

## Original Article

# Comparing the effect of psychodrama with parental behavior management skills training on social adjustment, anger and aggression of preschool children

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## Abstract

**Background:** Today, education and training are associated with deep, broad, and meaningful concepts which approached to serve humanity. This study aimed to compare the effectiveness of psychodrama with training parenting behavior management skills on social adjustment, anger, and aggression in preschool children.

**Methods:** The research method was experimental with a pre-test and post-test design and a control group. The statistical population included all preschool students of Tehran-Iran (District 9) during 2020. The samples were selected through cluster sampling (n=45) and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (n=15 each). Participants were measured through Dokhanchi social adjustment questionnaires and Anger and Aggression-Novako scale. Parental behavior management skills training programs are administered in six sessions 90 minutes for parents and psychodrama included ten 45-minute sessions for children. The control group did not receive any intervention during the study. The results were analyzed using an analysis of covariance. SPSS version 24 was used to analyze the data.

**Results:** The results showed that the social adjustment of children in the psychodrama and the parental behavior management groups increased comparing the control group (P=0.001). Psychodrama reduced all three components of aggressive behavior, thinking, and feeling (P=0.001). The components of anger and aggression in parental behavior management have reduced significantly comparing the control group (P=0.001). Also, parental behavior management program effectiveness was significantly higher than psychodrama (P<0.05).

**Conclusion:** The study results showed that the effect of parental management skills on reducing anger-aggression and increasing social adjustment was higher than psychodrama.

**Keywords:** Anger; Aggression; Behavior management; psychodrama; social adjustment.

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## Introduction

One of the important achievements of the contemporary era is giving value to childhood ages (1). Children constitute the major stratum of the world's population, in developing countries, they consisted of almost 50% of the

population (2). Studies in different cultures have shown that a significant percentage of children presented communication and behavioral problems in school and preschool ages with parents and interpersonal relationships. In most cases,

the intensity of these difficulties is considerable and needs therapy and training (3).

The childhood anxiety disorders and aggression is the root of many behavioral problems during adolescence and adulthood. The failure to the management of childhood difficulties can cause psychological, interpersonal, academic, social, political, economic, and physical problems in childhood and future adults (4). Anger categorized as internal emotion and aggression is an external behavior that leads to consequences such as communication problems, personality disorders, social adjustment problems and psychosocial adjustment (5). Aggressive behaviors result in high referrals to psychological and counseling clinics, schools, and parent reports major individual and social problem which aggressive children. The Boys are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors comparing girls (6). Evidence showed one of the most effective ways to reduce anger and aggression is psychodrama. Theatrical games allow the child to express their failures, anger, aggression, and shortcomings (7).

From a psychological point of view, adaptation means creating harmony and balance between personal needs and environmental requirements, that is, achieving a kind of harmony with the environment; Social adjustment is influenced by psychological structures and basic human characteristics such as personality, intelligence, language, perception, evaluation, attitude and interaction between behavior and environment (8).

Social adjustment contributes to children's shared experience to provide support for each other's (9). Children's mood stability, anger, and aggression have a strong relationship with important variables such as relationship with parents, educational performance, social development, and behavioral and social adjustment (10). Anger and aggression are also of particular

importance in childhood because they will affect the psychological, educational, occupational and physical security of children and future men and women (11). Children who respond appropriately to environmental variables, they will show higher social adjustment and more success (12).

One of the interventions that can be effective in improving children's executive functions is psychodrama. The psychodrama or role-play was founded by Moreno in the 1930s (13). Psychotherapy, like cognitive-behavioral therapy, is a short-term psychotherapy approach (14) that enables one to recognize and change dysfunctional emotions and maladaptive cognitive behaviors, processes, and themes through role-playing and storytelling (15). In this method, therapists and clients with "pragmatism" try to change the actions or learn a new way of dealing with the problem by bringing the problems and fears of the person to the surface (16).

In this way, past events with their fears and future with hopes transferred to the present, and they presented and discovered through their display and not only through dialogue (17). This approach combines art, play, emotional sensibilities, emotions, imagery, group dynamics, explicit thinking, facilitating the release of trapped emotions to acquire new, effective behaviors, and opening up undiscovered ways of resolving conflict, as well as self-expression (18).

Accordingly, one of the ways to find out children's emotions is through individual and group play games. According to the National Association of Adolescents, the most important childhood exercises are games and playing (19). In the process of play, the child shows his proper growth and the development of children is accelerated (20). The National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends extensive use of projects, games, exploration, teamwork, and learning centers; As play enhances the development of learning processes such as observation,

learning, problem solving and creativity in children. In addition, play helps to improve their physical, speech and social skills (21). The results of a study by Rasekhi and Cola showed that psychodrama increases social skills and reduces aggression in children (1).

Proper attention and guidance in the process of growth and development of the child prevent behavioral disorders and maladaptations. Negligence in this sensitive period leads to incompatibility and low adaptation to social and educational environments (22). Numerous studies have shown that one of the main causes of communication and behavioral difficulties in children is the dominant educational patterns such as parenting styles, personality type and parents' lack of awareness about appropriate interaction and communication styles with children (23). On the other hand research suggests that there is a significant relationship between parent-child inappropriate behaviors and children's behavioral problems, anger, aggression, destructive behaviors, impulsive behaviors, noise and lively and active children (24). The parent-child interaction is a strong predictor of children's behavioral problems. Long-term, multidimensional, and family-oriented therapies can be effective in addressing children's behavioral problems. One of these most widely used programs is parental behavior management education. This program aims to correct the child's behavior in the natural environment of the home through parents, especially mothers who have higher contact with the child. This psychotherapy program tries to change the behavior of children by changing the cognitive-emotional behavior of parents (25, 26). Considering that children's social adaptation ability is very important and anger and aggression in children can have dangerous consequences for them, it has doubled the importance of research in this direction.

This program leads to increasing parents' awareness in controlling their emotions, improving the methods of controlling and managing and monitoring children's behavior, reinforcing positive behavior and using silence and inattention, and eliminating positive reinforcements in inappropriate, harassing and erosive behaviors of children. Various aspects of parent-family performance have a positive effect and also increase parental coordination in giving appropriate feedback to the child (27). Therefore, the researcher aimed to compare the effectiveness of psychodrama and parenting behavior management skills training on social adjustment, anger and aggression in preschool children.

## **Methods**

The research was a pre-test-post-test study with a control group. The statistical population consisted of all preschool students of the ninth District in Tehran-Iran during 2020. Out of 53 governmental and non-governmental preschool centers, three centers were randomly chosen through the method, then 45 people were selected as samples by simple random method from these centers and were placed in three groups, which are as follows:

- A. Psychodrama group 15 cases (children) received session each session 45 minutes.
- B. Parent behavior management group with 15 cases (parents of children) received parent management training in six 90-minute sessions.
- C. Control group did not receive any intervention during this study.

Inclusion criteria were: District 9 preschool students, the presence of both parents in the parental behavior management training group, having physical and mental health based on their health certificate and information received from the psychologist present in the centers, and no medication use.

Exclusion criteria were the absence of more than two sessions in therapeutic interventions, the reluctance of parents or the subject to continue the intervention process, and failure to complete the questionnaires in pre or post-test.

The method of conducting the study was that after the necessary coordination with the preschool centers and referring to these centers, there was a discussion in connection with the present research. After selecting the samples for final and accurate diagnosis, parents were invited to participate in the initial interview. Then the mothers were informed about how to conduct the study and completed a written consent form for informed and committed participation in the study. In the present research, ethical considerations including respecting the right to participate in the research and the confidentiality of information in order to preserve the moral values and rights of the subjects have been observed.

Here, in the pre-test, the questionnaires of social adjustment and anger and aggression were distributed among all parents. The participants completed the same questionnaires after interventions.

*Social Adjustment Questionnaire:* The social adjustment questionnaire and developed by Dokhanchi in 1998. The scale includes 37 items and each item has a four-choice Likert scale, in the questionnaires related to adaptive behavior, the scores of the options are never 0 to often 3. In the items that measure children's maladjustment, never 3 to most of the time 0 are assigned. The validity of the questionnaire using the halving method was equal to 0.79 and its validity was equal to 0.81% in the Dokhanchi study. The minimum and maximum score is 0 to 111. The criterion for assigning a score to a child is the degree of adaptation, so the higher the child scores in this test indicates a higher level of incompatibility. Very low compatibility level scored less than 52; low between 52-65; average between 65 and 77; high is between 77 and 90 and very high is over 90 (28).

*Anger Questionnaire - Karimi Aggression – Novako (1986):* adapted by Karimi in 2012 with 16 items in a four-point Likert scale. Cases who score above average on this scale show high aggressive behavior and emotions. This questionnaire is completed by parents, teachers, educators, and mentors who know the child well.

Table 1. Summary of parent management skills training sessions

Session	Aim	Content
1th	Familiarity with behavior and factors affecting it	Preparing a behavior record table that we are trying to change. Recording the time of occurrence of that behavior
2th	Behavioral problems: hereditary / peripheral	Parents spend time with the child. Encourage, caress, kiss, and hug children. Confirm the correct behaviors of the child
3th	Enhance desirable behaviors	Demonstrate attention: Describing appropriate behaviors, participation in child's games. Transmitting positive feelings. Reward: Verbal, emotional or physical, activity, and material reward.
4 <sup>th</sup>	Ordering and legislating	Legislation / ordering: Limited and traceable. Not vague and ambiguous. Have the right time and the right atmosphere. Not contradictory and ambiguous. Do not have a question state. Do not be accompanied by violence and aggression.
5th	Managing inappropriate behaviors	Planned ignorance of behavior, facing the natural consequences with behavior, face with logical consequences of behavior, and behavioral penalties.
6th	Manage difficult situations	Identify difficult situations, plan appropriately for the child based on gender, age, place, and time and explain the situation.

The questionnaire is scored on a Likert scale from always (score 3) to never (score 0). The questionnaire has 3 Subscales: aggressive behaviors, aggressive thinking, and aggressive feelings. To get the score for each dimension, the sum of the scores of the questions related to that dimension is added together and the total score of the questionnaire is the sum of the scores of all the questions. The reliability of the questionnaire has been reported by Karimi 2012 with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.72, and the face validity of the scale has been approved by experts and professors in the field of psychology (29). Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was 0.74.

The training programs of parental behavior management skills were implemented by the researcher for parents in six sessions (90

minutes for each session and two sessions per week). Psychotherapy included ten 45-minute sessions for children, which were conducted by the researcher. The control group did not receive any intervention during the study. In addition, the researcher completed the training course to acquire the skills needed to implement the training program. The summary of parent management skills training and psychodrama sessions is presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

In this study, data were analyzed by analysis of covariance and Bonferroni post hoc tests. The assumptions of normality, linearity and slope of regression coefficients were checked and confirmed with SPSS 24 software.

Table 2. Summary of psychodrama sessions

Session	Aim	Content
1th	Familiarity of children together	Game Throw the ball and introduce yourself. Defining a lovely memory, performing the mirror technique and performing it under the guidance of a coach.
2th	Familiarity of children with one of their problems	Warming step: Stirring technique. Reverse and Mirror Role Playing Techniques: Showing Kids Memories. Participation stage: Other children will express their opinions about the problem.
3th	Non-fluent handwriting, drawing and calligraphy techniques	This technique helps children to express themselves emotionally, how they manage and express themselves emotionally. Reverse role-playing stage: Playing the role of parents in the same issue
4 <sup>th</sup>	Lucky / unlucky technique	Children talked about self-esteem and self-confidence and their strengths and weaknesses. Future projection technique: Demonstrating children's abilities. It is about trusting and relying on God
5th	Magical shop technique	Anxiety and how to manage the physical and mental symptoms of anxiety discussed with children, and the children will each start talking about the situations in which they are anxious.
6th	Storytelling techniques	Here, the coach used the mirror technique and relaxation for the children.
7th	Problem solving skills and conversational skills	They use role-playing and mirror skills for problem-solving skills to gain new insights into their problem.
8th	Discover important and influential variables during the intervention	All aspects of the specified variable are discussed
9th	Educational intervention about beating	A child told their experience of being beaten and how they feel about it. The role-playing instructor reconstructs the child's performance and experience so that the child can defend himself or herself and not give up. Different defenses are asked of other children
10th	Box of Hope	Children asked to take from the box of hope what they want to achieve in the future and to recount and display it. At the end of the last session, the director summarized the sessions and the group session ended

**Results**

Demographic findings showed that the gender of people in parental behavior management (66.7%), psychological role-playing (60%) and control (53.3%) were girls and rests were boys. In the parental behavior management training group, most of the fathers (33.3%) were undergraduates and graduates. Mothers showed the same number of postgraduate educations; in the psychodrama group, most fathers (26.7%) have a master's degree, bachelors or master's degree, and most mothers (33.3%) have a bachelor's degree, and in the control group, majority of fathers (33.3%) and mothers (40%) hold bachelor's degree. 33.3 percent of cases in the parental behavior management group of most parents have between 35 and 40 years old; In the psychological role group 46.7 percent of fathers were between 35 and 40 years old and the majority of mothers (60%) were up to 35 years old. In the control group, fathers (40%) and mothers (46.7%) were between 35 - 40 years old.

The assumption of homogeneity of variance for the social adjustment was reviewed. The results showed that by removing the pre-test effect, the average social adjustment of children in the psychodrama group is significantly more than the control group ( $F(1, 27) = 117.796, P = 0.001$ ). Also, by removing the pre-test effect, the average social adjustment of children in the parental behavior management group was

significantly higher than the control group ( $F(1, 27) = 327,877, P = 0.001$ ).

According to the Box's M, the assumption the significance level is more than 0.05 and the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices is also observed. The residual covariance is the same as the matrix  $F(3, 23) = 61.784$ , value = 0.11,  $P < 0.001$ , Wilkes-Lambda test showed that there was a significant difference between the groups in the linear composition of the dependent variables. In the Levens test, the significance level of anger and aggression components (behavior, thought and feeling) was more than 0.05. The pre-test effect of anger and aggression components (behavior, thought and feeling) was significant with  $P < 0.01$ . There was a correlation between their post-test and pre-test after removing the effect of pre-test between groups in the components of aggressive behavior  $F(1, 25) = 144.788$ , aggressive thinking with  $F(1, 25) = 124.903$  and aggressive emotions with  $F(1, 25) = 171.183$ , a significant difference was observed.

In Table 3, the mean scores in the post-test by removing the pre-test effect, the mean difference between the control and intervention groups showed that the three components of anger and children's aggression decreased in the psychodrama and parental behavioral management group compared to the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 3. Post-test averages of psychological role-playing variables, parental behavior management, and control

Groups	Variable	Mean of post-test	
		Without removing the effect of pre-test	After removing the effect of pre-test
Psychodrama	Aggressive behavior	11.53	11.59
	Aggressive thought	5.73	5.82
	Aggressive emotion	5.8	5.88
Parental behavior management	Aggressive behavior	11.26	11.29
	Aggressive thought	5.06	5.18
	Aggressive emotion	4.93	4.99
Control	Aggressive behavior	16.06	16.00
	Aggressive thought	9.66	9.57
	Aggressive emotion	8.53	8.44

In Table 4 observed that children 's social adjustment in the parental behavior management group increased more than psychodrama group, also the results of children's social adjustment scores in both experimental groups increased significantly compared to the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, scores of social adjustment parental behavior management and psychodrama programs have increased significantly.

The mean of the post-test by removing the pre-test effect of the mean difference between the groups of parental behavior management with psychodrama were (-1.939); parental behavior management and control groups difference were (-12.573) and between the psychological role-playing and control groups were (-10.634). These findings showed that the anger and aggression of children in the parental behavior management group shows significantly greater decrease than the psychodrama group. The results of anger and aggression scores in the children of both experimental groups showed a significant decrease compared to the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, parental behavior management and psychological role-playing programs have reduced the anger and aggression of preschool students.

## Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to compare the effectiveness of psychodrama and parenting behavior management skills training in social adjustment, anger, and aggression of preschool children. The results showed that children's social adjustment in the level in psychodrama group increased comparing the control group. Psychodrama reduced all three components of aggressive behavior, thinking, and feeling. Social adjustment of children in the parental behavior management group increased comparing the control group.

The components of anger and aggression in the parental behavior management have reduced significantly comparing the control group. Parental behavior management program effectiveness was significantly higher than psychodrama. The results of the present research are in line with the findings of Mingeback et al., (30), Kazdin (31), Khadr et al., (32), and Solakoglu et al., (33). In explaining these findings and the results of the present research, it can be said Variables such as anger, aggression, and social adjustment influence the individual and social life of individuals.

Table 4. Bonferroni post hoc post-test of social adjustment, and anger and aggression variables

Variable	Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean diff (I-J)	Standard error`	P-value
Social adjustment	Parental behavior management	Psychodrama	5.23*	1.35	0.001
		Control	20.05*	1.36	0.001
	Psychodrama	Parental behavior management	-5.23*	1.35	0.001
		Control	14.81*	1.36	0.001
	Control	Parental behavior management	-20.05*	1.36	0.001
		Psychodrama	-14.81-	1.36	0.001
Anger and aggression	Parental behavior management	Psychodrama	-14.81*	0.68	0.001
		Control	12.57*	0.68	0.001
	Psychodrama	Parental behavior management	1.93*	0.68	0.001
		Control	10.63*	0.69	0.001
	Control	Parental behavior management	12.57*	0.68	0.001
		Psychodrama	10.36*	0.69	0.001

The adulthood behaviors are rooted in childhood mental health. The most common behavioral problems of preschool children are lying, aggression, mood instability, barking, stealing, inappropriate communication, retaliation, and rivalry between siblings, embarrassment and shyness (34). Aggression has a very complex and multidimensional conceptual context, on the one hand it is affected with factors such as time, place and subject, environment, psychological and genetic factors (35). Aggression is considered a behavior that causes harm to self and others. It is learned through observation and imitation. Psychologists have provided packages of children's behavior disorders for controlling aggressive behavior (36).

Social adjustment also is strongly related to social, academic, occupational, mental and physical health development (37), adjustment includes physical, mental, social and moral adaptation, totally includes adaptation to social environment, which may be related to change is achieved by self or environment (38).

Social adjustment is created by adapting to the environment or changing the environment to meet needs and achieve favorites (39). Negative parenting is a strong predictor of the continuation of behavioral and mood problems in children. Parental management education is most common among psychologists and educational counselors than other family interventions; This program increases parents 'awareness to control their emotions, improves reward and punishment methods, improves parents' attitudes about parenting methods, and ways to control and monitor the child's behavior (4). The family is responsible for the mental health of its members and the problems of each family member affect the performance of other members (40). This approach has been shown to be highly effective in reducing risky and aggressive behaviors, and in a study by Firoozkoobi et al., 2016 showed reduction of parental anxiety and

depression was related to reducing the behavioral problems of children and adolescents (30). It is also known as an effective approach to reducing antisocial behaviors, anger, and aggression (31). They pointed out the effectiveness of this approach in reducing risk of harmful factors of childhood ages (32, 33). Increasing mothers' skills through behavior management changes the attitude of parents, especially mothers who spend more time with the children. Hence, mothers show more acceptance and adaptation with children. Most of the researchers' focus on mothers, principled confrontation with extravagance, mood changes, anger, Aggression, inattention and hyperactivity of their children will have appropriate strategies that will help to control and manage the anger of parents and children (40).

Studies have also been conducted on the effectiveness of psychodrama in reducing aggression, showed that this method is very effective in reducing aggression in children (41, 42). Children who are also characterized by low scores of social adjustment and social skills engage in aggressive behaviors (43).

The effect of psychodrama on improving social skills showed in different skills (44), sensitive and responsive caregivers on emotional self-regulation, the development of social acceptance and social adjustment (45) and social skills (46). The effectiveness of psychodrama has also been shown on reducing aggressive behaviors in children and improving children's adaptive performance through parental stress reduction (47).

The positive effect of parental behavior management skills training showed on reducing antisocial-anxiety behaviors, emotional problems and behavior of children with mental disabilities (48). This program works through creating a sense of empathy in children, reducing aggressive behaviors, increasing self-esteem and



displaying societal behaviors of children with parents (49).

The present study also had some limitations: the research is conducted in the 9th district of Tehran preschool students, and its generalization to other regions, cities, towns and other provinces should be done with more caution. In the present study, children who lived with their parents participated in the research process, and the generalization of the results to single parent children or caregivers should be done with more caution. In the process of research work, due to the spread of coronavirus, the influx of news, high fear in society, researchers and educators of psychodrama and parenting skills training faced great problems, resistance and many excuses from parents that depend on other circumstances. It was not predictable and unexpected, and of course, due to the spread of Coronavirus, the researcher faced parental resistance to follow up and get the follow-up.

### **Conclusion**

According to the results of the present study, parenting skills training has direct and positive effects on the environmental variables of children. This training will also teach parents to manage their personal and interpersonal emotions and behaviors with family members. In order to reduce the level of interpersonal and interpersonal tension in themselves and their families, which has a direct relationship with the health of family structure. This provides an environment for higher success and social adjustment in childhood and adulthood for these children.

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### **Authors' contribution**

Study conception and design: HKM and GNO; data collection: HKM; analysis and interpretation of results: KA; draft manuscript preparation: HKM and GN; All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

### **Ethical considerations**

The article was extracted from the doctoral dissertation of submitted to Islamic Azad University of Ardabil, and all ethical considerations were observed during study including necessary permission, participants' security and confidences of data.

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### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in this article.

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