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Annotated Summary Of Research Studies On the Adkins Life Skills Program

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New York City's Employability Skills Project (ESP) represented an early innovative approach to helping people move toward self-sufficiency and away from welfare dependency. Using a client-centered approach that helped people make informed, realistic and satisfying career choices this Human Resource Administration program's success, documented in several annual reports (1988, 1989, 1995), moved quickly from a demonstration project to broad implementation. The core program in the ESP was the Adkins Life Skills Career Development Program which was used concurrently with vocational training, education (ABE, GED, ESL) and work experience components. The first demonstration project included 300 participants. Using a pre-post test control and comparison group design ESP researchers reported results that included high attendance and graduation rates with 27% employed in full-time jobs, 24% enrolled in educational programs and 25% in vocational training programs as compared to 86% of the control group who were engaged in none of these activities. Following the success of this project ESP was expanded. Larger numbers of clients were involved and ESP was added to HRA's Work Experience Program. It eventually formed the basis for the city's BEGIN program which was offered in a variety of different sites throughout New York City.

Burton

In a pilot program, conducted at one Head Start Center, funded by the New York City Agency for Child Development 18 parents, primarily from the Dominican Republic (age range 24-45 yrs., mean age 32, mean number of children 2.4, no work experience), completed an Adkins Life Skills Program. The preliminary report (Burton, 1996) noted that following the intervention results indicated that participants' Career Maturity scores increased particularly with respect to making informed career choices and having specific knowledge about occupations they were interested in. Participants' Career Self- Efficacy greatly increased with 80% reported being very certain about their ability to obtain a job as compared to 40% on the pre-test. All parents said they were very interested in pursuing future education and training and 73% made specific plans to do so.

Colon-Wagner

Colon-Wagner (1999) addressed the need for social workers to provide programs that combine life skills with employment training as part of case management services. She notes in her study that New York City's Work Experience Program (WEP) was problematic in really helping people move toward self-sufficiency because it severely restricted education and training. To develop a model program for homeless women in a large social service agency on the lower East side of New York City Colon-Wagner chose the Adkins Life Skills Program because other programs failed to stress the importance of meeting women's self-esteem needs and their perception of themselves as failures. Participants who completed her vocational readiness program demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem, career maturity and greater psychological preparation for the world of work.

Contreras

Contreras' study (1981) examined the hypothesis that a modified Adkins Life Skills Program would facilitate appropriate classroom behavior of adolescent high school students who had been identified as "aggressive students." Twenty-two students in the experimental group included 11 who were Special Education students, 8 who were classified as mentally retarded, 2 as emotionally disturbed and one learning disabled.

In the group there were 14 Males, 8 Females, 17 African-Americans, 3 Hispanics, and 2 Whites. The mean age was 16 Yrs. and 9 months. Her study was based on the idea that if adolescents feel more skillful and adequate in important life situations (e.g. having goals and becoming more economically able to support oneself) this could serve strengthen their mental health and serve to preclude negative behaviors.

The Life Skills experience she hypothesized with its emphasis on dignifying the person, emphasizing positive reinforcement, providing descriptive rather than evaluative feedback, role-playing, and helping students express themselves in a group format with supportive group dynamics--all this would result in decreasing the incidence of physical aggression and the number of disapproving statements of others in the classroom and in increasing the number of approving statements. The intervention consisted of Units 1,2 and 4 of the Adkins Life Skills Program with groups meeting for 2 hr. periods one time a week for 10 weeks. Results of the intervention were compared to two matched control groups, one group receiving no treatment and the other group a RAP group that listened to and discussed music.

Measurements employed were videotaped class sessions rated by 5 school psychologists for the target behaviors and reports of principals and guidance counselors on frequency and number of suspensions. The results indicated that the Life Skills intervention significantly decreased physically aggressive behavior and

physical disturbances in the classroom. It did not significantly affect an increase in approving statements towards others nor decrease unapproving statements.

The author concluded that several school constraints e.g. changing rooms affected the results of the study but that the Life Skills intervention could be used as an important part of efforts to mainstream special education students into the broader classroom. The importance of Contreras' findings are significant. The Hamilton Fish Institute (2001) cited Contreras' research for its use of an effective program that reduced violence, thus making schools safer for learning.

Cullinane

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the Adkins Life Skills Program on the Career Development of Community College students (Cullinane, 1985). Two different groups of students participated in a college course that used the Career Choice Units (1, 2 & 3) of the Life Skills program as its core curriculum. One group consisted of students who were placed in a mandated remedial program known as "College Skills" because they had low reading scores. The other group consisted of typical mainstream students who were taking the Life Skills course for college credit (Age range for both groups 17-48 yrs., Mean age 19.7; Mixed SES levels).

Measures used to assess career development progress included Super's Career Development Inventory and criterion measures related to the behavioral and knowledge learning objectives for each of the Life Skills Units. Pre and Post-test scores on these measures for the experimental group were compared to scores of two comparison groups of community college students. The results indicated that both experimental groups, remedial and mainstream students, had significant gains in readiness for career choice, knowledge of preferred occupation, certainty of choice, attitude toward career choice, planning and exploration, self-assessment and use of resources for career exploration. Both groups' responses to the intervention were highly favorable. Another outcome of the study was the decrease in feelings of resentment from students who were placed in the remedial group by the college admissions process as the Life Skills group experience helped them express their feelings and begin to make more informed choices.

Curcio

Curcio (1997) explored the role of employment, training and welfare on women who experienced domestic violence in a Job Readiness program which uses the Adkins Life Skills Program as its central component in one of New Jersey's County Welfare-to-Work Programs. Survey measures were given to a larger group and in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 Life Skills participants. Curcio used "the comfort, security and respect" women experienced as a result of their participation in Life Skills groups to explore sensitive issues of domestic violence and conflict. Life Skills outcomes described in the study include increased self-knowledge and

self-esteem and an increase in participants' ability to describe the effects of traumatic experiences that affected their ability to obtain employment.

Gibbs

In an evaluation study conducted by the Employment and Training Commission of Warren County (Gibbs, 1992) fifteen Life Skills group participants were interviewed in-depth to explore their reactions to the experience. All of the participants thought it was a wonderful experience and would recommend it to their friends " Yes I would recommend this to a friend, it helps you with one of the most important decisions you'll ever make". Learning about themselves and the world of work was frequently mentioned as very important to participants " I learned there are hundreds of career opportunities, you just have to know what is best suited to you and be willing to put the effort into it to reach your goal". Others mentioned the importance of the support system the group provided, the way the class changed their outlook on life, the changes that people were able to make in their lives and the feelings of confidence they gained from the experience. A frequent comment by those interviewed was how important the Life Skills class would be for high school students to take so that they could make more informed choices earlier " to help them know what they want to do with their future".

Grothe

Grothe (1974) examined the effectiveness of one unit in the Adkins Life Skills Program "Developing Effective Interview Skills" to help welfare recipients present themselves effectively in the employment interview. The sample included 68 females, age range 17-57, mean age 35, Ethnicity African-American. The results, as measured by expert-rated videotaped simulated employment interviews, indicated that the Life Skills intervention was an effective method for inducing change in participants' ability to demonstrate positive interview behavior. Reading comprehension and age of participants were not significant factors affecting acquisition of new interview behaviors.

Hagin

In a four-year federally funded project Another Chance Hagin and her associates (1991) developed a model program to meet the educational and vocational needs of 60 learning disabled adults (mean age 30.2, mean reading grade- level 5.1, 53% male, 47% female, 40% white, 28% Black, 27% Hispanic, 5% Asian) whose lack of literacy skills severely affected their educational and occupational achievements.

The interventions in the program were comprehensive in nature. They included diagnostic assessment, individual tutoring in reading, writing, mathematics and

study skills. Innovative to this program was its attention to the vocational needs of the population who all had problems with unemployment or underemployment and lack of mature vocational planning. To address these issues the Career Choice and Planning Units of the Adkins Life Skills Career Development Program were used.

Evaluation of program outcomes with respect to educational achievement, vocational maturity and emotional adjustment were assessed with pre and post-test measures. Levels of Career Maturity as measured by the Adult Vocational Maturity Measure (Manuele, 1980, 1985) improved significantly (2 standard deviations above control group means). Changes in employment status were also observed with 48 % of the group becoming employed and 70% of the group deciding to continue their education. Participants also reported higher levels of confidence, optimism and achievement motivation.

The HOPE Program (first study)

Client profiles and outcomes for the years 1994 through 1997 are documented in a study conducted by the HOPE Program (1997). The HOPE Program serves approximately 70 homeless men and women a year with a program model that includes job readiness skills, computer and work-place literacy, case management, follow-up and support.

Its 18-week work readiness program focusing on choice and empowerment is based on the Adkins Life Skills Program: Career Development Series. Outcomes for 124 clients (Gender: M= 68, F=56; Ethnicity: African-American 95, White 11, Hispanic 21; Mean age= 41 yrs.; Mean Educational Level High School/GED; Reported Substance Abuse = 86%) show that the majority of graduates 96 (75%) were employed; 31 (25%) also went on to other educational or training programs along with becoming employed. Job retention data (reported for 90 days) was 89% for those without children living at home and 75% for those with children living at home.

The HOPE Program (second study)

Employment outcomes for 140 (54% Male; 40% Female) welfare recipients were reported in a study conducted by the HOPE Program (1999). The HOPE Program helps homeless adults acquire educational and employment-related skills through a comprehensive program that includes assessment, psychological and career counseling, job-readiness training, work internships and follow-up after program completion. HOPE is a Job Readiness program that uses as "its main curriculum The Adkins Life Skills Career Development Program which provides participants with specific training in how to choose, find, get and keep a job". HOPE in all its program components, like the Adkins Program itself, is specifically focused on what the client must learn to achieve sustained employment and become economically and psychosocially self-sufficient.

More than 60% of all participants completing the HOPE Program during the three-year period of the study had become employed. Eighty-eight (88%) of the employed HOPE participants kept their job for over 90 days and 60% kept them for one year. The study notes that these rates are about 1/3 higher than those reported in the national welfare reform literature. They are also considerably higher than the 10% retention rate at the 90 day mark for welfare programs in New York City as reported in the New York Times (6/6/02). Working with clients who have many barriers, including substance abuse, offender status, poor education and employment histories, in addition to no personal residence, the HOPE Program has been successful in achieving positive employment outcomes over sustained periods of time and has recently received several national awards for excellence.

Josephs

The Youth Employability Skills Program (YES) helped young African-American males and females between the ages of 16 and 19, who were out- of- school and out- of- work, acquire the skills they needed to choose, find, get and keep a job. As its core curriculum the program used all ten units of the Adkins Life Skills Program presented in ten- week cycles. Results of the study (Joseph, 1980) were based on ten completed cycles of the program and included a total of 257 students. Program outcomes for participants were compared to outcomes for similar populations that did not participate in the YES program. Success in becoming employed, for YES participants, assessed over a two-year period of time was 77% compared to 20% for the young people who did not participate in the program. In each individual program cycle positive termination rates ranged from 58% to 92%

Kahn

Kahn (1981) examined the effect of the Adkins Life Skills Interviewing Unit "Developing Effective Interview Skills" along with portions of other Adkins Life Skills Units, (which included learning how to conduct an effective employment agency interview, using the telephone to obtain information about employment and training opportunities, and filling out employment application forms,) on the Career Maturity of incarcerated young men. Subjects of the study were 80 inmates from a youth correctional agency who had voluntarily sought help in securing employment upon release.

Results on the Crites Career Maturity Inventory and on the Pre and Post-Test Ratings of Job Interview Behavior indicated that the intervention had a significant effect on subject's Career Maturity Attitudes and that it significantly increased their Job Interviewing Skills. The author concluded that individuals who want help in securing employment and have a need for improved career adjustment would benefit from participation in this intervention.

Lovett

The effects of the Adkins Life Skills: Career Development Program on the Career Development of high school juniors and seniors enrolled in a suburban high school were explored by Lovett (1984). The relationship of Grades, Gender, SAT scores, SES and other variables such as persistence and effect of program participation were also analyzed for interaction effects. Thirty-two students were in the experimental group and thirty-two students were in a control group matched by Grades, SAT scores and SES.

This study focused on the Career Choice Units directed at helping individuals with the career development tasks of self-exploration, career exploration, and career decision-making. Pre and Post Test Results on Super's Career Development Inventory, the Career Decision-Making Scale and on an adaptation of Manuele's Adult Vocational Maturity Measure indicated that significant gains were made by the experimental group on all eight variables measured: Career Planning and Exploration, Career Decision-Making Skills, Knowledge of the World of Work, Accuracy of Occupational Information, Readiness for Career Choice, Decision Making, Quality of Self-Exploration and Vocational Exploration.

Manuele

Manuele (1980, 1983, 1984) examined the effects of six Life Skills Units on the career maturity of adults who were economically and educationally disadvantaged. Part of the study involved the development and validation of a measure of Career Maturity (based on Super's theories of career development and career maturity) designed specifically for this population, The Adult Vocational Maturity Interview (AVMAI). The measure, using a semi-structured interview format with accompanying scoring guide, assessed the degree of competence people demonstrated in coping with the tasks and problems of career development.

Participants in the study were 20 unemployed men (3) and women (17), age range 25-53 yrs.; mean age 40.8 yrs.; ethnicity 75% White, 25% African-American. 75% had no high school diploma, and the group had a mean reading grade level of 9.6. Participants' Career Maturity was assessed with the AVMAI on a pretest basis.

During the ten-week intervention period, participants were involved in a Life Skills group during which they completed Units 1,2,3,4,5,and 9 "Who I Am and Where I Want to Go"; "Exploring the World of Work"; "Making Good Career Decisions"; "Finding Job Information and Contacting Employers"; "Using Employment Agencies and Personal Contacts"; "Developing Effective Interviewing Skills." Following the intervention, the participants' Career Maturity was assessed again on a posttest basis.

The results indicated that the intervention was effective in modifying the Career Maturity of adults whose career development was either "late, delayed or impaired". Significant differences were made on all eight of the Career Maturity Scales of the AVMAI: Orientation to Education; Orientation to Work; Concern with Choice; Self-Appraisal Interests, Abilities, Values, Exploring Occupations and Using Resources. Significant differences were also found on two other scales Belief-in-Value (of engaging in career development tasks) and Confidence-in-Self (to cope successfully with these tasks). The results also indicated that the AVMAI was a more appropriate measure of Career Maturity for this population than other published "paper and pencil" tests.

New York Community Trust Report

In a four- year organizational development project funded by the New York Community Trust, the Institute for Life Coping Skills worked with nine community agencies to help them develop the capability to respond to new welfare reform legislation. During the course of the project, the agencies were helped to modify their mission, goals, structure, resources and operations to develop employability program services for their clients. Results of this project are described in two reports entitled Community Agencies and Welfare Reform: improving Organizational Capacity for Client Employment (1999, 2001). Homeless populations, Head Start parents, Hispanic immigrants, high-school drop-outs and women recently released from prison were all part of the clients served by the agencies involved in the project.

Project activities included: installing the Adkins Life Skills Career Development Program in each agency; training staff members to deliver the Program and learn how to work with client's career development, employment and counseling needs; assisting agencies to develop new services and resources; tracking client outcomes; and developing new links to employers, education and training resources in their communities.

Agency staff, in the context of busy schedules and staff turnover, and changing governmental policies monitored progress for some 448 clients. Staff reported excellent Life Skills group attendance and participation, high staff and client satisfaction with the Program, and employment and training outcomes that demonstrated gains made in movement toward work-related activities. Thirty-eight percent had realistic career/employability plans, 47% completed useful resumes, 24% were going out on job interviews, 22% were enrolled in literacy or GED programs, 1 % in college, 42% were involved in vocational training, 12% had obtained internship positions and 22% obtained full-time employment. Prior to intervention, all clients were receiving welfare benefits and had had no involvement in education, training or employment activities. None of the agencies had previously had employment preparation as one of their major objectives

The Report's summary and recommendations described the great deal of progress most of the agencies made with an expanded employment mission (one of the participating agencies was recognized by HUD as a "best practices agency"), The report also described additional problems the agencies experienced in delivering direct vocational preparation services such as the need to find a variety of funding sources to support the new mission, the problems of considerable staff turnover, the new welfare restrictions limiting education and training time, the absence of strong linkages between the agencies and employers and resources in their own community (all of which needed more development and nurturing).

New York State Education Report

When the Life Skills Curriculum became a formal part of the Adult Basic Education Program in New York State an evaluation study was conducted to review how well Life Skills was installed and delivered in sites throughout the state and to assess the effects it had on students who participated in Life Skills groups. The evaluation (New York State Department of Education, 1978-1980) included students who participated in Life Skills groups and Life Skills Educators who conducted the groups. The study's sample included 227 students (M= 45%, F= 55%, Ethnicity= African-American 40%, White 48%, Hispanic 6%, Mean Grade Level 8.1 Yrs) enrolled in 13 Adult Education Centers across New York State. The students were in Adult Basic Education, GED and ESL programs.

The results of the evaluation indicated that students and teachers involved with the program considered it to be very effective. Pre and Post-Test Unit Change Scores as measured by items related to specific instructional objectives for each unit and rated by Life Skills Educators were significant at the .05 level. Students made significant gains in their ability to carry out such career-related tasks as identifying their interests and abilities, increasing their knowledge about occupations, completing effective job application forms, and conducting effective employment interviews. Additionally 73% reported gains in self-confidence, 79% worked harder in other classes, 97% recommended the program to their friends and 90% had consistent Class Attendance.

Rodriguez

Concerned with the low rate of college completion by Hispanic students Rodriguez (1986) was interested in increasing the career maturity of 64 Hispanic females in their first semester of college (mean age 18 yrs., mean reading grade level 11 yrs.). Using two specially designed career interventions, one of which included the Career Choice module of the Adkins Life Skills Program as a major component she found that she was able to facilitate the career development of these students. Both interventions produced significant changes in career maturity, as measured by Crites' Career Maturity Attitude and Competence Tests, Super's Career Development Inventory and Manuela's Adult Vocational Maturity Inventory,

when compared to a control group in a general Freshmen Orientation Seminar. Significant changes were also found on internal Locus of Control measures.

Analysis of career maturity scores also showed strong positive correlations between the total scale scores of the Adult Vocational Maturity Inventory (AVMAI) and Crites's Career Maturity Inventory and between the AVMI and Super's Career Development Inventory, providing evidence for the construct validity of the AVMAI as a measure of the constructs associated with career maturity.

Shandera

The population in this study included 73 young male first offenders, 17-21 years of age, incarcerated in a unit of the Texas Dept. of Corrections (Shandera, 1983, 1984). Participants in the study received ten units of the Adkins Life Skills Program and the study evaluated short- term and long- range effects of the program as well as the inmates' perception of the program.

A study done upon the completion of the Life Skills program indicated that in addition to increases in employability skills other changes were found. Disciplinary records of Life Skills participants improved as 51% had fewer disciplinary actions against them. Educational achievement increased for all participants as 7% enrolled in College, 15% obtained their GED; and 27% enrolled in vocational training programs despite being incarcerated. Results from a Student Opinion Form were very positive with participants ranking improved self-confidence as one of the most important outcomes of the program for them. All described it as a very good program they would recommend to their friends.

Ursillo

The main research question of this study involved examining the effectiveness of the Adkins Life Skills Program for increasing the career maturity of adolescents with learning disabilities (Ursillo, 1987). The Career Choice module including Units 1, 2 and 3 "Exploring Who I Am and Where I Want to Go", "Exploring the World of Work", " Making Good Career Decisions" were delivered to the experimental group over a one-month period of time. The experimental group consisted of 20 adolescents (divided into 3 Life Skills groups). Fifteen were male and 5 were female, ages ranged from 17-22 with a mean age of 19.15 yrs., WAIS IQ scores ranged from 74-105 with a mean score of 87.35, Ethnicity 80% White, 10% African-American, 5% Hispanic and 5% Asian. All completed some type of high school program and at the time of the study all were unemployed.

Using a pretest, posttest control group design all 20 experimental and all 20 control group subjects were first pretested on Crites Career Maturity Inventory and

on Manuele's Adult Vocational Maturity Measure. Following participation in the Life Skills intervention all participants were post tested again on these measures. The results indicated that the experimental group improved their attitudes toward accomplishing career development tasks and made significant gains on all five-career maturity scales.

They increased their ability to identify their interests and abilities, to explore occupations in a more meaningful way, to be more concerned about career and job choices, to be more oriented to the demands of the work world and to increase the number of resources used. No significant relationship was found between intelligence and the learning disabled adolescent's ability to benefit from the intervention.

Wald

The purpose of Wald's (1981) study was to explore the effects of the Adkins Life Skills Program on helping unemployed minority youth develop employability skills. Participants were enrolled in an Urban League Program in a large metropolitan area. and included 23 African- American youth in the experimental group and 25 in a waiting list control group. The experimental group received portions of the ten units with most emphasis on Unit 1 the self-exploration unit; Unit 2 the occupational exploration unit, Unit 8 the application and resume unit and Unit 9 the job interviewing unit.

An Employability Skills test was developed for the study which consisted of six subscales The results indicated that the experimental group scores were significantly better on five of the six scales: Self-Description; Exploring a Job; Information Giving; Job Application Ability; and Job Interviewing Skills. There was no difference between the groups on Occupational Knowledge.

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