

## Abstract

**Objective:** This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of optimistic attributional styles in reducing addiction potential and changing attributional styles in female students. **Method:** A quasi-experimental study with pretest-posttest control group research design was used in this study. The number of 40 students was selected by random cluster sampling from the statistical population of female students in Pakdasht high schools. Then, they were randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups. The experimental group received nine training sessions of optimistic attributional styles. Attributional Style Questionnaire and Iranian Scale of Addiction Potential were used for data collection purposes. **Results:** The results showed that the training of optimistic attributional styles leads to the significant reduction of addiction potential. In addition, this will convert pessimistic attributional styles to optimistic attributional styles among students. **Conclusion:** Training optimistic attributional styles can play an important role in the prevention of addiction.

**Keywords:** attributional styles, optimism, addiction potential

# On the Effectiveness of Training Optimistic Attributional Styles in Reducing Addiction Potential and Changing Students' Attributional Styles

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## Research on Addiction Quarterly Journal of Drug Abuse

Presidency of the I. R. of Iran  
Drug Control Headquarters  
Department for Research and Education

Vol. 10, No. 38, Summer 2016  
<http://www.etiadjournal.ir>

## Introduction

Addiction is a colloquial and unscientific term which means pathological dependency on one or more narcotic drugs (Bahari, 2013) and leads to habit formation in the form of substance abuse in individuals. Substance abuse is one of the most important problems at present that has obtained a global range, has gone beyond health borders, and has become a psycho-social and family problem. The use of drugs and other illegal substances by adolescents and young people is one of the most important challenges and public health and psychosocial problems that imposes many personal, social, health, and economic problems on the affected societies and communities (Skiba, Monroe & Wodarski, 2004). Adolescence is a period in which the person experiences rapid biological, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional changes. These normal and unwanted changes are stressful and make the person vulnerable. Research has shown that high-risk behaviors, such as smoking, alcohol drinking, and drug use are initiated before the age of 18. Hence, many of these adolescents may undergo substance abuse or drug dependence disorders in early adulthood (Luck, Jannoti & Morton, 2010). The American National Institute on Drug Abuse has estimated that one in every ten Americans older than 12 years suffers from substance abuse (Grillo, 2010; cited in Karami Rad, Zargar & Mehrabizadeh Honarmand, 2014). In Iran, the decreasing age of addiction and substance abuse among adolescents is being also witnessed. A significant percentage of high school age adolescents who consume a variety of substances and drugs have reported numerous problems in regarding drug use and the diagnostic criteria for substance abuse disorders (Mami, Ahaadi, Naderi, Enayati & Mazaheri, 2012). According to multiple reasons, addiction in women is particularly more important than that in men and its angles have been left unexplored for some unknown reasons (Hajjhasani, Shafiabadi, Pirsaghi & Kianipoor, 2012). Women seek treatment or services to reduce the damage caused by addiction to a lesser extent than men, and women's addiction is filled with stereotypes and pre-judgments that are detrimental to women (Jiménez, Sánchez, Molina & García-Palma, 2014).

Since addiction for women is associated with higher levels of stress, feelings of guilt and shame than that for men, and addicted women experience lower levels of intellectual independence, less social support, and larger stigma in the surrounding environment, women need special attention in terms of the social and political system. Low motivation and refusal of treatment, social stigma, distrust, and the absence of comprehensive health care services are among the barriers to women's access to treatment. The fear of losing their children and revelation of drug use are among the reasons that cause female addicts not to refer to public health services (Kirtadze, Otiashvili & O'Grady, 2013). Athens Foundation's Report has introduced this phenomenon as invisible drug addiction (Athens Foundation, 2009; cited in Jimenez et al., 2014). According to the addictive potential theory, some people are prone to addiction and, thereby, they will become addicted if they are exposed to substances; however, if someone is

not talented to addition, s/he will not get addicted (Mami, 2009). Research findings suggest that unhealthy growth areas, talent, and addiction potential have an essential role in the appearance of addiction (Hiroi & Agatsuma, 2005). For many years, experts from around the world have been seeking for finding the reasons for the tendency to addiction. It is obvious that such knowledge would be useful because it enables professionals to protect the patients who are at risk of greatest harms and threats. In terms of the etiology of the tendency to drug use, different factors have been mentioned; however, none of these factors can explain one's tendency to drug use. In most of the cases, a combination of factors and items are involved in this trend, but, in different socio-cultural and individual circumstances, some factors play a more prominent role (Mami et al., 2012). One of the issues that can be referred to in connection with substance abuse is the predictive role of one's personality traits (Janery & Kan, 2012). One of these characteristics is the learned optimism. Seligman (1979), in his therapeutic application, refers to this concept as an important tool in determining how to cope with personal and social problems. Learned optimism is a key concept in coping with any kind of cognition that is associated with mood and behavioral abnormalities. He believes that it is possible to train people to solve their problems in a realistic method and to keep safe from the negative emotions pertaining to maladaptive styles. Seligman believes that human beings provide explanations for an event and these explanations are referred to as attributional styles. In fact, attributional styles may be internal-external, stable-unstable, and global-specific. He believes that pessimists generally exude external, stable, and global attributions in situations of failure. Hajhoseini (2003) concluded that the attributions of addicted people are more pessimistic than those of the non-addicts. To date, the consequences of causative attributions have been studied in various fields. Depressed individuals attribute the incidence of adverse events to internal, stable, and global causes, and alcoholics also attribute their own relapse to stable, internal, and global aspects. Fortunately, in the past two decades, significant advances have been made in the development of effective programs for the prevention of substance use in adolescents. Accordingly, this question is raised that considering the increasing role of attributional style processes in explaining psychological issues, to what extent this process will be effective in justifying addiction potential?

## **Method**

### **Population, sample, and sampling method**

A quasi-experimental study with pretest-posttest control group research design was used in this study. All the female high school students of Pakdasht city (n = 6643), including Theoretical High School students (n = 5286) and Vocational High School students (n = 1357), constituted the statistical population of this

study. Sampling was fulfilled via random cluster sampling method. In this way, three schools were selected out of the 17 Theoretical High Schools and one school was selected out of the 5 Vocational High Schools. From each school, only second and third grade classes were picked. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed among 160 participants and, then, 40 subjects were randomly selected from among the 60 individuals who had obtained higher scores in addiction potential and lower scores in attributional styles. At the next stage, they were randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups. The experimental group received nine 75-minute training sessions of optimistic attributional styles.

### Procedure

The research training package was developed by the researchers based on Seligman's theory, Beck's cognitive model, and rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) as well as Seligman's positive-thinking therapy. The content of the sessions was as follows.

**Table 1: The content of training sessions of Optimistic Attributional Styles**

<i>Sessions</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Procedure</i>
<b>First</b>	Acquaintance, description of the objectives, and motivation of students	The researcher introduced himself and then wanted the members to introduce themselves. The plan of training sessions was explained to them. Students were encouraged to do necessary exercises during the future training sessions to create optimism and change attributional styles.
<b>Second</b>	Teaching of the concepts of optimism and pessimism and arriving at a common definition for these concepts	Students were asked to define optimism and pessimism. The characteristics of optimistic and pessimistic persons were described. The researcher used a story to express the different interpretation of an optimist from an adverse event with that of a pessimist from that adverse event.
<b>Third</b>	Teaching of internal dialogue and communication between one's thinking and emotional reactions	It was explained that the external stimuli cannot influence the individual alone, but these stimuli are shaped and identified with the individual's attitudes and perceptions of the events. For example, a similar event may happen to two persons and one of them may get furious, but the other one may remain indifferent. This will depend on how the two persons have perceived the event.

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<i>Sessions</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Procedure</i>
<b>Fourth</b>	Thoughts test to assess the correctness of one's beliefs	It was explained to students that automatic thoughts are not necessarily correct and they were helped to assess their thoughts.
<b>Fifth</b>	Teaching of attributional style and its different variants and description of the characteristics of optimistic and pessimistic attributions	Internal-external, global-specific, and stable-unstable attribution styles were described and the features of optimistic and pessimistic attribution styles were described considering the causes of the events and according to three dimensions. They were asked to write their attributions about an unpleasant event and assert which of the triple dimensions is covered by the event. They were also asked to replace their pessimistic attributions with optimistic ones if they had any pessimistic attributions.
<b>Sixth</b>	Teaching of how to avoid catastrophizing, teaching of effective dispute with saddening events	It was explained that this technique refers to the dispute with wrong thoughts, the emotional and behavioral consequences of these disputes and challenges. Training of effective dispute involves estimating evidence, alternative interpretations, and consideration of all the implications.
<b>Seventh</b>	Positive thinking teaching and promotion of awareness of the abilities	The individuals were guided to think of the situations where they have lost something important, have failed in accomplishing a great plan or in which an individual has forsaken them. It was explained to them when a door is closed, another door is open, and this represents the proverb stating "Where one door shuts another opens". The participants were asked to give some examples in this field and to narrate three good things that have happened to them and express the reasons for happening these positive events.
<b>Eighth</b>	Formation of positive thinking using gratitude techniques and reconstruction of memories	Negative beliefs are shaped as a result of important life events. However, if we rethink about the event that has created the negative belief, we may discover that we could have concluded even positive beliefs from that event. Remember a valuable person who is very kind to you and you have never thanked him/her. Write him/her a letter and read it to him/her in person or by phone.
<b>Ninth</b>	The end of the sessions, running the post-test	A summary of the topics discussed at the sessions was stated and the tests were administered.

## Instruments

1. **Attributional Style Questionnaire:** The attribution style questionnaire was used in this study that had been extracted and developed from Seligman et al.'s questionnaire (1979) by Ghasemzadeh & Eslami Shahrabaki (1990). This questionnaire evaluates the content of individuals' causal attributions for negative and positive consequences in the dimensions of causality center, stability, and totality. For the administration of the questionnaire, the participants are asked to imagine that each of the events has really happened to them and, then, to record the causes of each event in the external-internal, stable-unstable, and global-specific dimensions. This questionnaire contains 10 hypothetical situations (five positive and five negative situations). The items are scored based on a 5-point Likert scale and separate scores are calculated for situations of failure and success. In this way, the sum of the odd numbered questions' scores in section A (items numbered 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9) represents the internal-external attributions of failure situations; the section B of the items indicates the stable-unstable attributions of failure situations; and the section C of the items shows the global-specific attributions of failure situations. In addition, the sum of the even numbered questions' scores in section A (items numbered 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10) represents the internal-external attributions of success situations; the section B of the items indicates the stable-unstable attributions of success situations; and the section C of the items shows the global-specific attributions of success situations. Internal, stable, and global attribution styles have been reported to be involved in situations of success; on the other hand, external, unstable, and specific attribution styles have been reported to be involved in optimistic situations of failure. Moreover, internal, stable, and global attribution styles have been reported to be involved in situations of success; but, external, unstable, and specific attribution styles have been reported to be involved in pessimistic situations of failure (Eslami Shahrabaki, 1990). Test retest reliability coefficients of the good and bad outcomes of internal, global, and stable attribution styles have been reported to range from 0.57 to 0.70 (Asgharipoor, Yazdandoost & Zargar, 2012). Peterson et al. reported the reliability coefficients of positive experiences and negative experiences to be equal to 0.72 and 0.75, respectively. Ahadi, Narimani, Abolghasemi & Asiaea (2009) used Cronbach's alpha coefficient to calculate the reliability and obtained the reliability value of 0.78. The studies conducted to determine the validity of this questionnaire showed that the obtained scores predict people's actual attributions for specific life events (Noorali, 2004).

2- **Iranian Addiction Potential Scale:** This inventory was constructed by Zargar in 2006 after the review and analysis of previous tests and scales in this area. This questionnaire has been composed of two factors and consists of 36 items and 5 lie detecting items. Each question is scored on a continuum from zero (strongly disagree) to three (totally agree). In the first factor (active readiness),

most of the items pertain to anti-social behaviors, drug use craving, positive attitude to drugs, depression, and sensation seeking. In the second factor (passive readiness), most of the items pertain to a lack of assertiveness and depression (Zargar, Najarian & Naami, 2008). The reliability of this instrument has been calculated via Cronbach's alpha reliability method and the values of 0.90, 0.91, and 0.75 have been obtained for the total scale, active readiness, and passive readiness, respectively (Zargar & Ghaffari, 2009). Two methods were used to calculate the validity of this scale. In terms of criterion validity, the Addiction Potential Scale discriminated addicted and non-addicted individual from each other well. The construct validity of the scale has been calculated by correlating the scale with the 25-item of Clinical Symptom Scale, which was significant at the level of 0.001 (Zargar et al., 2008).

**Results**

The descriptive statistics of the variables are presented in the table below for each group.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of variable scores for each group**

<i>Group</i>	<i>Test type</i>	<i>Addiction Potential</i>		<i>Attributional Style</i>	
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Experimental</b>	Pretest	120.10	6.93	66.65	5.45
	Posttest	79.05	6.89	113.80	7.96
<b>Control</b>	Pretest	119.60	6.67	68.70	6.08
	Posttest	116.18	5.94	70.20	7.02

Univariate analysis of covariance should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention of optimistic attribution styles in addiction potential. One of the assumptions of this analysis is the normal distribution of data. In this regard, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results are presented in the table below.

**Table 3: Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test examining the normality of addiction potential scores**

<i>Group</i>	<i>Z</i>		<i>Sig.</i>	
	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Posttest</i>	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Posttest</i>
<b>Experimental</b>	0.147	0.097	0.20	0.20
<b>Control</b>	0.176	0.095	0.20	0.20

As it can be observed, the assumption of the normality of data distribution has been satisfied ( $P > 0.05$ ). The other assumption for using this parametric test is the equality of error variances. The results of Levene's test suggested that this assumption has been met ( $P > 0.05$ ;  $F = 1.39$ ). Therefore, the analysis of covariance was performed on addiction potential scores and the results are presented in the table below.

**Table 4: Results of univariate analysis of covariance assessing the effectiveness of the intervention in addiction potential**

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Effect size</i>	<i>Statistical power</i>
<b>Pretest</b>	57.36	1.24	0.27	-	-
<b>Group</b>	14296.45	311.38	0.0005	0.89	1.00
<b>Error</b>	45.91	-	-	-	-

As it is observed in Table 4, teaching of optimistic attributional styles has had an effective role in students' addiction potential ( $F = 311.38$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; Effect size = 0.89).

Multivariate analysis of covariance was used to evaluate the effectiveness of optimistic attribution styles in the components of attributional styles. The test results were indicative of the existence of a significant difference between them ( $P < 0.01$ ;  $F = 18.14$ ; Wilks's lambda). Univariate analysis of covariance was used to examine the patterns of difference as follows.

**Table 5: Results of univariate analysis of covariance examining the patterns of difference in components of attributional styles**

<i>Components</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Effect size</i>	<i>Statistical power</i>
<b>External-internal style in success</b>	725.43	128.48	0.001	0.77	1.00
<b>Stable-unstable style in success</b>	571.03	89.70	0.001	0.70	1.00
<b>Global-specific style in success</b>	595.04	124.01	0.001	0.77	1.00
<b>External-internal style in failure</b>	534.63	65.79	0.001	0.64	1.00
<b>Stable-unstable style in failure</b>	453.27	68.32	0.001	0.64	1.00
<b>Global-specific style in failure</b>	309.43	47.35	0.001	0.56	1.00

As it is indicated in the above table, this training has been effective in all components ( $P < 0.001$ ).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of optimistic attributional styles in reducing addiction potential and changing attributional styles in female students. The results of this study showed that the teaching of optimistic attribution styles is effective in reducing the addiction potential among students. The results of this research are consistent with those of the studies carried out by Hajhoseini & Akhavan (2003); Walton, Castro & Barrington (1994); Zlotnic & Najavits (2005); Shewan & Dalgarno (2005); Garcia (2005); McCormick, Taber & Kruedelbach (2006); and Shaghaghay, Safarnia, Iranpoor & Soltanynejad (2011). Despite the available legal medicinal actions, access to these programs in addicts' life is still minimal and ineffective (Jimenez et al., 2014). For this reason, prevention is of great importance. One of the approaches to the addiction prevention is empowerment. According to this

approach, it is essential to empower individuals so that they can acquire the capabilities that make them resistant to drug use. One of these features is optimism. Optimistic people take advantage of high levels of life expectancy and self-esteem (Moghtader, 2013; Macsinga & Nemeti, 2012). In addition, the individuals who have optimistic attribution styles undergo lower rates of depression and pessimism (Monirpoor, 2004; and Yahyaei, 2013). These people are less likely to get entrapped in drug use. Individuals move towards some sort of internal, stable, and global attribution in order to keep an integrated picture of themselves and maintain self-esteem in pleasant events. On the other hand, people make use of external, unstable, and specific attributions to defend themselves in unpleasant events. However, addicts attribute success to such factors as luck and task difficulty (external factors) and look at success in such an unstable and specific way that they will never be repeated (Hajhoseini, 2003; Garcia, 2005; and McCormick et al., 2006). Students with addiction potential attribute their failures to internal factors and view themselves lacking abilities. Accordingly, the teaching of optimism, with an emphasis on students' causal explanations on pleasant and unpleasant events, could provide students with proper training in such areas as the perception of the concepts of optimism and pessimism, testing thoughts to evaluate the accuracy of their beliefs, attributional styles, and positive thinking. The increase of students' awareness of the effect of attributional styles in mental health and lifestyle helps students substitute positive thoughts with negative thoughts and reduce the addiction potential.

In addition, the results of this study also suggest a significant increase in optimistic attribution style in the experimental group compared with the control group. This finding is consistent with the research findings reported by Comer (2004); Nikmanesh, Kazemi, Raghbi & Rabani Bavojdan (2012); Aghavali Jama'at (2001); Vazehi Ashtiani (2003); Rabani Bavojdan (2010); and Yahyaei (2013). These findings represent that the people prone to addiction attribute success to external, unstable, and specific factors and attribute failures to internal, stable, and global shortcomings and weaknesses. However, in the real sense, success is attributed to internal, stable, and global factors, but failures are attributed to external, unstable, and specific factors. The results also showed that the teaching of optimistic attributional style has been effective in the causal retraining of students against failures and, finally, in the attribution of success to internal, stable, and global factors and the attribution of failures to external, unstable, and specific factors.

It can be concluded that adaptive attributions will be shaped using the teaching of optimistic attributional style and targeting the thoughts that produce unhealthy attributions and challenging them via the provision of alternative attributions that are based on healthy styles. In this way, the individuals will enjoy greater mental health by having a higher rate of control and will be exposed to risky behaviors such as addiction to a lesser extent. It seems that the inclusion of the optimistic attributional style into the educational and treatment interventions can help the

students with addiction potential to prevent the formation of negative attributions towards themselves and the establishment of pessimism to life. In this way, it is possible to stop the person from getting involved in addiction to a great extent. In addition, it is possible to teach students how to recognize themselves and exercise curiosity about the self and the world and take an active position against the life events by means of the teaching of optimism. In fact, the training of optimism helps the individuals evaluate the right and wrong beliefs and cope with the difficulties and the bitterness; it also teaches them that unpleasant events are not uncontrollable, and success and fun events are not inaccessible. Students' thoughts and attributions are altered towards a logical and realistic direction and students are taught to consider their abilities in successes and failures.

The current researcher selected four high schools, including three Theoretical High Schools and one Vocational High School via cluster sampling method. As a minor finding, we can argue that most of the sample units (those with higher scores in addiction potential and lower scores in attributional styles) were the students of the Vocational High School (40 students out of 60 ones). This finding is noteworthy from this perspective that Vocational High School students are at risk of injuries and pathologies to larger extent. These individuals had a poor educational status and suffered some family problems (such as parental divorce and parental substance abuse) and had some friends that oriented them to substance abuse. These are all among the risk factors for addiction, which increase the likelihood of addiction potential in people. At the end, consultants and counselors, parents, and educational authorities are recommended to train the students the optimistic attributional style. Moreover, the authorities are also recommended to implement preventive policies and particularly address vocational high school students. In addition, there is addiction potential in female adolescents, addiction is stressful to women and is followed by guilt and stigma (James et al., 2014). Given the critical role that mothers have in raising children, women should be given special attention in terms of social and political system, which entails the consideration of differences in race, age, economic status, social class, and marital status.

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