

## The Comparison Between Effectiveness of Storytelling and Play Therapy on Separation Anxiety of Children of Kindergarten

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the comparison of effectiveness of storytelling and play therapy on kindergarten children's separation anxiety.

**Methods:** The present study was experimental with a control group design and included pre-test, post- test. Sampling was purposeful in which 30 children from Garmsar kindergartens who were received high scores in pre-test were selected and randomly divided into two experimental groups and one control group (10 subjects each). The instrument used in this paper was CSI4 questionnaire part (J) specifically for separation anxiety disorder. The experimental groups received eight weekly sessions of storytelling and play therapy. Using descriptive statistics and inferential tests such as covariance did analysis of the data and Benferroni test analysis was conducted.

**Results:** The results showed that storytelling and play therapy were effective on the reduction of separation anxiety disorder in post-test ( $\alpha < 0.05$ ) but there was no significant difference between the effectiveness of storytelling and play therapy interference ( $\alpha > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Based on the results, storytelling and play therapy were applied as interference methods for reducing the symptoms of separation anxiety and improving social performances of pre- school aged children.

**Declaration of Interest:** None.

**Keywords:** Separation anxiety, Storytelling, Play therapy

### Introduction

Separation anxiety is a kind of anxiety disorders that is very prevalent among pre-school aged children. That is explained by DSMV as: Fear and anxiety which is not appropriate with the growing level of child in separating from parents(1) Separation anxiety is very probable for those children that separate from their parent at the first time and go to kindergarten. Hatton (2006) in his researches claimed that the beginning of anxiety disorders under 12 years old children is approximately minimum 2.6% and

maximum 41.2%.(2) Separation anxiety is very prevalent and vulnerable kind of anxiety disorders among children, which is not treating by itself.  $\frac{2}{3}$  Of anxiety disorders, patients who refer to counselling clinics are suffering from separation anxiety. Approximately, in  $\frac{1}{3}$  cases, separation anxiety will be continued to adulthood. This disorder may access in pre-school age and may remain for many years. Separation anxiety may occur in every probable separation situation and force the person to avoid the situation(3) Children who suffer from separation anxiety reveal some

physical symptoms such as headache, stomachache, nausea, frequent nightmares, sleeping problems, school phobia and etc. most of these children don't show any willing for interactions in school that cause manifest disturbances in family relations and educational performances(4) This problem may cause other disorders such as depression, phobias, generalized anxiety, panic disorders, eating disorders, claustrophobia, agoraphobia and etc. in adulthoods(5) Also it may result serious problems in family relations and school performances if it is not be solved properly(5) There are many useful methods for solving anxiety problems such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and etc. but because of children under the school aged have cognitive and linguistic limitations and also because of their lower motivations in participating other kinds of therapy processes and children inner interests for playing and attracting to stories, these methods seems to be useful for reducing anxiety symptoms that can increase positive behaviors and psychological health.

Stories are proper tools for children cognitive and social growth. Storytelling is one of the best methods in child counseling because they can encounter with feelings, emotions, thoughts and behaviors that couldn't be explained (6) It is not easy to make changes in psychological performances in children directly but it can be reached from storytelling non-directly. Many researches applied it as an effective method for variant disorders(7) In the other hand playing is an important part of therapy process and the most applied instrument for child communication(8) Children can express their emotions through playing and also they can communicate external world with it. By this way, they can control objects in their environments and show their experiences from threatening and hurtful environments(9) Games encourage children to interact with each other and feel security in educational environment and their internal source would be reinforced by playing and dreaming.(10) Play therapy help children to cope with negative feelings and irritating situation without defense or threatening emotions. Children should learn how to deal with separation situations as an important life

skill so if the first separation would be managed properly, it is very probable for children to adapt with next separation without any problem in their social relations and performances.(11)

Other methods may not be tolerable for children because of their cognitive and linguistic limitations but in story and play sessions children can experience pleasurable moments without mother's attending and also they can sympathize other participants with the same problem(3)

Previous studies showed positive impacts of play therapy and storytelling methods on different disorders. In a research on 36 primary students who suffered from anxiety, child center play therapy was applied to reduce anxiety level and the results showed significant improvement on students' anxiety level(12) In other research group play therapy was used to reduce separation anxiety of primary school students, significant impact was achieved by this method on the reduction of separation anxiety symptoms.(13) Oswal (2012) used some famous stories to relieve people's distress and found out some useful themes to reduce physiological and psychological diseases(14) Ray and Bratton (2010) summarized the results of 25 researches on play therapy from 2000-2009 and concluded that except one, all the other results showed statistical significant effect on reducing disorders. (15) Karami et al. (2013) applied story therapy method to reduce anxiety disorder in students of primary school, their findings revealed that the level of anxiety decreased in experimental group(3) Thus regarding the efficacy of methods mentioned above, this paper aimed to investigate the comparison between the impacts of them on reducing separation anxiety of kindergarten children of Garmsar city.

### **Methods**

The method of this research was randomized clinical trial with a control group design. The statistical population were children of Garmsar city kindergartens who reported that could not separate from mothers and could not adjust to kindergarten environment, teacher and classmate for more than 4 weeks. Procedure of

Sampling was purposeful in which 30 children who were received high scores in part J of CSI4 as pre-test, were selected and randomly divided into two experimental groups and one control group (10 subjects each). Experimental groups received 8 sessions of play therapy and storytelling weekly after the ending of sessions, CSI4 as post-test was performed for both experimental and control groups. The data were collected and statistical analysis was done. Then each group was compared with control group and with each other. Research tool was CHILD SYMPTOMS

QUESTIONARE (CSI4) parents form part (J) specifically for separation anxiety assessment. The method of scoring in this paper was based on the severity of separation anxiety symptoms. Reliability and validity of (CSI4) through re-administrating of questionnaire showed that mentioned tool had relatively good reliability as screening tool for behavioral-emotional disorder in Iranian children (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.74$ ).<sup>(16)</sup>

Table 1:Storytelling sessions

sessions	Book title	Content
<b>First</b>	Acquainting and communication	Introducing, trust making, making friendly relationship.
<b>Second</b>	Leo mouse does not want to go to kindergarten. <sup>(17)</sup>	First separation experience, acquainting with new situations, unfamiliar people, recognizing emotions and behaviors of first separation.
<b>Third</b>	Come to school, Blue Kangaroo! <sup>(18)</sup>	Reviewing, feelings, emotions and thoughts by story, identifying with story's personality and revealing emotions.
<b>Forth</b>	Hugless Douglas goes to little school <sup>(19)</sup>	Helping children to discover conflicts, worries and anxieties in coping with unfamiliar situations and people, making good relationships with peers and therapist.
<b>Fifth</b>	When Fuzzy afraid of trying new things <sup>(20)</sup>	Helping children encountering and overcoming fears, worries and anxieties in new situations, teaching relaxation and deep breathing.
<b>Sixth</b>	The kissing hand <sup>(21)</sup>	Learning effective solutions encountering fears and worries, keeping mother love in absence of her.
<b>Seventh</b>	Ready for everything <sup>(22)</sup>	Applying positive points, available possibilities, and constructive facilities encountering new problems.
<b>Eighth</b>	Finishing preparation	Reviewing learning behaviors, practicing and generalizing effective solutions.

Table2:Play therapy sessions

sessions	Games name	Content
<b>First</b>	Playing with names	Introducing, truth making, explaining the rules, playing with each other' s name
<b>second</b>	Emotional labeling	Acquainting and discovering emotions, excitations and issues, playing with emotional words, signs and colors.
<b>Third</b>	Emotional shooting the balls	Recognizing anxiety and worry, playing with anxiety balloon.
<b>Forth</b>	Bubbling	Controlling anxiety by bubbling play, learning relaxation.
<b>Fifth</b>	Group playing	Emotional catharsis, group activities, encouraging corporation and interaction with each other, chairs playing and mini basketball playing.

<b>Sixth</b>	Making clay animals	Enhancing touch feeling, decreasing defense power, increasing flexibility by shaping the clay, making story for clay animals, role modeling by identifying with animals, finding variant solutions, coping with issues.
<b>Seventh</b>	School backpacks	Pretend playing with dummy in the backpacks, recognizing child roles in daily anxiety, coping with unfamiliar adults and situations.
<b>Eighth</b>	Finishing preparation	Reviewing learned behaviors, practicing and generalizing effective solutions.

Plays derived from Kaduson & Schaefer(23,24)

## Results

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics (mean and

standard deviation) in pre-test and post-test of examinees.

Table 2: calculating central tendency and variable distribution

	Test level	Play therapy group	Storytelling group	Control group
<b>Means</b>	Pre-test	15.60	15.10	16
<b>Standard deviation</b>		2.83	2.37	2.62
<b>Mean</b>	Post-test	11.90	12.40	15.9
<b>Standard deviation</b>		2.55	2.45	2.8

Pre-assumption of one-way Covariance test  
The results of table 4 shows Kurtosis and Skewness for separation anxiety in interval (2,-2). Thus, from observing Kurtosis and

Skewness of research variable scores, they have normal distribution.

Table4: calculating Kurtosis and Skewness of research variables for symmetric distribution function

	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	value	Std. deviation error	value	Std. deviation error
<b>Separation anxiety</b>	0.415	0.427	0.884	0.883

Results of table 5 shows the Flevin for measuring equality of separation anxiety

variable variance. Significant level Flevin  $>0.05$ , therefore in this variable  $H_0$  is accepted.

Table5: F Levine test results for analysis of variances equality

Variable	F	Degree Of Freedom 1 (Df)	Degree Of Freedom 2 (Df)	Level Of Significance (Sig)
<b>Separation Anxiety</b>	0.261	2	27	0.772

### Pre-hypothesis for random sampling:

To this end, first of all 6 kindergartens were selected by cluster random sampling then CSI4

questionnaires were filled by parents to recognize goal subjects. 30 samples were selected as an available subject then divided to

three groups randomly (two experimental groups and one control group). One of the experimental group was named storytelling group and received 8 sessions of storytelling interference weekly, other group named play therapy group, and received 8 sessions of play therapy interfere weekly. The control group received no interference. The reliability of this questionnaire (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.74$ ) was investigated. For data analysis, mean differences, regression (covariate and dependent), covariance analysis and SPSS<sub>22</sub> were used. Thus, covariance analysis pre-hypothesis was observed.

**Linear dependent and covariate regression pre-hypothesis:**

The results of this pre-hypothesis were explained in covariance analysis report. The results of table 6 shows the summarized form of the effects between experimental group and control group separation anxiety scores. Significance level of covariate variable

for separation anxiety was  $F=158.008$ ,  $Sig=0.001$  that is significant in error level of 0.05. Thus, linear pre-hypothesis for dependent and covariate regression was observed. Based on the summarized data of the effects between subjects for separation anxiety scores with the purpose of error level (personal differences) and after the omission of probable effect of pre-test, F significant level is less than 0.05 error ( $F=35.007$ ,  $df=2.26$ ,  $P=0.001$ ). Therefore, separation anxiety level between three groups is different and independent variable was effective and the amount of effectiveness was 0.73 and statistic power was observed 0.99. In other words, the probability of first kind error is 0.01. In continue for testing each hypothesis, Benferroni hoc test was used.

Depended variables	Source of change	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom (df)	Average squares	F test statistics	Level of significance (sig)	Eta	Statistical power
	Pre- test	158.17	1	158.17	158.008	0.001		
	Independent variable effect (group)	70.08	2	35.04	35.007	0.001	0.73	0.99
	error	26.02	26	1.001				
	Total corrected	279.20	29					

Table 6: Summarize of the analysis the effects between subjects of experimental and control groups for separation anxiety degrees

**First hypothesis**

Storytelling is effective on reduction of separation anxiety.

The results of table 7 from Benferroni hoc test to compare the means of separation anxiety

scores between storytelling group and control group showed that storytelling interference was effective and the observed difference were not random ( $sig=0.017$ ). Thus,  $H_0$  rejected with 0.95 of confidence.

Table 7: The results of Benferroni test to compare the means of separation anxiety scores between storytelling group and the control group

groups	Storytelling group	Control group	means	Means difference	Std. deviation error
Separation anxiety	Storytelling	-----	0.017	12.4	-3.5
	control	0.017	-----	15.9	

### Second hypothesis

Play therapy is effective on separation anxiety. The results of table 8 from Benferroni hoc test to compare the means of separation anxiety scores between play therapy group and control group

showed that significant level was less than 0.05 (sig=0.006) so the observed difference between the means was not random and  $H_0$  was rejected with 0.95 of confidence.

Table<sup>^</sup>: The results of Benferroni test to compare the means of separation anxiety scores between play therapy group and the control group

	groups	Play therapy group	Control group	means	Mean's difference	Std. deviation error
Separation anxiety	Play therapy	-----	0.006	11.9	4	1.16
	control	0.006	-----	15.9		

### Third hypothesis

The effectiveness of play therapy and storytelling on reduction of separation anxiety of kindergarten children is different. The results of Benferroni hoc test to compare the means of separation anxiety score between play therapy group and storytelling group showed that

the significant level was more than 0.05 (sig=1) so the observed difference between means was random and  $H_0$  was accepted. Therefore, there was not statistical significant difference between the effectiveness of storytelling and play therapy on reduction of separation anxiety.

Table9: The results of Benferroni test to compare the means of separation anxiety scores between play therapy group and storytelling group

	groups	Play therapy group	Storytelling group	means	Mean's difference	Std. deviation error
Separation anxiety	Play therapy	-----	1	11.9	0.5	1.16
	Storytelling	1	-----	11.4		

### Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to investigate the comparison between effectiveness of two methods (play therapy and storytelling) on reduction of separation anxiety in Garmsar kindergarten children. The results showed that separation anxiety scores in those children, who participate the programs, were significantly lower than control group children who did not attend interference sessions. Thus, it could be concluded that these techniques were effective, but from statistical view there was no differences between two methods and no significant difference was observed. The results of this paper is consistent with existing evidence of efficacy of play therapy and story therapy on many different behavioral, emotional and psychological issues, but the comparison between two methods was not found. This paper is consistent with

Ramdaniati et al. (2016) compared art therapy and play therapy in reducing anxiety of preschoolers who experienced hospitalization. Both methods showed significant differences in reducing anxiety of experimental groups(25) Stulmaker (2015) in quantified study used child-centered play therapy with young children anxious and these children showed significant improvement on anxiety and worriedness' level than control group who received nothing(12) Shoa Kazemi et al. (2012) investigated the effect of therapy on reduction of separation anxiety disorder in primitive school children. They found this technique as an effective mean to reduce separation anxiety disorder,(13) Oswal (2012) in his research applied some famous themes of storytelling to reduce tension and stress of patient with different physical and mental illness(14) Ray and Bratton (2010) in their

study investigated many researches between the year 2000-2009 with the title of play therapy in extend field of problems such as social and behavioral incompatible, aggression, fear, autism, anxiety disorders, phobias, learning problems, linguistic problems and etc. they found positive results from play therapy in various problems(15) Karami et al. (2013) in their study investigate the effectiveness of story therapy on reduction of children separation anxiety symptoms. They found storytelling sessions as an applied an effective technique for reducing level of anxiety(3 The results of this study is also in consistent with other method such as Abbasi et al. (2016) applied MBCT method to reduce separation anxiety of 6 and 7 years old children(26) Mohammadpour and Esmailpour (2016) that approved the efficacy of coaching approach behavior and leading by modeling on reducing separation anxiety of preschoolers.(27) Zarghami et al. found coping cat program as an effective method for reducing anxiety of children(28).

In storytelling children could identified and modeling personalities in content of stories and learned proper problem solving and concurred with issued and also they could understand and accept their emotions.(29) Stories included the role of mother- child and emotions of separating of mother thus children could have emotional catharsis(3) Playing is voluntary activity done without pressure from outside. Play is a reflection of the ability of physical, intellectual and social and a way of learning to communicate and adapt to the environment. Play can be a psychological preparation for children in the face of issues and cope with their problems. They could expand their self-esteem and increase the relationship of trust between child and others(25) Play therapy sessions could help children to replace their improper and illogical thought with proper and logical ones through play techniques and also it caused catharsis and releasing emotions which made improvement in relation and performance(13) The experimental groups could learn instructive behaviors from the games and stories, which were used in this program to

cope with future unfamiliar people and situations better than past. The children realized that the absence of mother is not equal to hurt. They could share their emotions, feelings, worries and anxieties with peers who have the same feelings. They experienced exciting moments in flexible educative environment and they revealed their emotions to each other and by giving proper feedback from therapist, identified with the personalities inside the stories and learned instructive performances and positive interactions from group playing, generalized the social effective compatible behavior in real life.

#### Limitation

The difficulty of this study was finding samples because of limitations of subjects in the city of research. The result of this study could not be generalized to whole society (from geographical and cultural point of view). Techniques of this study were performed by researcher and it might be influenced by bias.

#### Suggestions

Welfare organization, kindergartens, schools, child psychologist, teacher and parents should learn how to screening separation anxiety symptoms of children before going to school and learned how to use effective method such as play therapy and storytelling and other techniques for solving this problem and prevent following problems that separation anxiety caused. Teachers and parents should be alerted to separation anxiety symptoms for preventing serious problems such as malfunction performance or avoidance from school. At last combined techniques with play therapy and storytelling is suggested for future researchers.

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