

ATTITUDES OF ARABIC PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS TOWARD BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

JAMAL M. S. YOUSEF

The University of Jordan

Summary — Several American studies have investigated attitudes toward behavior modification. As there are no data on perceptions of this approach in other countries, this study was undertaken to examine such attitudes in Arab countries. The attitudes of 102 undergraduate psychology students at the University of Jordan were assessed. The results showed that behavior modification is favorably received. No significant differences were found between male and female students, or among second, third, and fourth year students. However, significant differences were found between students who had taken a behavior modification course and those who had not.

Many authors have expressed concern about the existence of negative connotations of and substantial misinformation about behavior modification (Bandura, 1975; Franks & Wilson, 1975; Goldiamond, 1975; Reppucci & Saunders, 1974; Stolz, Wienckowski & Brown, 1975). Some studies have provided evidence that general negative attitudes toward behavior modification do exist in educational, clinical, and other settings (Barling, 1979). Turkat and Feuerstein (1978) examined all articles indexed under behavior modification in the *New York Times* for a period of 5 years. They found that almost half of the 27 identified articles presented behavior modification inaccurately. It was found that procedures such as psycho-surgery, brainwashing, drugs, sensory deprivation, and even torture were equated with behavior modification procedures. Similarly, Woolfolk, Woolfolk and Wilson (1977) demonstrated empirically that undergraduate and graduate college students responded less favorably to methods labelled "behavior modification" than to the same methods when they were labelled "humanistic education". Barling and Wainstein (1979) replicated this study in

an industrial/organizational setting and the results were consistent with those of Woolfolk, Woolfolk and Wilson (1977). Kazdin and Cole (1981) also found that behavior modification procedures were evaluated less favorably than were humanistic or "neutral" procedures.

In another investigation, Turkat, Harris and Forehand (1979) found that college students perceived behavior modification as appropriate for use with certain populations (i.e., the retarded and prisoners) but not with others (i.e., normal children, individuals with marital problems, and homosexuals). However, Young and Patterson (1981) found that the attitudes of college students and non-psychology faculty members toward behavior modification procedures were generally favorable, especially among persons who were more knowledgeable about these procedures. The above mentioned studies have been carried out in the United States. A review of the literature has not disclosed any information about attitudes toward behavior modification in other countries. The present study investigated the attitudes of Arabic psychology students toward these procedures.

Requests for reprints should be addressed to Jamal M. S. Yousef, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, College of Education, P.O. Box 13136, The University of Jordan, Amman-Jordan.

Methods

Procedure

Subjects

The participants were 102 (37 male and 65 female) undergraduate psychology students at the University of Jordan. These were randomly selected from two groups: students who had already taken an elective behavior modification course, and those who had not. Thirty-one were second year, 32 third year, and 39 fourth year students. Fifty-one had taken the behavior modification course and 51 had not. The sample constituted more than 60% of the total population.

Students were asked to complete a questionnaire which assessed their attitudes toward behavior modification procedures. The questionnaire consisted of 30 Likert-type items rated on a 5-point scale of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with higher scores indicating more favorable attitudes. Most items were taken from the scales developed by Musgrove (1974) and Turkat, Harris and Forehand (1979). Items were translated into Arabic and given to 10 psychology faculty members at the University of Jordan to assess their clarity and appropriateness. The questionnaire consisted

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of students' responses to each item

| No. | Item | Mean | SD |
|-----|--|------|------|
| 1 | Behavior modification is a desirable way to decrease inappropriate behavior | 4.31 | 0.69 |
| 2 | Behavior modification is dehumanizing | 4.24 | 0.62 |
| 3 | Behavior modification is a threat to human freedom | 3.96 | 0.76 |
| 4 | Behavior modification is a desirable way to increase appropriate behavior | 4.12 | 0.91 |
| 5 | Behavior modification is a threat to human dignity | 4.21 | 0.63 |
| 6 | Behavior modification is good | 3.84 | 1.04 |
| 7 | Behavior modification is unable to meet the demands of a complex social order | 3.49 | 0.89 |
| 8 | Behavior modification deals with humans as though they were machines | 3.86 | 0.92 |
| 9 | Behavior modification can improve the quality of our lives | 4.18 | 0.65 |
| 10 | Behavior modification is another name for tyranny | 3.99 | 0.78 |
| 11 | Behavior modification methods will enhance education | 4.24 | 0.78 |
| 12 | The benefits of behavior modification have been exaggerated | 3.46 | 0.95 |
| 13 | Behavior modification strengthens moral development | 4.03 | 0.65 |
| 14 | Teachers should be prohibited from using behavior modification in their classrooms | 4.28 | 0.79 |
| 15 | Reinforcement is another name for bribery | 4.08 | 0.91 |
| 16 | Behavior modification has limited possibilities | 3.66 | 0.87 |
| 17 | Behavior modification is an appropriate way of dealing with minor problems only | 3.51 | 0.99 |
| 18 | Behavior modification improves human performance | 4.13 | 0.64 |
| 19 | The use of behavior modification procedures with humans is unethical | 4.13 | 0.79 |
| 20 | Behavior modification improves overall class conditions | 3.58 | 0.87 |
| 21 | Behavior modification is not appropriate to use with normal children | 3.63 | 1.02 |
| 22 | Behavior modification changes behavior only temporarily | 3.48 | 0.88 |
| 23 | I wish my education were accomplished under behavior modification methods | 3.45 | 1.02 |
| 24 | Behavior modification improves relationships between children | 4.06 | 0.61 |
| 25 | Behavior modification enables children to learn how to cope with the environment | 4.06 | 0.61 |
| 26 | Behavior modification is appropriate to use with retarded children | 4.00 | 0.83 |
| 27 | More people will support behavior modification if they knew more about it | 4.15 | 0.89 |
| 28 | Behavior modification aids learning | 4.11 | 0.69 |
| 29 | Behavior modification causes too much friction among the children | 3.51 | 0.84 |
| 30 | The eventual gains achieved through behavior modification programs do not justify the time and effort involved in implementing these programs. | | |

Table 2

Analysis of variance data

| Source of variation | SS | df | MS | F | f |
|------------------------------|----------|-----|---------|-------|-------|
| Sex | | | | | |
| Between groups | 13.97 | 1 | 13.97 | 0.10 | 0.75 |
| Within groups | 13584.12 | 100 | 135.84 | | |
| Year | | | | | |
| Between groups | 71.03 | 2 | 35.51 | 0.26 | 0.77 |
| Within groups | 13527.06 | 99 | 136.64 | | |
| Behavior modification course | | | | | |
| Between groups | 1608.09 | 1 | 1608.09 | 13.41 | 0.001 |
| Within groups | 11990.0 | 100 | 119.90 | | |

of 16 positive statements and 14 negative statements. Weights of negatively worded statements were reversed for purposes of scoring. Split half reliability using the odd-even method was 0.87.

Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of students' responses to each item. Means ranged from 3.45 to 4.31 with an average of 3.91 which indicates a general positive attitude toward behavior modification.

To determine whether there were differences in attitudes toward behavior modification among male and female students; second year, third year and fourth year students; and among students who have taken the behavior modification course and those who have not, a one-way analysis of variance and Scheffe Post Hoc Comparison procedures were used. The analysis of variance results are summarized in Table 2.

The data show significant differences between the attitudes of students who took the behavior modification course and those who did not [$F(1,100) = 13.41, p \leq 0.01$].

Students who took the course expressed more favorable attitudes ($X = 4.05$) than those who did not ($X = 3.78$). No statistically

significant difference was found either between males ($X = 3.90$) and females ($X = 3.92$), or among second year ($X = 3.96$), third year ($X = 3.89$) and fourth year ($X = 3.89$) students.

Conclusion

The major finding of the present study is that the University of Jordan undergraduate psychology students' attitudes toward behavior modification are generally positive. Behavior modification was viewed as generally effective, philosophically and ethically acceptable, and appropriate to use with various populations. However, this study is preliminary in nature and its sample is obviously not representative of all Arabic psychology students. Accordingly, further investigations examining the attitudes of larger samples in different Arab countries are needed.

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