and attitude but a negative impact on the behavior of teenage boys regarding group conflicts.

Table 6. T-test results to compare the mean differences in improvement of awareness, attitude, and behavior regarding group conflicts in two groups in the post-test stage

Variable (Post-test)	T-test for equality of means						
	t	df	P	Mean difference	SD	95% Confidence interval	
						Lower	Upper
Awareness	-9.76	28	0.001	-17.67	1.81	-21.37	-13.96
Attitude	-10.17	28	0.001	-13.20	1.30	-15.86	-10.54
Behavior	5.73	28	0.001	11.47	2.00	7.37	15.57

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the coping skills training package has had a positive and significant effect on increasing the awareness of teenage boys. These results are consistent with domestic and international research indicating the effectiveness of coping skills-based training in enhancing adolescents' awareness (22-40). For instance, Aguilar (1) and Musisi and Kinyanda (2) have shown similar positive impacts in different cultural contexts, highlighting the universal applicability of such training programs. Additionally, Niyitunga and Wamaibe have identified key factors influencing conflict relapse in South Sudan, which aligns with our findings on the importance of coping skills in conflict resolution (3). Carpiniello also reviewed the mental health costs of armed conflicts, emphasizing the need for effective coping strategies in war zones (5). The coping skills training program, focusing on introducing goals, presenting success stories, group discussions, and practical training such as strengthening eye contact, voice tone, stress management, and decision-making, has helped adolescents deal more constructively with

social challenges and group conflicts. Critical thinking workshops and perspective-changing sessions have aided in identifying and managing biases and prejudices while coping exercises for sudden changes and peer pressure have strengthened adolescents' social resilience. Summarizing and evaluating progress at the end of the program has allowed participants to assess their progress and plan for future skill improvement. This educational program has not only been effective in reducing group conflicts but also in enhancing individual awareness and abilities of adolescents in managing complex situations.

Recent findings indicate that life skills training has significantly improved adolescents' attitudes. These results align with domestic and international studies (22-40). For example, studies by Niyitunga and Wamaibe (3) and Carpiniello (5) have demonstrated similar improvements in attitudes toward conflict resolution in different populations. Le et al. conducted a cross-country analysis of conflict's economic and social impacts, supporting our findings on the broader implications of group conflicts (6). Fallahi et al. explored the developmental tasks of Iranian middle-aged

mothers, providing insights into the familial context of adolescent conflicts (8). Using various educational and practical approaches, the implemented training program has effectively improved adolescents' attitudes toward group conflicts. In the initial weeks, the introduction of the program and the presentation of success stories from adolescents who have succeeded in difficult situations using coping skills were inspiring. They helped adolescents to have a more positive attitude toward the possibility of change and progress. Group discussions and practical training have strengthened communication skills, stress management, and decision-making, helping adolescents to resist social pressures and act more constructively in the face of social challenges.

The findings of the study indicate that the educational package on coping skills had effects on the behavior of adolescents, which may be due to the focus on identifying and avoiding high-risk behaviors. These results are consistent with the findings of other researchers (22-40). For instance, Le et al. (6) and Fallahi et al. (8) have reported similar behavioral changes in their studies. Kamalikhah et al. examined the impacts of excessive social media use on Iranian adolescents' health, which parallels our findings on the influence of external factors on adolescent behavior (9). In the first week, the introduction of the program inspired the participants and showed them that change and progress are possible. Reviewing the participants' current situation and personal experiences created a space for discussion and mutual learning. Practical training provided in the following weeks, helped strengthen the practical skills of adolescents. Workshops on critical thinking and changing perspectives in the fourth and fifth weeks helped adolescents review their behaviors regarding prejudices and biases. The current research faced limitations in methodology, sampling, data collection tools, and the statistical population. Using a sequential exploratory mixed method may lead to limitations in interpreting and generalizing the qualitative to quantitative results. The snowball sampling method in the qualitative part and the use of Cochran's and Cohen's formulas in the quantitative part may lead to the

selection of heterogeneous samples and errors in sample selection. Questionnaires may only partially measure all aspects of group conflict awareness, attitude, and behavior. In addition, the limitation of the statistical population to adolescent boys in Tehran with a history of group conflicts may make it difficult to generalize the results to other groups. To overcome the limitations encountered in the course of the research measures such as using a pilot study to improve the quality of transferring qualitative findings to quantitative and identifying overlaps and differences; using more diverse sampling methods to increase representation and reduce error; developing and testing new data collection tools that cover a wider range of awareness, attitude, and behavior and have higher validity and reliability; and conducting similar studies in different communities and with different age groups to examine the generalizability of the findings and the effects of cultural and social variables are suggested.

Conclusion
The educational package on coping skills significantly improved the awareness, attitudes, and behaviors of male adolescents regarding group conflicts.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations
The Ethics Committee of Azad University of Semnan approved this research. All participants provided informed consent, and their rights and well-being were prioritized throughout the research.

Code of Ethics
IR.IAU.SEMNAN.REC.1401.039

Authors' Contributions
HSM and MRMS wrote the manuscript, MRMS, and FJ performed the statistical analysis and validation, and HSM and MRMS approved the final article.

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