

Psychosocial Effects of a Soft Skills Intervention for Adolescents with Substance Use

Disorder as Delivered by Near-Peers: A Second-year Pilot Study

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Introduction

Background:

- Transition into the workforce presents a challenge for most adolescents and is further complicated by substance use disorder (SUD). This diagnosis is associated with social impairments¹ and maladaptive behaviors, which can create a barrier to employment and vocational success without intervention.²
- Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem solving contribute to long-term job success.^{3, 4}
- Self-efficacy is a primary driver of career interests, goals, and actions according to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT).⁵

Purpose of Study:

To examine the effects of using a manualized, work-related soft skills training program for adolescents with SUD to address social functioning as it relates directly to employment.

The ASSET Program

ASSET is a 12-session manualized group intervention that addresses nine areas of social functioning tied to vocational success (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Skill areas



Procedures:

This iteration of ASSET was facilitated by three master's level OT students with an average age of 24 who simultaneously completed a Level I psychosocial FW placement and their research project implementation at the same facility. The ASSET group met 3x/week for 4 weeks, each session lasting 1.5 hours.

Curriculum:

Each session included didactic learning, group discussion, activities, role play, worksheet completion, and guided self-reflection.

Participants:

Twelve adolescent inpatients diagnosed with SUD at an alternative school/treatment center in Florida. One participant was female (8.4%) and eleven participants were male (91.6%). The mean age was 15.75 ($SD = 1.36$).

Methods

Design & Analysis:

Quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design; measured effects of intervention using descriptive and paired sample t -test statistics. Data was collected on mental health and key constructs underlying SCCT (Table 1).

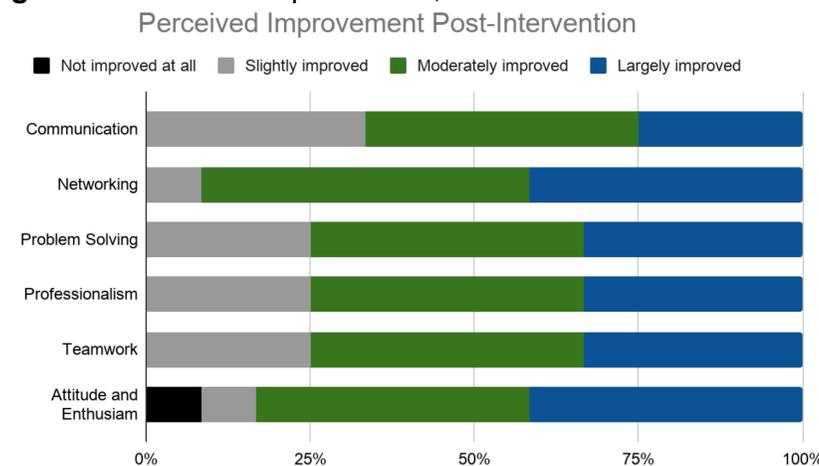
Table 1. Instrumentation

Table 1	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Self-efficacy	General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) ⁶	GSE
	Perceived Empathic Self-efficacy Scale (PESE) ⁷	PESE
	Perceived Social Self-efficacy Scale (PSSE) ⁷	PSSE
	N/A	Perceived Improvement (PI)
	N/A	Perceived Confidence (PC)
Soft Skills	Social Functioning Questionnaire (SFQ) ⁸	SFQ
Mental Health	Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7) ⁹	GAD-7
	Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item (PHQ-9) ¹⁰	PHQ-9
Outcome Expectations	Career Decision Making Outcome Expectations (CDMOE) ¹¹	CDMOE
	Vocational Outcome Expectations-Revised (VOE-R) ¹²	VOE-R
Substance-Related Occupational Dysfunction	Lifestyle History Questionnaire (LHQ) ¹³	LHQ

Results

- Self-efficacy increased significantly (Figure 4) as evidenced by GSE scores, $t(11) = 2.33$, $p = 0.04$, $d = 1.04$.
- A subgroup of participants with higher substance-related occupational dysfunction as measured by the LHQ at baseline reported large ($d = 0.95$) increases in self-efficacy.
- A second subgroup with lower levels of substance-related occupational dysfunction reported very large ($d = 2.00$) increases in self-efficacy.
- Participants reported perceived improvements and increased confidence in work-related social skills (Figures 2 & 3).

Figure 2. Perceived improvement, condensed.



Results (cont'd)

Figure 3. Perceived confidence, condensed.

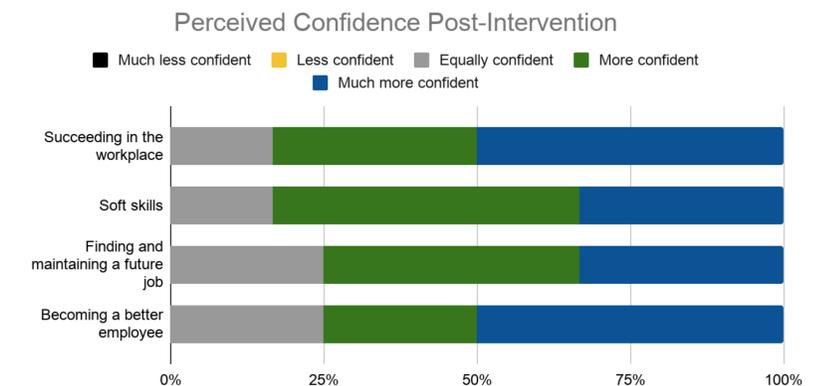
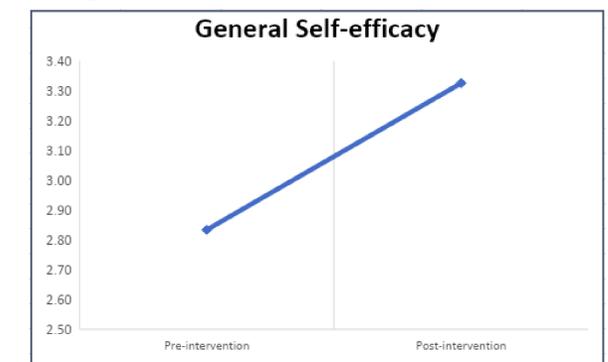


Figure 4. Average GSE scores.



Discussion

Discussion:

- Effect sizes were large to extremely large for self-efficacy, which is a primary driver of successful career engagement.
- While all participants showed positive gains in self-efficacy, this intervention proved to have the greatest effect on adolescents with lower levels of substance-related occupational dysfunction.

Limitations:

- Attrition (20%) due to discharge from facility.
- Self-report bias.
- Underpowered to detect statistical significance across all domains, while clinical effects were evident.
- Small homogenous sample ($n = 12$) and single-site implementation limits generalizability.

Implications:

- This study corroborates the findings of last year's study, but more research is needed with larger, representative samples.
- A manualized, work-related soft skills program improves general self-efficacy, a driver of vocational success, in adolescents.

References available upon request: aconnor@FGCU.edu.