

Explaining Social Problem Solving and Its Effect on Mental Health

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Abstract

Social problem solving is defined as problem solving that occurs in natural environment. Social problem solving is a learning, coping and self-directed processes. The aim of this paper is to give introductory information regarding social problem solving. Background information, definitions, theoretical background, research examples, and measurement issues regarding social problem solving is explained. In particular, three types of social problem solving were discussed: rational problem solving, impulsive/carelessness problem solving and avoidance problem solving. The positive outcomes of rational problem solving and its effect of on mental health were provided. In addition to it, measurement tools regarding social problem solving were discussed. Overall, social problem solving is an important concept, which has positive effects on mental health and psychological well-being. This paper can be used an introductory paper for counseling and psychology students.

Keywords: Social problem solving, Mental Health, Literature review, Research

Sosyal Problem Çözme ve Sosyal Problem Çözmenin Zihin Sağlığına Etkisi

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Öz

Sosyal problem çözme bireyin doğal ortamında oluşan öğrenmeyi, baş etmeyi ve öz yönlendirmeyi içeren problem çözme olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu makalenin amacı sosyal problem çözme konusunda giriş niteliğinde bilgi sunmaktır. Bu makalede sosyal problem çözme ile ilgili tanımlar, sosyal problem çözmenin teorik altyapısı, araştırma örnekleri, ve sosyal problem çözme ile ilgili ölçme yaklaşımları açıklanmıştır. Özellikle üç tür sosyal problem çözmeden bahsedilmiştir. Rasyonel akılcı sosyal problem çözme, dürtüsel/dikkatsiz sosyal problem çözme ve kaçınan sosyal problem çözme açıklanmıştır. Bu problem çözme yöntemleri arasından akılcı/rasyonel problem çözmenin olumlu sonuçlarından bahsedilmiş ve bu problem çözme yönteminin psikolojik iyi oluşa etkisi açıklanmıştır. Bunun yanında sosyal problem çözme ölçme araçları ile ilgili bilgi verilmiş, sosyal problem çözme yaklaşımlarında süreç ve sonuç odaklı ölçümlere değinilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, sosyal problem çözme, zihin sağlığı üzerinde olumlu etkisi olan önemli bir kavramdır. Bu çalışma sosyal problem çözmeyi açıklamak amacıyla psikolojik danışmanlık ve psikoloji öğrencileri için giriş niteliğinde bir makale olarak kullanılabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sosyal problem çözme, Zihin sağlığı, Literatür taraması, Araştırma*

Introduction

Social problem solving skills is defined as problem solving that occurs in natural environment. It is a learning, coping and self-directed processes. Social problem solving skills can be improved overtime with learning. Therefore social problem solving skill is a learning process. By problem solving, stress is relieved so it is also considered as a coping process. Finally problem solving requires initiation and taking steps toward problem solutions, therefore it is a self-directed process. Social problem solving intrinsically consists of two themes: problem and solution. Problem is defined as a life situation or task that creates conflict and there is not an effective response available to person. A solution is defined as a response to problem that creates a solution to problem (McGuire, 2001; D'Zurilla & Maydeu-Olivares, 1995). Nezu and his colleagues indicated social problem solving has two components: problem orientation and problem solving style (Elliot, Grant, & Miller, 2004) .

Problem orientation: Problem orientation has two subgroups: positive orientation and negative orientation. Positive orientation includes seeing problem as a challenge, having expectancies, and beliefs that the problem can be solved. People, who have positive orientation tend to have positive emotion that facilitates problem solving, believe in that problem solving takes time and persistence, and they commit time and effort for problem solving. Negative problem orientation includes seeing problem as a threat, source of stress, and having pessimistic thoughts about it. People with negative orientation tend to believe that they do not have adequate abilities to solve problem, therefore they have lower motivation and commitment for problem solving. When faced with problems, encountering difficulties reinforces their belief of not being competent to solve problem effectively (Elliot, 1999; Elliot et al., 2004) .

Problem solving styles: It includes three types of problem solving styles. Rational problem-solving, impulsivity/carelessness problem solving and avoidance problem solving. Each problem solving style provides a different path to problem solving (Belzer, D'Zurilla & Maydeu-Olivares, 2002)

Relational problem solving. Rational problem solving style is similar to problem-solving steps. It includes determining problem, defining it, trying to understand problem, obtaining goals regarding the problem, finding different solutions, assessing and evaluating the solutions, applying the selected solution and re-assessing the efficacy of the solution (Malouff, Thorsteinsson, & Schutte, 2005). People who have relational problem solving style tend to analyze the problem and look for different solutions and selecting best solution using logical thinking (Belzer et al., 2002; Nezu et al., 2010).

Impulsivity/Carelessness problem solving. Although, it shows similarities to relational problem solving skills, it consists of hurried, narrow, and undeveloped problem solving skills. People who have this problem solving style tend to go over the problem steps quickly, find only a few problem solutions among many, and chose one without putting a lot of thoughts on it. The common characteristic of this problem solving style is impulsivity. People who have this problem style tend to behave impulsively and attempt to solve problem in hurry (Belzer et al., 2002; Nezu et al., 2010).

Avoidance problem solving style. It is a dysfunctional problem solving style. It refers to being passive, inactive and dependent. People who have avoidance problem solving style tend to defer problems and wait problems to be solved by themselves or put their responsibilities on other people and expect them to solve problems (Belzer et al., 2002; Nezu et al., 2010).

Research Regarding Social Problem Solving

Although there are numerous studies regarding problem-solving skills, only several examples of them will be discussed in this paper. However, these examples aimed to give audience a sense of studies conducted regarding social problem solving.

Elliot (1999) conducted a study with people with spinal cord injury to determine relationship between social problem solving and physical and

psychological adjustment. The results indicated that participants who had impulsive and carelessness problem solving style had less acceptance of disability, whereas participants who had rational problem solving skills had more acceptance of disability. As expected negative problem orientation were related to less acceptance of disability, whereas positive problem orientation were related to more acceptance of disability. Distress, injury severity and demographic characteristics did not mediate relationship between problem orientation and disability acceptance.

Elliot, Sherwin, Harkins, and Marmarosh (1995) conducted a study with college students to investigate relations between problem orientation factors and emotional well-being. The results indicated that student who had higher problem solving confidence factor had higher positive effect and lower negative effect. They asserted that positive problem orientation promotes emotional well-being in academic situations. As a part of this study, to test validity of the results in a more rigorous condition they had same measurements done during a course examination period. The results indicated that positive problem orientation brought out more, enthusiasm and energetic emotional tone during an intellectual challenge.

Shanmugham, Cano, Elliot, and Davis (2009) conducted a study with caregivers responsible from patients with stroke after their discharge from a rehabilitation hospital. The researchers aimed to investigate relationship between caregivers' depression and their problem solving skills and relationship satisfaction. The results indicated that dysfunctional problem solving skills were associated with higher depression rates at discharge of the patients and at one month follow up. However, they did not find a significant relationship between problem-solving skills and relationship satisfaction.

Siu and Shek (2010) conducted a study with youngsters from 7 to 9 grades in a district of Hong Kong. They aimed to investigate relationship between social problem solving and depression and anxiety. The results indicated that positive problem orientation had significant negative correlation with depression, impulsive/careless style, avoidance style, and negative problem orientation had positive correlations with depression respectively. However, there was not any relationship between relational

problem solving and depression. The positive problem orientation had negative correlation with anxiety; negative problem orientation and avoidance style had positive correlations with anxiety. Impulsivity/carelessness had no correlation with anxiety, and relational problem solving had relatively weak correlation with anxiety.

Measurement

Macguire (2001) examined measurement tools of social problem solving into two groups: problem solving process measurement tools and outcome related measurement tools. Process type measurement tools are designed to assess cognitive and behavioral activities of examinee that are used in problem solving situations. In those measures, underlying pattern of problem solving skills is measured. They measure examinees perception of problem solving approaches. They are usually self-report measures. Most used assessment tools are Social Problem Solving Inventory (SPSI) and Problem Solving Inventory (PSI).

Outcome type measurement tools assess performance or problem solving competence by looking at outcomes. Therefore, those type measurement tools involve value judgments and are affected by environmental conditions and cultural differences. For instance, when elderlies make mistake, confronting with them may be regarded as acceptable problem solving in western culture but not in eastern culture. Some examples of those measurement tools are Alternative Thinking Test (ATT) and Adolescent Problem Inventory (API).

Measurement of social problem solving has been an issue among researchers. Mcguire (2001) indicated that there are several points that need to be considered regarding measurement of problem solving. First, to what extent questions in those measurement tools cover typical life situations. Second, some commonly used tools exert instrumentation problems and have weak psychometric properties. It was recommended developing assessment tools based on behavioral observations. Moreover, usages of problem situations that reflect self-reflective and meta-cognitive process of examinees in measurement tools were advised.

Conclusion

Social problem solving has two components: problem solving orientation and problem solving style. Problem solving orientation has two subgroups positive problem orientation and negative problem orientation. Problem solving style has three subgroups: Relational problem solving, impulsivity/Carelessness problem solving, and avoidance problem solving. The research shows that social problem solving has relationship with acceptance of disability, emotional well-being, depression, and anxiety. The measurement tools of social problem solving can be divided into two groups: measurement tools assessing process and measurement tools assessing outcomes. Among many assessment tools SPSI is the measurement tool that comprehensively assesses theoretical links of social problem solving. Overall, social problem solving has been an important topic and gives valuable information regarding problem solving patterns.

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