

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Effect of Therapeutic Group Therapy on Parents' Ability to Stimulate the Development of Initiatives for Preschool Children during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The Covid-19 pandemic causes learning activities to be carried out at home. Parents encounter obstacles in stimulating their child's development because they do not understand how to stimulate and leave school. Preschoolers are in the initial development stage that focuses on exploring creativity. Initiative development is preparation for children to cope with more enormous stressors at school age. **Objectives:** This study aimed to analyze therapeutic group therapy's effect on the parents' ability to stimulate initiative development. **Methods:** This study used one group pre-posttest design method. The sample was 32 parents of kindergarten and early childhood education students in Malang City. The independent variable was online therapeutic group therapy. The dependent variable was the parents' ability to stimulate initiative development. **Results:** The results indicated that the parents' average score to perform stimulation before therapeutic group therapy implementation was 44.19. After therapy, the average score increased to 55.84. The statistical test used Paired T-test showed that the p-value was 0.000 (p-value <0.05), so it can be concluded that therapeutic group therapy had a significant effect on parents' ability to stimulate initiative development. **Conclusions:** This study recommends the importance of increasing the parents' ability to stimulate the pre-school children's initiative development. The school can work together with health workers, especially mental nurses, in therapeutic group therapy activities to increase the parents' active role in stimulating children's development, optimizing children's psychosocial development.

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1. Introduction

Humans have a critical period of development that needs stimulation in order to develop their potential. This development's critical period is when individuals enter the pre-school age range (3-6 years). This pre-school period is an essential psychosocial development that significantly affects the next development stage (school age) (Charach, Bélanger, McLennan, & Nixon, 2017). The psychosocial development of this preschool age is referred to as a period of initiative. Initiative psychosocial development can be in the form of learning to interact with other people, wanting to do something that has never been done, fantasizing about being something you want, recognizing one's identity such as name, gender (Bornstein, 2018). Initiative development is also referred to as the genital-locomotor stage, often referred to as the play stage. Playing for children is when children want to learn about the challenges of the outside world. Children want to learn new things and abilities that have not been done before (McNeill, Howard, Vella, Santos,

& Cliff, 2018). At this stage, the child also feels a sense of purpose. Children can think of cause and effect to do something based on the desire to achieve something. Also, playing for pre-school children is vital as a first step in developing socialization skills (Charach et al., 2017). The age range of 3 to 6 years is a period that is very sensitive to stimulation, so it is often referred to as the golden period. This development is obtained through the child's environment (Hodgkinson, Godoy, Beers, & Lewin, 2017). Preschoolers have the potential to develop rapidly. This development is optimal if the child is trained with stimulation (Cross & Cross, 2017). The development of pre-school age children can experience irregularities if stimulation is not carried out intensively. Any developmental deviation during this period predisposes to other developmental problems at the next psychosocial development stage (Gustafsson, Proczkowska-Björklund, & Gustafsson, 2017). Developmental deviations that occur at preschool age cause children to experience guilt. This guilt causes fear for children to do something new so that a sense of initiative to do other activities does not arise (Bornstein, 2018). Children tend to be more silent, less creative, less confident. This attitude is undoubtedly hazardous if it continues until the next developmental period (school age and adolescence)(Olsson, Druss, & Marcus, 2015).

Attention to the development of children's initiatives is significant because the number of preschool-age children is large, especially in Indonesia. The total population of Indonesia at pre-school age is around 10% (BPS, 2011). Besides, the phenomenon of not optimal pre-school age development also occurs in Indonesia. Many parents of preschoolers do not understand that their child's developmental initiative is not optimal. Parenting style often only pays attention to the child's physical development, only sees that their child is physically healthy but does not pay attention to psychosocial development (Glascoe & Leew, 2010). Parents cannot distinguish between normal and abnormal developmental initiatives (Yulianto, Lestari, & Suwito, 2017). A preliminary study conducted by researchers showed that 19 out of 20 parents of students did not know what initial development was and how to stimulate it. Most parents think that a quiet child is a good child. Besides, parents also think that their child has had enough stimulation at school by the teacher.

The Covid-19 pandemic that occurred in 2020 impacted changing learning methods at all levels of education in Indonesia. Changes in learning methods from face-to-face to online methods (Syah, 2020). Changes in learning methods also occur at the pre-school education level, which leads to the stimulation of early childhood development. Home learning requires a more significant role for parents in stimulating children's development. This situation increases parental stress because most parents tend to leave the stimulation of development to school teachers (PAUD or TK) and do not realize that their children have not fulfilled the developmental tasks they should have achieved at their age. Previous studies also support this phenomenon that most pre-school children who attend early childhood education have good social development skills. Most pre-school children who do not attend early childhood education have sufficient social development (Retnowati, 2010). This condition shows that the role of schools in stimulating is still more dominant than that of parents. A study conducted in mid-2020 showed that out of 17,565 parents, 83.2 percent experienced stress. This figure increased to 95.1 percent in the next survey. The disturbance is felt by parents in caring for their children, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, schools are implementing online learning at home, this is because parents have to participate in studying the material taught at school, studying the technology used, assisting during learning, taking part in arranging children's learning hours, worrying about the child's learning outcomes and adding that parents also feel the child's workload, especially mothers who have to share homework by guiding children's work and office work (Drouin, McDaniel, Pater, & Toscos, 2020).

Several efforts can be made to increase parents' knowledge and abilities in stimulating pre-school age children's development. Health education is the most frequently carried out effort, but health education is more directed at increasing cognitive abilities. Another form of effort that can be done is therapeutic group therapy. Therapeutic group therapy provides opportunities for clients to discuss, share experiences, help each other provide problem-solving solutions, and anticipate problems that may arise. In addition to increasing the client's ability to stimulate

development, it can also overcome clients' stress (Stuart, 2013). Therapeutic group therapy is also often performed on clients of pregnant women, parents of babies and toddlers, school-age children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Group therapy is also often used for psychosocial and mental disorders clients.

The therapeutic group provides a therapeutic effect on each member of the group. Therapy with a group approach has advantages over health education because there are a sharing burden and stress management (Setyaningsih, Keliat, WU, Lindawati, & Mustikasari, 2012). Therapeutic group therapy can also increase toddlers' ability to reach their developmental stage and increase parents' ability to perform stimulation (Susanti & Livana, 2019). Therapeutic group therapy becomes a medium for group members to share opinions, burdens, stress, and solutions to the same problem so that it becomes a place to meet family coping needs and sources (Stuart, 2013). Therefore, therapeutic group therapy's effect on parents' ability to stimulate preschool children's development needs to be investigated. This study aims to determine the effect of therapeutic group therapy on the ability of parents to stimulate developmental initiatives of preschool children

2. Methods

This study used the one group pre-posttest design method. The sample in the study was 32 parents of PAUD and kindergarten students in Malang City. The independent variable is the therapeutic group therapy performed using the therapeutic group therapy module and workbook as a therapy guide. Thirty-two parents participated in online therapeutic group therapy in 3 sessions, namely a session exploring the experiences and problems of parents in stimulating the development of pre-school age children's initiatives, training sessions to stimulate developmental initiatives in preschool children, evaluation sessions, and sharing experiences while practicing stimulation exercises developmental initiatives in preschool children. The dependent variable is parents' ability to stimulate the development of preschool children's initiative as measured by using a questionnaire on the ability to stimulate the development of pre-school children's initiatives. The questionnaire consists of 15 Likert scale questions with a value of 0 (never do) to 4 (always do). The respondent's score ranged from 0 (zero) to 60 points. The questionnaire has been tested for validity.

The validity test result was 0.483 to 0.889 and a reliability test of 0.759. The final score is obtained from the total score with an interval of 0 (zero) to 60 points. The data were then analyzed by statistical paired T-test because the data were interval scale and normally distributed.

3. Results and Discussion

This study indicates that the average score of parents' ability to perform developmental stimulation before implementing therapeutic group therapy is 44.19. After going through three therapeutic group therapy sessions, the parents' average score to perform developmental stimulation increased to 55.84. Statistical test using Paired T-test shows that the p-value is 0.000 (p-value <0.05), so it can be concluded that therapeutic group therapy has a significant effect on parents' ability to stimulate developmental initiatives, pre-school children. Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents' characteristics, while table 2 shows the bivariate test results on parents' ability to stimulate the development of pre-school age children.

The average score of the respondent's ability to stimulate the development of pre-school children's initiative has increased from 44.19 points to 55.84 points or an increase of 11.65 points. The result of the paired T statistical test between the respondents' ability scores in stimulating preschool children's development before and after therapeutic group therapy was 0,000. Because the p-value <0.05, it can be concluded that therapeutic group therapy has a significant effect in increasing the respondent's ability to stimulate the development of pre-school age children's initiatives (Table 2).

This study indicates no parents have a maximum score in stimulating developmental initiatives in children. The ability to perform stimulation is closely related to general knowledge. This knowledge is obtained through both formal and informal learning processes. However, this

study shows that although most of the respondents' education is at the high school to tertiary level, stimulation of children's developmental initiatives is still not optimal. At the beginning of the discussion session, all respondents thought their child's development had been expected, and there were no problems with the initiative's development. After the first session of discussion on identifying the initiative's progress, All respondents concluded that their child's development was not appropriate and had never been stimulated. However, this research's weakness is that it does not identify the dominant factors associated with this knowledge.

One of the skills that parents rarely practice involves involving children in activities to help with household chores at home, such as making beds, sweeping, helping in the kitchen. Almost all parents think that their child is too young to be involved in-home activities. Also, children are deemed unable to do well, so the results are not what parents want. All respondents thought they should do their homework because it was done better quickly than their preschool children's assistance. Other skills that are also not practiced by many are letting children play roles, play with their imaginations with household items or items at home.

At this stage of developing this initiative, the child's physical and language skills begin to mature. Children usually will be more aggressive in exploring their environment for new physical and social experiences (Bornstein, 2018). Children who have started to have initiatives will take many actions such as running, playing, jumping. Parents often do not understand this and think that their child is naughty and then carry out physical and verbal punishment (Livana & Anggraini, 2018). Parents often punish children who take the initiative and will make children feel guilty. This development is called guilt or guilt (Glascoe & Leew, 2010).

This phenomenon is fascinating because inviting pre-school children to carry out daily activities at home aims to foster a sensitive attitude towards the surroundings so that gradually an attitude of initiative emerges to do something for others. Likewise, playing with household items is part of the child's curiosity to explore the imagination. If children are often restrained from exploring their imagination, they will feel afraid and do not develop their initiative (Hetherington, 2009). Parenting style should be more guiding and motivating children. This parenting style is essential to pass through the development stage of the initiative properly. Democratic parenting, in which parents give children more freedom to explore themselves as long as they do not violate norms, is closely related to better children's psychosocial development (Talib, Mohamad, & Mamat, 2011). Children who develop democratic parenting also have higher emotional intelligence than other parenting models. Parents can direct the behavior of children who are more confident, control themselves, are friendly, have high curiosity, cooperate, and are achievement-oriented (Hidayah, Yunita, & Utami, 2011).

This study found phenomena, and it turns out that parents rarely give praise to children for their children's achievements. Giving praise is a form of parents' effort to increase children's confidence in exploring learning experiences. High self-confidence will spur the development of better initiatives. Through therapeutic groups, parents become aware of the importance of giving praise for what their children have achieved then practice giving praise to motivate children's initiative. It is hoped that the mother's ability to give praise to this child's competence and achievement can increase the child's self-esteem so that it is hoped that it can motivate the child to try various aspects of skills that they have not mastered before.

Therapeutic group therapy becomes a learning process for clients. In this learning process, a stimulus is provided to respond to a new experience input (McAleese, Lavery, & Dyer, 2014). Giving stimulus through group activities with people who have the same stressor will enrich the client's response or response and become behavior change therapy (Stead, Carroll, & Lancaster, 2017). In a fair learning process, there is not only additional information but also a common perception. The learning method is also very suitable for the adult education process (Stead, Carroll, & Lancaster, 2017). This is the reason that therapeutic group therapy improves the ability of parents to stimulate development in children. Previous research has also shown that therapeutic group therapy affects mothers' knowledge and skills in stimulating toddler-age development (Trihadi et al., 2009).

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

Variable	n (%)
Age of respondents (mean ± SD)	33.84 ± 5,116
Age of children (mean ± SD)	5.18 ± 0.709
Respondent gender	
Man	2 (6.3)
Women	32 (93.8)
Marital status	
Married	32 (100)
Single parent	0 (0)
Father's education level	
SD	2 (6.3)
Junior High	2 (6.3)
High school	17 (53.1)
College	11 (34.4)
Mother's education level	
SD	1 (3.1)
Junior High	4 (12.5)
High school	16 (50.0)
College	11 (34.4)
Father's occupation	
Private entrepreneur	20 (62.5)
Civil servants	10 (31.3)
Civil servants	2 (6.3)
Mother's job	
Does not work	19 (59.4)
Private entrepreneur	8 (25.0)
Teacher	4 (12.5)
Teacher	1 (3.1)
Class	
Paud	4 (12.5)
Kindergarten A.	16 (50.0)
Kindergarten B	12 (37.5)
The gender of the child	
Man	15 (44.9)
Women	17 (53.1)
Order of the child	
The first child	21 (65.6)
Second child	6 (18.8)
The third child	3 (28.1)
The fourth child	2 (6.3)
Number of children	
1 person	9 (28.1)
2 persons	17 (53.1)
3 people	4 (12.5)
4 people	2 (6.3)
Caregiver	
Parents	22 (68.8)
Brother / grandfather / grandmother	8 (25.0)
Outside caregiver	2 (6.3)

Table 2. The ability of parents to stimulate the development of preschool children's initiatives

Pre-test (average± SD)	Post-test (average± SD)	p-value
44.19 ± 7,913	55.84 ± 3,428	0.000

The discussion process in a therapeutic group provides an opportunity for members to share experiences (Sved, et al, 2018), help each other to find ways to solve problems, and anticipate the problems that will be faced by teaching effective ways to control stress (Menvielle & Rodnan, 2011). Therapeutic group therapy aims to develop empathy among group members to reinforce adaptive behavior (Townsend, 2009). The implementation of therapeutic group therapy involves families, especially mothers, as the first and foremost place to educate children. Therapeutic Group provides opportunities for groups of mothers who have the same age characteristics of children to stimulate children's development, which will result in the development of pre-school age children's initiatives to prepare children to have the competence to continue the next stage of psychosocial development, especially when entering school age.

A therapeutic group is created to provide a therapeutic effect on each member of the group. Therapy with a group approach has advantages compared to health education because there are a sharing burden and stress management in groups. Therapeutic group therapy meets family needs and essential resources for families with the same family members (Townsend, 2009). The goal of therapeutic group therapy is to maintain homeostasis against unexpected changes and gradual events (McAleese et al., 2014). Therapeutic group therapy for families with pre-school age children (3-6 years) is carried out to help families overcome problems experienced in growth and development, share experiences in stimulating children's development, and learn how to stimulate children's development to help children develop initiatives.

4. Conclusion

Therapeutic group therapy has a significant effect on parents' ability to stimulate developmental initiatives in pre-school children. This study recommends the importance of increasing the ability of parents to stimulate the development of pre-school children's initiatives. The school can work together with health workers, especially mental nurses, in therapeutic group therapy activities to increase parents' active role in stimulating children's development, thereby optimizing the child's psychosocial development.

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