
The Effectiveness of Art Therapy on Improving Self-Esteem and Social Skills of Mental Retardation Boys

Simin Aminjafary^a, Mohammadreza Bagherilori^{b*}

^aDepartment of Graphic Design, Yazd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yazd, Iran

^bDepartment of Graphic Design, Yazd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yazd, Iran

Received 03 March 2019; revised 06 July 2019; accepted 29 August 2019

Abstract

Mental retardation is problematic due to cognitive limitations in two basic aspects of their lives, including social skills and self-esteem. A review of the research background has proven the effectiveness of art therapy in dealing with mental retardation and the reduction of negative psychological factors, such as aggression in them. As a result, the aim of this research is to examine the effectiveness of art therapy on improving social skills and subjective mental self-esteem, which so far has not been studied by researchers. For this reason, mental retardation was assigned to the control and experimental groups and then under the treatment painting sessions. To analyze the data, covariance analysis and SPSS software were used. The results showed that art therapy affects the improvement of social skills and the increase of mental retardation self-esteem.

Keywords: Art Therapy; Social Skills; Self-Esteem; Mental Retardation

1. Introduction

Mental retardation is one of the most complicated and difficult issues in children and adolescents. Based on the definition of the fifth Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), mental retardation is a general term for relatively common and lifelong conditions due to structural and functional abnormalities in individual cognitive development.

Subjective mental disadvantages have a significant disadvantage in terms of social development compared to their normal counterparts and do not have the necessary means to meet social expectations (Emerson, 2003). Social skills are often considered as a complex set of skills that include dimensions such as communication, problem-solving, decision-making, dare, interactions

* Corresponding author. Tel: +98 9131546271.

E-mail address: bagherilori@gmail.com

with peers and self-management (Aydogan, Klinc and Tepeta, 2009). On the other hand, research has shown that the sense of self-esteem is low in mental retardations compared to ordinary people (Li HL, quoted from Halahaan and Kaufman, translation of Javadian, 2008). Self-esteem is the judgment and attitude that a person consistently and continuously expresses his values (Cooper Smith, 2003). Tokinan and Bilen (2010) argue that self-esteem is a factor affecting the entire life of each person. Those with high self-esteem are more flexible and capable of generating more innovative solutions to issues.

Art therapy is widely used to treat mental retardation, learning disorders, academic failure, anxiety, depression and obsessive compulsive disorder. According to the definition of the American Artistic Association, art therapy is the treatment of mental disturbances through artistic intermediaries, which through this method of treatment of the atmosphere can reveal it and help the therapist to evaluate what he has presented (Khoshkonesh, 2006). Art therapy has various components such as painting therapy, therapeutic show and therapeutic music. In this research, the technique of painting has been used. Therapeutic painting can facilitate learning, social skills training, self-expression skills, self-confidence, reducing stress and anxiety, acting as well as increasing the power of cognition and perception in mental inferiority (Case and Dally, 2008; Case, 2006; Andrias, 2005; quoted by Moghaddam, 2009).

The study of research on arts therapy and mental infertility is well illustrated. In addition, research in this area is very limited, focusing on reducing negative psychological factors such as aggression. Investigations in this area have been left out to examine the effects of arts therapy on positive psychological factors such as social skills and self-esteem, which have low mental ability in these cases. As a result of this study, an attempt will be made to examine the effectiveness of arts therapy on improving self-esteem and social skills of mentally retarded people.

Regarding the importance of art therapy in the process of treatment and rehabilitation of mental retardation, it is necessary to assess its position in the rehabilitation patterns of exceptional individuals, especially in mental retardation, with behavioral problems, lack of social skills and low self-esteem; Feels more and more. The proof and effectiveness of this rehabilitation pattern requires countless studies that have been done in this regard. If the effectiveness of this treatment is confirmed, all practitioners in the field of rehabilitation and mental retardation can take this therapeutic approach and if they are not approve, they will focus on other areas so that they can take an effective step toward mental retardation.

2. Research Background

A review of research on art therapy and mental retardation suggests that most of the research in this area investigates negative psychological factors such as emotional-behavioral problems (Lix, 2000) and aggression (Behpajouh and Nouri, 2005; Nazadi Kashani et al., 2010; Hashemi et al., 2010; Yarmohammadian and Akhlaghi, 2014). In addition, the review of research background in the field of art therapy and social skills suggests that art therapy has a positive impact on the social skills of different groups such as children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and mental retardation, like the investigations of Damiko and Lalonde (2017), Shalani et al. (2014), Shalani and Azadimanesh (2014), Rangani et al. (2014), Shahri (2013), Ghanbari Hashem Abadi and Ebrahimi Nejad (2011), Nazari, (2016). In the area of research on art therapy and self-esteem, the efficacy of arts therapy has also been shown to increase self-esteem (Franklin, 2013; Nasserie and Kersakian, 2017; Dehdar, 2012; Rahimian, 2014; Sanei, 2015; Soltani et al., 2013).

Based on the research background, the hypotheses of this research are:

- Painting therapy affects the improvement of social skills of mentally retarded boys.

- Painting therapy has an impact on raising the self-esteem of mentally retarded boys

3. Methodology

The present study is an experimental study that was conducted through pretest-after-test with controlled group.

The statistical population of this study was all mentally retarded boys who were attending Shahreza city care centers. Using a suitable sampling method, 30 of them were selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The following tools were used to collect data.

Gersham and Elliot Social Skills Questionnaire: Social skills questionnaire (Gresham and Elliott, 1990) was used to measure social skills. Social skills scale consists of three forms of evaluation by parents, teachers and students. In this study, the teacher's form was used. Teacher's Form has 47 entries. Each of the points in this scale has three-dimensional answers with never-ending, sometimes, and often unavailable options, a zero score, an option sometimes, a score of one, and an option often, a score of two. To get the general score of the questionnaire, the score of all the items is collected together (Khoshnazar, 2004; Shahim, 1999). The internal reliability of the scale has been reported by Gershom and Elliott (1999, quoted by Biyabangard, 2005) from 0.74 to 0.95, Behpajouh et al. (2005) 0.88 and Shahim (1999) 90 percent. This scale has structural and concurrent validity which is desirable and its diagnostic and therapeutic use for children has been confirmed in several studies (Mokhtari, 2010). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the reliability of the scale with 0.70 coefficient. The results indicate that the desired scale is desirable. To determine the validity, the correlation coefficient of each score was used with the total scale score, with the range of coefficients ranging from 0.47 to 0.68.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965) measures overall self-esteem and personal value. The scale consists of 10 general statements that measure the level of satisfaction with life and have a good sense of their own (Salsali and Silverstone, 2003). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the study on female students was 0.93 (Rosenberg, 2015). In Iran, the research was studied by Rajabi and Behlol (2007), the results of the internal consistency coefficients of the female in the whole sample were obtained 0.85. Correlation coefficients between each of the scales with the total score of females were 0.56 up to 0.72 it was variable. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha calculation method was used to determine the reliability, with a coefficient of 0.81 to determine the validity of the method, the correlation coefficient of each score was used with the total scale scores. The range of coefficients was between 0.62 and 0.70.

After receiving satisfaction from the parent's parents and coordinating with the management of the rehabilitation center, the trainers were asked to complete questionnaires on self-esteem and low-level social skills. Then the experimental group performed 8 consecutive sessions (every session was 45-60 minutes) according to the drawing instructions. The topics used in this study were from the Silver Art Therapy Program (2008) entitled Art Therapy for Children and Adolescents with Autism Disorders. The topics of the painting sessions were as follows: Session 1: Draw up various emotions such as laughing, crying, etc., Session 2: Drawing up group members, Session 3: What upset me?, Session 4: Draw an animal that how would you like to be, the 5th session: a custom moral painting, the 6th session: how is it raining like?, The 7th session: painting of the body, the 8th session: painting with music (music with a rhythm slow and steep with the desired subject) after the end of the sessions, the effect of this intervention and the comparison of the two post-test groups was determined and the results were analyzed using SPSS software.

4. Research Findings

Inferential analysis of the data used a covariance analysis to assess the effectiveness of art therapy on increasing self-esteem and raising the social skills of mentally retarded people. For this purpose, the first assumptions of the statistical test of covariance analysis were investigated. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that all the variables of the research have a normal distribution (Table 1), and the results of the Loon test for homogeneity analysis of variance indicate that the difference between the two groups of control and the control is significant (Table 2).

Table 1 Results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to verify the normal distribution of variables

Variables	Control Group		Test Group	
	Significance Level	Statistic Z	Significance Level	Statistic Z
Social Skills	0.93	0.54	0.43	0.88
Self-Esteem	0.73	0.69	0.9	1.25

Table 2 Lone test results for homogeneity analysis of variance among in-group scores

Variables	F	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level
Social Skills	1.89	1	0.19
Self-Esteem	0.73	1	0.4

The covariance analysis was performed with respect to the assumption of homogeneity of variance. The results showed that art therapy is effective in improving social skills (Table 3). Also, the results of Table 4 indicate that art therapy has an impact on the rise of self-esteem.

Table 3 Results of covariance analysis on the effectiveness of art therapy on social skills

Statistical Index	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Pre-test	562/761	1	562/761	56/629	0.0001
Group	169/766	1	169/766	17/083	0.001
Error	168/939	17	9/938		
Total	46381/00	20			

Table 4 Results of covariance analysis on the effectiveness of art therapy on self-esteem

Statistical Index	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Pre-test	55/059	1	55/059	18/059	0/0001
Group	36/361	1	36/361	13/543	0/002
Error	49/441	17	2/908		
Total	4767/00	20			

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effect of art therapy on improving social skills and increasing mental health and low self-esteem. The results show that art therapy is effective in improving social skills, because doing artistic activities helps the mentally impaired make emotions and feelings that they cannot show with their behavior and speech as they wish, will better share with others and improve their social skills, such as speaking and expressing existence in the community

(Fuladband, 2008). Group art therapy also has a significant impact on the improvement of subjective mental skills. Studies show that group painting as a free and imaginative subject can transform new thoughts among people, and also increase their collaboration and interaction with each other and thus improve their social skills (Moghaddam and Irani, 2010). Painting direct expressions of dreams, imagination and other personal experiences are possible in images; video displays of unconscious content are more easily extracted than verbal expressions. In fact, the effectiveness of medical painting is due to the fact that this method provides an opportunity to express excitement beyond the strictly formal rules and in a completely free environment. Subjective mental abilities can interact more through painting, especially team painting, and enhance their social skills, which facilitates interpersonal relationships (Yarmohammadin and Akhlaghi, 2014).

Other results of the research were that art therapy increased the level of subjective mental self-esteem. In explaining this finding, it can be said that mental impairment by painting as a tangible activity can be seen from the result of its activity, and this is a means to increase their self-esteem and give them a sense of self-worth (Yarmohammadin and Akhlaghi, 2014). Subjective mental abilities cannot bring their problems into language and speech, but they show up during art activities like painting. Artistic activity forms their expression and their flexibility increases their morale and self-esteem (Zadehmohammadi, 2010). On the other hand, the diffusion of inner life by painting and communicating with emotions and conflicts leads to self-acceptance and greater belief in the ability of mental retardation which raises the level of self-esteem (Malchiodi, 2003). One can also point out the effects of group art on self-esteem, which was the subject of the fifth session, that, since they are not mentally capable of high self-esteem, group painting makes them worthless. And be brought into the attention of friends. During a low-level painting, they can express themselves and increase their self-esteem (Karivand and Goudarzi, 2014).

6. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that painting therapy is effective on improving social skills and increasing mental self-esteem. Art and, in particular, painting, provide a sort of episode of emotion and feelings in people. Hence, it can be achieved through painting into the world of people and giving rise to emotions, feelings and excitement. This is especially important in the case of mental retardation, which often affects the verbal expression of their emotions and feelings. By expressing fears, these individuals reveal their own inner fears and conflicts without worrying others about judgment or good and bad ones. At first glance, poorly painted painting may seem weak, but these people use simplistic and uncensored symbols in their drawings and express their own problems in the same way.

The purpose of this study was not to teach the painters to the empowered, but to protect them from being released, in order to express all that is within them and express their inner dimensions. The good or bad of what is being said is not a fundamental issue; it is important that there is no fear of expressing thought for them. The good or bad elements and concepts expressed in the next step are not the subject of this research. Perhaps the only way to raise real self-esteem and low-level social skills is to understand that no call comes in from the judgments.

This research has not been carried out without limitation, indicating that it should be done with caution in generalizing the results. The reliance of research findings on the data from the low-profile trainer's report on existing variables is notable as the first limitation. It is likely that a kind of bias affects the relationships between variables. The second limitation of the present study is that

the sample used in this study included the male mental retardation, which limits the generalization of the results.

Based on the present study, researchers interested in similar research with this research are recommended to repeat the research in other age groups and the wider community. It is recommended to run this test on both sexes simultaneously and compare them with each other. In this research, painting therapy was used as one of the main components of art therapy. It is suggested that in the future research, the effects of other aspects of art therapy such as music therapy, show therapy and storytelling on self-esteem and low-level social skills should be considered.

References

- Aydogan, Y., Klinc, F. E., & Tepeta, S. (2009). Identifying parent views regarding social skills. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1, 1507-1512.
- Behpajouh, A., & Nuri, F. (2005). The Impact of Therapeutic Painting on Reducing Aggressive Behaviors of Retarded Students. *Psychology and Educational Sciences*, 3, 155-170.
- Biyabangard, E. (2005). Comparison of social skills of blind, deaf and normal high school girl students in Tehran. *Quarterly journal of research in the field of exceptional children*, 5(1), 55-68.
- Cooper, S. (2003). *Self-esteem enhancement with children and adolescent*. New York: Pergamon press.
- Damico, M., & Lalonde, C. (2017). The Effectiveness of Art Therapy for Teaching Social Skills to Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 34, 176-182.
- Dehdar, Z. (2012). *Investigating the effect of group art therapy on decreasing aggression and increasing self-esteem of boys in elementary school*. Master's Thesis, Payam Noor University of Tehran.
- Emerson, E. (2003). Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents with and without intellectual disability. *Journal of intellectual disability research*, 47(1), 51-58.
- Franklin, M. (2013). Art Therapy and Self-Esteem. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 9, 78-84.
- Fuladband, F. (2008). Art: Creativity and mental health. *Simply heal it*. Workshop of life, 5, 52-63.
- Ghanbari Hashem Abadi, B., & Ebrahimi Nejad, M. (2011). The Impact of Group Art Therapy on the Interpersonal Skills of Women with Chronic Psychiatric Disorders Hospitalized in the Center for the Maintenance and Rehabilitation of Chronic Psychiatric Patients. *Principles of Mental Health*, 13(3), 222-229.
- Gresham, F. M., & Elliot, S. N. (1990). *Social skills rating system: manual*. American Guidance Service.
- Hashemi, M., Mirzamani, M., Davarmanesh, A., Salehi, M., & Nazadi Kashani, GH. (2010). The Impact of Puppet Showcase (with UV Light) on the reduction of aggressive female students in the mentally retarded girl. *Special Needs Children's Rehabilitation*, 5, 88-93.
- Karivand, B., & Goudarzi, H. (2014). Painting and control aggression. Educational plan for exceptional children. Retrieved from URL:<http://echildren.blogfa.com/post/84>.
- Khoshkonesh, A. (2006). Art Therapy: Definition, History, Methodology and Measurement. *Proceedings of the First Congress of Art Therapy in Iran*.
- Khoshnazar, A. (2004). *Standardization of Social Skills Rating Scale (SSRS) in Preschool Children in Tehran (Parent Form)*. Master's thesis. Tehran University.
- Li, H. L. (2002). *Painting therapy for a child with emotional and behavioral disorders* (Doctoral dissertation, Master's thesis in art therapy and counseling. Cleveland: Ursuline College).

- Liu, X. (2000). Behavioral and emotional problems in Chinese children with mental retardation and without intellectual disability. *Journal of American child and adolescence Psychiatry*, 30(7), 869-903.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2003). Art therapy and the brain. *Handbook of art therapy*, 16-24.
- Mokhtari, Y. (2010). *The effectiveness of teaching theory of mind on social skills of Asperger's children*. Master's thesis. Allameh Tabataba'i University.
- Moghaddam, K. (2009). *The effect of visual arts education on increasing the information skill processing vocabulary for children in accurately*. Master's thesis. Tehran, Azad University of Tehran Central Branch.
- Moghaddam, K., & Irani, A. (2010). Painting instruction for mentally retarded children. *Exceptional education*, 103, 53-47.
- Nazari, M. (2016). The effect of therapy painting on increasing the skills of students in slow student step. *Second international congress on community empowerment in the field of educational science and social and cultural studies*.
- Nasseri, M., & Keraskian, A. (2017). The effect of therapy painting on increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy of aboriginal children in Karaj. *Behavioral Sciences Research*, 3(15), 484- 494.
- Nazadi Kashani, Gh., Mirzamani, M., Davarmanesh, A., Salehi, M., Masah, O., Hashemi, M., & Ghlami, A. (2010). The impact of painting on reducing aggression among elementary educated mentally retarded students. *Special Needs Children's Rehabilitation*, 5, 80-87.
- Rajabi, GH., & Bohlul, N. (2007). Reliability and validity measurement of Rosenberg self-esteem scale of New Year students in Shahid Chamran University. *Educational and psychological research*, 8, 33-48.
- Rahimian, E. (2014). The effect of unity-oriented art therapy on understanding respiration from family and self-esteem of adolescent teenagers. Master's Thesis, Shahid Beheshti University.
- Rangani, A., Hemati, GH., Shojaei, S., & Asghari Nekah, M. (2014). The effectiveness of tumor therapeutic game intervention on the social skills of male students with Autism disorders. *The Psychology of Exceptional Persons*, 20, 73- 92.
- Rosenberg, M. (2015). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton University Press.
- Sanei, N. (2015). The effect of cognitive-behavioral art therapy on reducing aggression, Self-esteem and happiness in teens. Master's Thesis, University of Tehran.
- Shalani, B., & Azadi Manesh, P. (2014). Comparison of the effectiveness of group art therapy and puppet therapy games on the social skills of children with over-the-counter (ADHD) disorder. *Mental health of the child*, 4, 103-113.
- Shalani, B., Karami, J., & Momeni, Kh. (2014). The effectiveness of art therapy with painting approach on the social skills of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 4(2), 10-15.
- Salsali, M., & Silverstone, P. H. (2003). Low self-esteem and psychiatric patients: Part II- The relationship between self-esteem and demographic factors and psychosocial stressors in psychiatric patients. *Annals of General Hospital Psychiatry*, 2(1), 3.
- Shahri, M. (2013). The effect of therapy painting on communication skills of Shirin students. Master's Thesis, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili.
- Shahim, S. (1999). Comparison of social skills and behavioral problems in two groups of normal children with learning disabilities at home and school. *Journal of Psychology and Educational Sciences*, 1, 121-138.
- Silver, J. B. (2008). *Art therapy workbook for children and adolescents with Autism* (Doctoral dissertation, Ursuline College).
- Soltani, M., Arian, KH., & Angeji, L. (2013). Effectiveness of group storytelling method in increasing the self-esteem of primary school girl students. *Educational Psychology*, 29, 92-97.
- Tokinan, B., & Bilen, S. (2010). Self-esteem assessment form development study. *Procedia social and behavioral sciences*, 2, 4366-4369.

- Yarmohammadian, A., & Akhlaghi, A. (2014). *The effect of therapy painting on reducing the aggressive behavior of male students with mild to moderate mental retardation*, 10, 833- 844.
- Zadehmohammadi, A. (2010). *Art therapy: An introduction to specialist art therapy*. Tehran: Ghatreh Publishing.