# The Effectiveness of Emotion Regulation Skills Training on Happiness of Relief Workers of Red Crescent Society in Bushehr Province, Iran

**Mehdi Nezamian-Mojarad**[1], **Hossein Asadi-Rad**[2]

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**Original Article**

## Abstract

**INTRODUCTION:** The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of emotional regulation skills training on happiness of relief workers of Red Crescent Society in Bushehr province, Iran.

**METHODS:** This was a semi-experimental research with pretest, posttest, and control group. The statistical population of this study included all relief workers of Red Crescent Society of Bushehr province in 2018. The study tool was the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). Relief workers received emotional regulation training in eight 90-minute sessions, and the control group did not receive any training during this period.

**FINDINGS:** The comparison of pretest and posttest scores of groups showed a significant difference between the scores of relief workers in experimental and control groups in terms of happiness. Thus, emotional regulation training was effective on increasing happiness.

**CONCLUSION:** The results of this study show that training of emotional regulation skills has important implications for improving the mental health of relief workers.

**Keywords:** Happiness; Emotional Regulation; Relief Workers of Red Crescent Society

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## Introduction

Employment plays a very important role in personal and social life. Regardless of financial security, employment can satisfy some fundamental human requirements including physical and mental mobility, social interaction, and feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and potency. Although a suitable job is an important factor in satisfying basic requirements and improving the social conditions of individuals, it can sometimes become a major source of psychological stress, which will result in a satisfying job progressing over time towards dissatisfaction and motivelessness (1).

In this regard, rescue is among the professions that are associated with stressors due to their nature and is one of the stressful and pressuring activities due to the collection of stress factors during a crisis. Relief workers are among the groups that are present at the accident scene since the first moments of an accident or disaster to implement relief tasks (2). Although happiness is an important component in positive psychology, in the past decades, psychologists have focused mainly on the negative aspects of the mind and mental disorders. However, in recent years, researchers such as Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (3) have performed extensive investigations on the positive dimensions of human beings. In general, positive psychology is the study of positive experiences, positive personality traits, and their growing methods (4).

The concept of happiness is vastly influenced by various factors including social structures and interactions as well as the beliefs of individuals (5).

1- MSc, General Psychology, Head of Dayyer Branch, Bushehr Red Crescent Society, Bushehr, Iran
2- PhD, Clinical Psychology, Bushehr University of Medical Sciences, Bushehr, Iran
Correspondence to: Mehdi Nezamian-Mojarad, Email: helaldayyer@yahoo.com



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Happiness is often associated with positive work and life outcomes such as life satisfaction, good health conditions, and high work performance and commitment. In an experimental study, it was found that happy employees had higher productivity compared to those who were less happy (6).

Walsh et al. (7) in a study indicated that happiness was accompanied by higher occupational success and promoted positive emotions among employees. Overall, happy individuals have a higher intrinsic motivation towards work, thus increasing their productivity (8). Additionally, employees' happiness and well-being is an essential issue in the organization, which leads to the greater commitment of employees to their jobs (9). In this regard, Albert Schweitzer believed that success is not the key to happiness, but rather happiness is the key to success (7). In fact, promoting happiness in employees can improve their performance and promote their mental health; therefore, enhancing happiness among relief workers can increase their intrinsic motivation to work.

Despite the importance of happiness in organizations, less attention has been paid to the happiness of the Red Crescent relief workers, most studies in this area have been focused on nurses and teachers, and there is a shortage of research on relief workers. In this regard, the concept of emotion regulation has been extensively examined in the area of psychology in recent years. Emotions can be either harmful or beneficial. They can be harmful particularly when their type, intensity, and persistence are inappropriate with respect to the situation (10). Moreover, emotion regulation comprises of conscious and unconscious strategies to increase, maintain, and decrease the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive components of emotional responses (11).

Ochsner and Gross (12) defined emotion regulation as behavioral, cognitive, attentional and emotional strategies to maintain or change an emotional experience or its emergence. Thus, from the research reports, it can be inferred that the reduction of happiness among relief workers can be due to weakness in emotion regulation. Taking into account the importance of this issue and the shortage of investigations on the mental health of relief workers, the present study was conducted with the aim to investigate the effect of emotion regulation training on the promotion of happiness among relief workers in Bushehr Province, Iran.

## Methods

The present study was a semi-experimental study with pretest, posttest, and a control group. The study population consisted of all relief workers of the Red Crescent Society of Bushehr Province in 2018 including 470 individuals. To select the subjects, the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was first distributed among 100 relief workers in Bushehr Province. After analyzing the questionnaires, 30 individuals with the lowest OHQ scores were invited to participate in the study. After coordination, the relief workers were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. Then, the experimental group took part in 8 sessions of emotion regulation training based on the Gratz and Gunderson (13) theory, as 1 session a week with each session lasting 90 minutes. The control group received no training during this period. At the end, both groups responded to the OHQ again.

The OHQ was utilized to collect data. This questionnaire was first developed by Argyle and Loo based on the Argyle and Crosland theory. This scale includes 29 items and assesses an individual's sense of happiness, including the 5 factors of satisfaction, positive mood, health, efficacy, and self-esteem. Since the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) is one of the most successful scales regarding depression, Argyle reversed the terms about his depression scale after consulting with him, hence preparing 21 items and adding 13 more items to cover other aspects of happiness. Then, the resulting scale was distributed among a number of students; given the formal validity of the items and the elimination of some items, the final form included 29 items. The score for each item ranges from 0 to 3. The highest and lowest scores a subject can gain in this scale are 87 and 0, indicating the highest level of happiness, and dissatisfaction and depression, respectively. The normal score on this test is 40-42 (14).

This scale was employed in a study conducted by Alipour and Noorbala with a sample of 101 students of the University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (15). The internal consistency coefficient for men and women was 0.94 and 0.90, respectively; in addition, the retest coefficient of this scale after 7 and 3 weeks in a sample of 25 subjects was, respectively, 0.78 and 0.79 (15).



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**Table 1.** Summary of emotion regulation training sessions (13)

| Sessions | Session subject |
|---|---|
| First session | Implementation of pre-test, communication, and conceptualization of the problem |
| Second session | Training of awareness of positive emotions |
| Third session | Training of awareness of negative emotions |
| Fourth session | Training of accepting positive emotions |
| Fifth session | Training of accepting negative emotions |
| Sixth session | Training of marketing positive emotions training and expressing them |
| Seventh session | Training of marketing negative emotions training and expressing them |
| Eighth session | End of sessions and implementation of posttest |

The content of the training sessions is presented in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics indicators and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were used to analyze the study and inferential data, respectively. All analyses were carried out using SPSS software (version 25, IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

## Findings

The mean age of all the participants, the experimental group, and the control group was 28.36, 27.87, and 28.85 years with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.62, 2.22, and 3.02, respectively. Furthermore, the results of investigation of the descriptive indicators of happiness are reported by groups in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation (SD) of happiness in the pretest and posttest and the two groups

| Variable | | Experimental group | | Control group | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| Happiness | Pretest | 81.33 | 5.46 | 82.00 | 5.79 |
| | Posttest | 88.47 | 6.17 | 81.53 | 7.86 |

As indicated by the results in Table 2, the happiness posttest score of the experimental group increased, which was followed by inferential statistics to check whether this difference was significant. In this regard, given the statistical method required, the ANCOVA presumption was first examined. First, the data had to be normal. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test for examining the normality of the data distribution for the experimental and control groups was a statistic of 0.80 and P = 0.54 and 0.49 and P = 0.97, respectively. Hence, the normal distribution of the data was accepted.

Then, Levene's test was performed to check the consistency assumption of variances in the happiness scores; with F = 0.31, 1 degree of freedom [(df) = 1], two df = 28, and P = 0.58, it can be concluded that the variances of the two groups in all the variables studied were consistent, that is the homogeneity assumption of the variances was established.

In the third assumption, the homogeneity of the regression slope was examined, showing that there was no significant difference between the slopes at the happiness factor level; thus, the assumption of the slope homogeneity was realized (Table 3).

In the following, to investigate the effect of the experimental intervention, univariate ANCOVA was performed on posttest scores by controlling the pretests of the dependent variable of the study (happiness). Table 4 presents the results of ANCOVA on the posttest scores by controlling the pretests of the dependent variables of the study. Based on the results presented in the table, given the significance level obtained in happiness, which was less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected and the study hypothesis is confirmed with 99% confidence.

The mean of the experimental group was higher compared to the control group, and emotion regulation training was effective on improving happiness among the employees (F = 13.07; P = 0.001). Moreover, the interaction effect (eta-squared) indicated that 36% of the changes in the happiness of the relief workers in the experimental group can be attributed to the emotion regulation training.

**Table 3.** Summary results of assessment of homogeneous slope regression assumption of pretest and posttest scores at factor levels

| Source | Variable | Sums of squares | Degrees of freedom | Mean squares | F | Significance level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pretest × Group interaction | Happiness | 0.61 | 1 | 0.61 | 0.03 | 0.86 |



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**Table 4.** The results of analysis of covariance of differences of adjusted mean values of training scores on happiness of relief workers

| Source of change | Sum of squares | Degrees of freedom | Mean squares | Ratio F | Significance level | $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | 396.03 | 1 | 396.03 | 13.07 | 0.001 | 0.36 |
| Error | 696.66 | 23 | 30.29 | | | |
| Total | 218510 | 30 | | | | |

## Discussion

The present study was carried out with the objective to investigate the effectiveness of emotion regulation training on happiness of relief workers of Red Crescent Society in Bushehr Province. The results were indicative of the effectiveness of the training. This finding was in line with the results of the investigations by Keshavarz (16), Banihashemian-Jahromi (17), Foulad-Chang and Hasan Nia (18), Rezvan et al. (19), Ortner et al. (20), and Schafer et al. (21). These studies indicated the relationship between emotion regulation and happiness and the effectiveness of emotion regulation on happiness in different samples. To explain this finding, it should be initially pointed out that emotions are one of the most important parts of any human life, and given the nature of the rescue profession, these individuals are susceptible to emotional problems. In fact, all humans encounter problems in their daily lives challenging their ability to regulate and adjust their emotions. In this regard, the appropriate regulation of emotions can guarantee happiness in individuals. It is important to note that happy people are more interested in the tasks they perform and are more involved in them, thus enhancing their productivity. In contrast, dissatisfied individuals do not like their job and tend to be careless, which results in negative consequences in their work. Happy people have more intrinsic motivation to participate in work, appreciate more autonomy, and are more creative; hence, they get more involved in tasks (8).

People who are well capable of regulating their emotions can model them in the form of effective terms, effectively use emotional strategies, make suitable decisions in stressful situations, and employ various skills required to develop effective social behavior. Such findings suggest that individuals with high emotion regulation ability can more successfully combine their true emotions with the positive emotional show, as they can quickly resolve the conflict between their internal and apparent emotions (22).

In explaining this finding, it can also be pointed out that inability in cognitive processing of emotional information causes emotional and cognitive distress and disruption among individuals. This inability disrupts the organization of emotions and cognitions among relief workers, in addition to causing failure, and consequently, reduced happiness in a stressful situation. In this training, while identifying positive and negative emotions and the effect that their type of tool applies on their happiness, it was attempted to promote happiness among the relief workers by delegating homework and reviewing it in the next session.

Additionally, various techniques are employed in emotion regulation all of which can enhance happiness in relief workers. Engaging oneself (such as calling a close friend), participating in some tasks (such as helping others, surprising a friend by buying him a gift), comparing oneself with those under worse condition, deliberately creating positive emotions (e.g., watching a movie), temporarily relieving painful situations (such as creating an imaginary wall between oneself and one's problems), replacing thoughts and reinforcing other senses (such as squeezing pieces of ice or listening to music at a high volume) are techniques exploited to regulate emotions. All of these techniques can manage negative emotions towards positive emotions and pave the way for promoting happiness. It can also be declared that a review of the results of studies in this area indicates that people with a low ability for emotional management are more likely to experience diagnostic symptoms of mental disorders including depression, anxiety, etc. (23).

The sample of the present study consisted of the relief workers of Red Crescent Society of Bushehr Province, which are a specific group culturally, socially, and economically, so caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to a larger community and to all employees. In addition, in this study, questionnaires and self-



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assessment tools were employed to collect data. The use of self-assessment tools and the impossibility of qualitative evaluation may cause biases in responses, which requires greater attention.

## Conclusion

Based on the study findings suggesting that emotion regulation training enhances happiness among the relief workers of Red Crescent Society, psychological services such as emotion regulation training can be used to promote mental health among relief workers. Finally, it is recommended that posters and brochures with the key content of emotion regulation training be distributed among relief workers at their workplace or through online magazines and messengers.

## Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

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