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Effectiveness of Social Problem-Solving-Based Life Skills Training on Self-Criticism, Self-Regulation, and Self-Efficacy in Women with Divorce Experience

Seyedeh Maryam. Zarei[1], Askari. Asghariganji[2*]

[1] M.A. Student, Department of Psychology, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Islamic Azad University, Amol, Iran
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology and Counselling, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: a.ganji@cfu.ac.ir

Editor	Reviewers
Habib Hadianfard Affiliation: Professor, Department of Psychology, Shiraz University, Iran hadianfd@shirazu.ac.ir	**Reviewer 1:** Abolghasem Khoshkanesh Assistant Professor, Counseling Department, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. Email: akhoshkonesh@sbu.ac.ir **Reviewer 2:** Abolghasem Khoshkanesh Assistant Professor, Counseling Department, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. Email: akhoshkonesh@sbu.ac.ir

1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The participant-recruitment paragraph indicates that the population consisted of “all women with divorce experience who had active welfare case records at the Social Health Unit of the Welfare Administration of Amol County during the first quarter of 2026,” yet the manuscript does not describe the underlying population size, the number of potentially eligible women screened, the number approached, the number declining participation, or the number excluded and reasons for exclusion. The authors should add a participant-flow description analogous to a CONSORT flow diagram, even if the study is retained as quasi-experimental. Reporting these figures is necessary to evaluate recruitment efficiency, selection bias, and the representativeness of the final sample. It is particularly important because convenience sampling from a welfare-service population may produce a sample that differs systematically from divorced women who do not seek or qualify for welfare services.

The eligibility paragraph contains several clinically consequential criteria, including “no history of severe psychological disorders or personality disorders,” “no current substance or alcohol dependence or abuse,” and “not receiving another treatment or intervention likely to influence the study outcomes.” The manuscript must explain how these criteria were assessed. It is currently unclear whether eligibility was determined by self-report, welfare records, structured diagnostic interviews, clinician judgment, medication records, or another screening procedure. The validity of exclusion decisions depends heavily on the assessment method. The authors should define what constituted a “severe psychological disorder,” identify whether psychotropic medication was permitted, explain how personality disorders were evaluated, and clarify whether common conditions such as depression and anxiety were exclusionary or allowed.

The intervention should also include an explicit assessment of treatment fidelity. The manuscript currently describes the eight session topics but provides no evidence that the planned content was delivered consistently. The authors should state whether fidelity checklists, session recordings, independent observers, supervision, facilitator logs, or attendance records were used. If fidelity was not formally evaluated, this should be acknowledged as a limitation. Because the intervention incorporated several components—problem orientation, brainstorming, SMART goals, cognitive restructuring, diaphragmatic breathing, thought stopping, and relaxation—the absence of fidelity monitoring makes it difficult to determine whether observed effects can be attributed specifically to social problem-solving training or to a broader multimodal psychosocial intervention.

The authors should reconsider the use of the expression “social problem-solving-based life skills training” throughout the manuscript because the intervention content extends beyond conventional social problem-solving procedures. In the seventh session, for example, participants received “diaphragmatic breathing, thought stopping, cognitive restructuring, and relaxation strategies for managing stress.” These elements introduce cognitive-behavioral and emotion-regulation techniques that could independently influence self-criticism, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. The manuscript should therefore distinguish core social problem-solving components from adjunctive techniques and explain the theoretical rationale for combining them. This distinction is necessary to avoid overstating causal attribution to social problem solving alone.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The manuscript would benefit from a more complete characterization of the participants before presentation of the outcome data. The Findings section currently begins with “A total of 30 women with divorce experience participated in the study and were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups,” but no demographic or divorce-related characteristics are provided. At minimum, the authors should report age, education, employment status, socioeconomic status, number of children, custody status, duration of marriage, time elapsed since divorce, remarriage status, and, where ethically and methodologically appropriate, history of counseling or psychiatric treatment. Baseline comparability of the two groups on these characteristics should also be described. These variables may materially influence self-criticism, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and responsiveness to post-divorce interventions.

The description of the Levels of Self-Criticism Scale states that “The instrument contains 22 items and measures two dimensions, namely Internalized Self-Criticism and Comparative Self-Criticism,” and subsequently reports Cronbach’s alpha values of 0.74 and 0.81 in the present study. The authors should provide the number of items assigned to each subscale and explain exactly how total and subscale scores were calculated, including whether any items required reverse scoring. Because the primary analysis appears to use a total self-criticism score whereas subsequent analyses separately examine the two dimensions, the psychometric justification for computing a total score should also be given. If the original scale is theoretically multidimensional, combining the dimensions into a single total score requires evidence that such aggregation is defensible in the present sample.

The paragraph describing the Short Self-Regulation Questionnaire requires careful correction of scoring information. The manuscript states that the Iranian version contains 20 items, yet earlier source material reported a possible score range

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inconsistent with a 20-item questionnaire. For a 20-item measure scored from 1 to 5, the mathematically possible total score should ordinarily be 20–100 unless specific scoring modifications are used. The authors should verify the scoring protocol against the validated Persian version and correct the manuscript throughout. They should also specify whether negatively phrased items were reverse-coded, provide the exact item allocation across self-awareness, goal setting, action planning, and self-monitoring, and clarify whether the four component scores were prespecified outcomes or exploratory secondary outcomes.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale paragraph states that the measure was "developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem" while the earlier study description refers to a 1979 development date. The authors should carefully verify the bibliographic and historical attribution of the version actually administered. There have been multiple developments and adaptations of the General Self-Efficacy Scale, and the commonly used 10-item version has a specific publication history. The manuscript should identify the precise version, Persian translation, scoring method, and validation source used in this study. This correction is important because psychometric validity should be linked to the exact instrument administered rather than to a broadly related version.

The intervention paragraph states that "The experimental intervention consisted of a structured social problem-solving-based life skills training program developed according to the framework of D'Zurilla and Nezu," but the intervention remains insufficiently described for replication. The authors should report who delivered the sessions, the facilitator's professional qualifications, prior experience, and specific training in the D'Zurilla–Nezu model; whether a treatment manual was used; whether sessions were delivered face-to-face or online; approximate group size; setting; use of homework; and procedures for reviewing homework. The authors should also clarify whether all 15 participants attended sessions simultaneously or whether separate groups were formed. Replicability of a behavioral intervention depends on these procedural details.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.
Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.

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