

## **An Investigation of the Relationship between Social Skills and High Risk Behaviors among the Youth: the Case of Shiraz City**

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### **Introduction**

A young population and delayed socialization for a new world order in the transitional society of Iran, has led to the development of adolescent and youth delinquency. In this context, young people who cannot direct their desires in a normal channel may turn into deviant and delinquent behaviors (Mohammadi asl, 2006: 11). This study considers serious delinquent behaviors which are named as high-risk behaviors, namely, behaviors that increase probability of physical, psychological and social negative consequences (Zadeh Mohammadi & AhmadAbadi, 2008: 88-89). Major causes of death and disease in industrialized and developing countries refer to relatively limited number of high-risk behaviors which are mostly begin from teen and young ages (Anteghini et al. 2001: 1). Teens and young adults are one of the important groups exposed to high-risk behaviors such as AIDS (Mozafarzadeh & Vahdaninia, 2008), suicide (Aliverdinia et al. 2011), sexual activities, violence and drugs (Baskin-Sommers & Sommers, 2006; Flisher & Chalton, 2001). Since social, family and economic factors play an important role in directing behavioral patterns of individuals, particularly adolescents and youth, if these factors do not play a desirable role, adolescents and youth experience challenge and pressures derived from these challenges and difficulties, may attract them towards high-risk behaviors (Barikani, 2008: 192-193). Occurrence and prevalence of high-risk behaviors among adolescents and youth is a result of disruption of social mechanisms and is due to several factors. One of these factors is social skills, which are essential elements of social life and the enjoyment of it can play an important role in deterring high-risk behaviors, especially among youth, because youth age is a period of transition accompanied by various crises. Social Skills are learned adaptive behaviors that enable individuals to interact with different people, expressing positive reactions and avoiding behaviors with negative consequences (Kartledge & Milbern, 1990). Lack of social skills may lead to behaviors such as delinquency, maladjustment, poor educational performance (Nasr Esfahani et al. 2005), drug abuse and addiction (Ghassemzadeh et al. 2007). Having social skills provide context for participation of individuals in the community and help them represent effective social reactions in confronting with really difficult social situations. In fact, social skills, transform people's potential abilities to actual ones and are essential to create, maintain and organize human relationships.

### **Material & Methods**

This research is based on quantitative approach and survey method to collect data and information. Research instrument in this study is questionnaire, consisting of two main parts: The first part of the questions is about the social-economic characteristics of the subjects and the second part is a set of questions measuring (1): four elements of social control (attachment, commitment, involvement and belief), (2): social skills and (3): high-risk behaviors. The validity and reliability of this scale has been designed and evaluated by researchers. Research population include all 15-29 year old youth in Shiraz, whose number in 1390 year, was 477,287 people. In this study, a sample of 600 individuals were determined by using Lin table (Lin, 1978). So the data was collected from 600 cases, and was analyzed using SPSS software.

### **Discussion of Results & Conclusions**

The results of the study showed that there were significant relationships between income, attachment, commitment, involvement, belief, social skills and high risk behaviors. There were also significant relationships between sex, marital status, social class and family structure with high-risk behaviors. Nevertheless, there were no significant relationships between age, education and high-risk behaviors. What should be considered here is that the incidence of high risk behaviors is higher among men than women, among unmarried than married, among the lower class than the middle and high classes, and among those who live independently or with their mothers.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Hirschi's theory of social control. Control theories assume that delinquent behavior is actually because of the absence of something internal or external to the

individual. That something is a constraining or controlling factor (Shoemaker, 2009: 122). Hirschi's social control theory, also known as social bond theory, proposes that juveniles develop attachments to various parts of their social world, and these attachments, or bonds, help deter them from committing acts of crime and delinquency (Ibid: 125). In this theory, the relationship between high-risk behaviors and three institutions of family, school and religion is considered. Correlation coefficients between these variables and high-risk behaviors showed that all four variables (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief), have inverse and significant relationships with high-risk behaviors. This indicates that the more attachment to family and friends, commitment to the norms, participation in various activities and belief to moral principles, the less commitment to high-risk behaviors by the juveniles. In other words, the more degree of social control on people, either officially or unofficially, the less high-risk behaviors. Thus, role of institutions such as the family, school and religion in explaining delinquency or high-risk behaviors should be considered. In particular, in relation to social skills, these institutions also have a profound impact. Because these institutions are extremely influential to internalize normal behavior and social skills for adolescents and the youth. So they perform a strong deterrent role in committing high-risk behaviors.

Regression equation showed that the four elements that Hirschi's social control theory suggest that the elements of commitment and belief were entered in the first and third stages of the regression equation. Gender and social skills were also entered into the regression equation.

Deficit social skills for normal behavior lead to high-risk behaviors. Based on the results, there were a moderate inverse relationship between social skills and high risk behaviors. People equipped with social skills, are enable to represent appropriate and rational reactions in different situations, and avoid behaviors that are dangerous with harmful consequences.

Social skills trainings help at-risk youth to develop techniques for creating or maintaining positive social relationships with family members, peers, and teachers. Social skills training can have long-term effects associated with preventing anti-social behaviors among young people (Heilbrun et al. 2005). Thus, considering this category of skills can be very effective in reducing high risk behaviors.

**Keywords:** High-risk Behaviors, Social Skills, Youth, Shiraz.

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