

# The Effectiveness of Art Therapy on Decreasing of Depression and Anxiety in Preschoolers

Safora Nooruzi<sup>1</sup>, Sahar Afshar Zanjani<sup>2</sup>, Bahare Dastan<sup>2</sup>, Atefeh Raadin<sup>3\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>M.A. in Clinical Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Bokan Branch, Bokan, Iran

<sup>2</sup>M.A. in Clinical Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Rode hen Branch, Rode hen, Iran

<sup>3</sup>M.A. in General Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, Garmsar, Iran

\*Corresponding Author Email: [tc.sari96@yahoo.com](mailto:tc.sari96@yahoo.com)

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**ABSTRACT:** Aim: In this study, the effectiveness of painting-based art therapy on reducing depression and anxiety in preschool children has been investigated. Method: This study was conducted as Semi-experimental study in which 30 children aged 4-6 years with psychological problems were randomly selected and placed in two groups of 15 subjects. The instrument used in this study was questionnaire of depression in children of Coaxes and Spence children anxiety questionnaire. Participants were arranged on the basis of art therapy for 10 sessions. Data were analyzed by covariance test. Results: The findings showed that the mean scores of depression and anxiety in the experimental group had a significant decrease in the post-test stage compared to the control group ( $P = 0.001$ ). The findings of the study showed the effectiveness of painting-based art therapy on reducing depression and Anxiety in preschool children. Conclusion: Regarding the reduction of depression and anxiety of pre-school aging children, the role of art therapy based on painting should be considered as one of the strategies for treatment of disorders in children.

**Keywords:** Art Therapy Paintings, Depression, Anxiety.

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## INTRODUCTION

Childhood is suitable to identify children problems, on time intervention and preventing affective, social and educational problems in future. In fact, on time intervention and improving child's abnormal behaviors may increase social skills and makes ready child to accept later responsibilities (Shahim, 2007).

Anxiety is a prevalent disorder among preschool children. It is the most usual reaction against stressful factors and is related to personality factors, biologic features, cultural effects, educational effects (Shirzad, 2014). Anxiety appears in different shapes like enuresis, sleep disorder and feeding disorder. It is important to identify main factors before therapy. 1-5 ages children have more tendencies to show anxiety (Macken, 2001). Researchers emphasize upon childhood attachment communications and caring method in anxiety and anxiety disorders continuity (Bennet & Stirling, 1998).

Depression disorders in childhood and adolescence period are known as psychiatry prevalent disorders. Therefore, depression diagnosis and therapy are very important (American academy of child and adolescent psychiatry, 2000). Continuity of depression may result in drug abusing, suicide and mental, social and educational performance disorder (Birmaher et al., 1996). Aronen and his colleagues have studied childhood depression. They

found that depression symptoms between 10-11 ages may predict psychiatry symptoms like aggression, weak accommodation performance and low self-esteem in adulthood (Aronen & Soininen, 2000).

Low depression age may show more weak prognosis (Carrison et al.,1997).

According to some research, painting-based art therapy may reduce anxiety, depression and aggression in children. Katz and Hamama (2013) found that children can use painting to show some emotions like aggression. Pifalo & colleagues found that art therapy with cognitive-behavioral therapy are effective upon reducing PTSD symptoms (like anxiety) in raped children. Perrin et al (2000) found that children anxiety signs appear in the form of play, painting and telling story. Jangi Ghoje Bigloo et al (2014) found that painting-based art therapy is effective upon anxiety reducing among stuttering children. According to Rezaee et al (2014), painting therapy may improve anxiety and aggression symptoms in elementary school children Gholamzade & colleagues(2013) showed that painting-based art therapy may reduce phobia disorder symptoms among 7-12 aged boys.

Painting-based art therapy is a relative therapy method to remedy children disorders. It may result to physical, mental and emotional growth. Art helps people to solve their conflicts and problems and extend interpersonal skills, behavior management, anxiety reducing, self-esteem improving and finally become informed (Khadar et al., 2013).

Is self-initiated drawing of images to communicate with others (Iverach & Jones, 2009). Drawing lines show child's affective and emotional states and painting becomes improved with consciousness increasing (Dadsetan, 2004). According to mentioned subjects, research main question is:

Is painting-based art therapy effective upon depression and anxiety reducing in preschool children?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was conducted as semi-experimental study in which 30 children aged 4-6 years with psychological problems in 2014- 2015 were randomly selected and placed in two groups of 15 subjects. These persons were selected among 10 centers randomly. Participants of experimental group (15 persons) were arranged on the basis of art therapy for 10 sessions. After painting-based art therapy sessions, preschool teachers completed depression and anxiety questionnaires.

### ***Research Instrument***

A) Children depression instrument (CDI): This questionnaire is a self-report scale designed by Kovaks (1985). It is used to evaluate behavioral, cognitive and affective symptoms of depression among children and adolescences 7-17 ages. It measures extended span of depression symptom like disturbed mood, weak biological performance, low self-assessment, disappointment and interpersonal problems (Landres, 2010). Internal consistency has been reported between 0/71- 0/89 (Kovaks,1985). According to studies, children depression questionnaire total score correlation with Beck depression questionnaire and children depression scale are 0/79 and 0/87 orderly. It indicates high convergent validity.

B) Spens children anxiety questionnaire: This questionnaire has been designed by spens (1997). This scale consists of 28 items based on 5-degrees likert. According to factor analysis, morbid symptoms clustering is accommodated with mental disorders list. (DSM). All of its sub-scales shows positive correlation with internalized problems in child behavioral list (CBCL) and all correlations are more than 0/42 (spens & colleagues , 2001).

### ***Executing Method***

Painting-based art therapy sessions consisted of 10 sessions 45-minutes. The executing method was as follows: at first, all children came to painting room and became familiar with therapy space and researcher in order to reduce their anxiety.

**Table 1.** Structure Of Painting Therapy Sessions.

Sessions	Activity
Session 1	Becoming familiar with each other. Becoming familiar with total process, doing art activities with optional subjects by painting pencil and water-color
Session 2	Making ready by some techniques like drawing line, finding pictures among lines and then painting.
Sessions 3 & 4	Drawing and group painting in the form of purpose activity by painting pencil, water- color and magic
Sessions 5 &6	Experiencing group paintings and completing by painting pencil, magic and water-color with concentration upon positive feedbacks and effective interaction among group members
Session 7	Sculpture from group members and completing group image, showing to the others group members and discussing about their features.
Session 8	Drawing group members by painting pencils, magic, with discussing about feeling and emotion, their cognition by these activities.
Session 9	Remembering before subjects, making ready children to finish group, comparing child feeling and behavior by him/herself before and after sessions
Session10	Making ready to finish sessions, making order to opinions in the form of drawing imaginative works.

## RESULTS

**Table 2.** Mean And Standard Deviation Of Research Variables Pretest & Post-Test For Experimental And Control Groups

Variable	State	Group	Mean	SD	Least	Uttermost	Number
Depression	Pretest	Experimental	27.80	6.02	20	43	15
		Control	28.47	5.57	24	46	15
	Posttest	Experimental	16.60	1.84	13	19	15
		Control	27.33	5.55	23	42	15
Anxiety	Pretest	Experimental	63.33	9.04	54	87	15
		Control	62.40	9.72	50	55	15
	Pretest	Experimental	39.33	2.92	35	43	15
		Control	63.47	12.09	43	88	15

According to table 2, there are differences between pretest and posttest means in research variables. It was used covariance analysis to survey significance of this difference.

**Table 3.** Results Of Covariance Analysis For Children Depression Variable Scores.

Variable	Changes Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Eta Coefficient
Depression	Pretest	285.81	1	285.81	89.14	0.001	0.592
	Group	803.15	1	803.15	110.00	0.001	0.803
	Error	197.12	27				
	Total	15823.00	30				

Depression scores of experimental and control groups were compared by covariance analysis. According to table 3 results, there are significant differences among experimental and control groups scores ( $F= 110.000$ ,  $P< 0.001$ ). It indicates that painting-based art therapy is effective upon depression reduction for preschool children.

**Table 4.** Results Of Covariance For Children Anxiety Variable Scores.

Variable	Changes Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Eta Coefficient
Depression	Pretest	723.51	1	723.51	13.53	0.001	0.334
	Group	4540.93	1	4540.93	84.93	0.001	0.759
	Error	1443.54	27	53.46			
	Total	85794.00	30				

Anxiety scores were compared between experimental and control groups by covariance analysis. According to table 4, there are significant difference among experimental and control groups scores ( $F=84.93$  ,  $P<0.001$ ). It indicates that painting-based art therapy is effective upon anxiety for preschool children.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was efficiency of painting-based art therapy upon preschool children depression and anxiety reduction. According to research results, painting-based art therapy has been effective upon children depression and anxiety. Total score mean of depression and anxiety have been reduced after therapy interventions for all variables. These results are congruent with painting-based art therapy interventions results of other researchers and therapists in preschool children disorders field. Jangi Ghoje Bigloo et al (2014) found that painting-based art therapy is effective upon anxiety reducing among stuttering children. According to Rezaee and his colleagues (2014) painting-based art therapy may improve anxiety and aggression symptoms in elementary school children. Gholamzade & colleagues(2013)showed that painting-based art therapy may reduce phobia disorder symptoms among 7-12 aged boys. Katz, C., & Hamama, L. (2013). showed that children can use painting to show some emotions like aggression. The present study results are congruent with Iverach and Jones (2009), Perrin et al (2000) and Yell (2000). Painting-based art therapy emphasizes upon encountering skills instruction, improving self-control and self-efficiency. Painting-based art therapy instructs performance improving skills to children. Child communicates with therapist and understands events, communications and feels comfort and use it as a tool to communicate and encounter with environment.

Painting-based art therapy is a relative therapy method to remedy children disorders. It may result to physical, mental and emotional growth. Art helps children to solve their conflicts and problems and extend interpersonal skills, behavior management, anxiety reducing, self-esteem improving and finally become informed (Khadar et al., 2013). Painting is self-initiated drawing of images to communicate with others (Iverach & Jones, 2009). Drawing lines show child's affective and emotional states and painting becomes improved with consciousness increasing (Dadsetan, 2004). The present study was executed upon preschool children that their sex did not become matched. Depression and anxiety scales indicators are comparable between girls & boys groups. We suggest that some research become executed with regard to both sex matching.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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