

Extended Abstract

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Research paper

The Effectiveness of Group Story Therapy on the Externalizing Behaviors of Female Students with Oppositional Defiant Disorder

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Introduction

Children, as one of the most sensitive and vulnerable groups, are prone to various psychological disorders. Studies indicate that between 15% and 22% of children experience emotional or behavioral disorders during their lifetime ([Andersson et al., 2012](#)). Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is one of the most common psychological disorders among children, with a prevalence rate ranging from 1% to 11% in preschool and early school-age children, typically before adolescence ([American Psychiatric Association, 2013](#)). Children and adolescents with ODD often experience negative emotions and display poor social interactions. As a result, they are frequently rejected by their peers, teachers, and other school staff, which diminishes their educational opportunities ([Andersson et al., 2012](#)). If these behavioral problems are not addressed early, they can have long-lasting effects on the child's behavioral, physical, and cognitive development ([Toolan, 2001](#)). Several studies ([Bietti et al., 2012](#); [Bietti et al., 2019](#)) have highlighted the effectiveness of story therapy in treating children's behavioral problems. However, these studies generally focus on individual storytelling, whereas group storytelling, which leverages group dynamics and peer imitation, may enhance the therapeutic effect. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of group story therapy in addressing the externalizing behaviors of female students with ODD.

Method

The study utilized a semi-experimental pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The study population consisted of 1,770 female students from the first and second grades of public primary schools in one district of Tabriz during the 2022-2023 academic year. A preliminary sample of 400 individuals was selected through cluster sampling, based on the geographic distribution of schools and the relative homogeneity of the student population within schools. Two public elementary schools for girls in the first district of Tabriz were chosen, and screening was conducted among all first- and second-grade students at these schools. After the screening process, the final sample comprised 36 students diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder, who were randomly assigned to either the experimental (16 students) or control (16 students) group. Inclusion criteria for the study included a T-score greater than 63 on the screening test, no history of medication use, no prior counseling or treatment services, and parental consent for participation. Exclusion criteria included nonattendance at more than three treatment sessions or the occurrence of significant life stressors during the intervention period. Data collection instruments included the Achenbach Child and Adolescent Behavior Inventory and its parent form. The experimental group participated in 13 one-hour group sessions, conducted three times per week.

Results

The results of the analysis of covariance were significant for the total score of extraversion behaviors and hyperactivity/impulsivity, law-breaking behavior, and aggressive behavior. Based on this, it can be said that group story therapy reduced the scores of extraversion behaviors in the post-test of the tested group and was effective in reducing these symptoms.

Table 1: The results of the analysis of covariance to compare the mean of self-esteem and social skills

Variable	SS	df	MS	F	P	η^2
Hyperactivity-Impulsivity	17.99	1	17.99	28.52	<0.001	0.51
Law-Breaking Behavior	2.50	1	2.50	17.48	<0.001	0.39
Aggressive Behavior	41.27	1	41.27	24.50	<0.001	0.48
Extraversion Behaviors	142.47	1	142.47	79.79	<0.001	0.73

The results of the analysis of covariance show that there is a difference between the two experimental and control groups in hyperactivity/impulsivity ($F=28.52$), law-breaking behavior ($F=17.48$), aggressive behavior ($F=24.50$) and extraversion behaviors ($F=79.79$) were significant. The effect sizes for hyperactivity/impulsivity, law-breaking behavior, aggressive behavior, and extraversion behaviors were 0.51, 0.39, 0.48, and 0.73 attributable to the experimental effects, respectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that group story therapy is effective in addressing the externalizing behaviors of female students with oppositional defiant disorder. These results are consistent with those of Andersson et al. (2012) and Bietti et al. (2019). In explaining these findings, it can be argued that story therapy allows children to openly express their problems without viewing the treatment as punitive. Additionally, they can engage in the process without fear of judgment, confronting their challenges alongside the protagonist of the story and searching for potential solutions. As children experience different emotions through the story, they reflect on how they might respond in similar situations and select appropriate strategies to manage them. Thus, storytelling helps children recognize meaningful relationships between events and gain a deeper understanding of their own experiences (Dwivedi, 1997). The stories used in this intervention aimed to teach children how to manage externalizing behaviors in comparable situations, thereby helping to improve symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Code

This study was preregistered at the Vice-Chancellor for academic affairs and Graduate Education, Seraj Higher Education Non-profit Institute, Tabriz, Iran.

Financial Support

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Authors' Contributions

Kobra Namvaran Gerami supervised the research process, methodology and, revise it critically for intellectual content, and approved the final version for publication. Shahla Heydari conducted the research, implementation of training, statistical analysis, and wrote the manuscript as part of her MA thesis at the Seraj Higher Education Non-profit Institute.

Conflicts of Interest

This study is based on a master's thesis, supported by the Seraj Higher Education Non-profit Institute and no potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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