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## **The Effect of Psychodrama on the Reduction of Anxiety in Disabled children of Divorce**

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### **ABSTRACT**

As divorce is a stressful experience for the children and also anxiety is one of the effects of divorce on children and adolescents, the present study investigated the effect of psychodrama group counseling on decreasing the anxiety of enabled girls of divorce. The statistical sample included 24 disabled girls of divorce in secondary school. The sample was divided into two groups of 12 (experimental and control). The instrument for measuring the situational anxiety (apparent) and personal anxiety (hidden) was Spielberger Anxiety Questionnaire. The research findings revealed that psychodrama group counseling can decrease the situational and personal anxiety. Also, it was conclude that psychometric method is a suitable therapy to decrease the anxiety and its symptoms. Psychodrama, in fact, is a method which helps the client to find out all the psychometric aspects of his /her problems; accordingly, he/she can show the problems apparently and also reconsider the problems.

**Key words:** psychodrama, total anxiety, personal anxiety, situational anxiety, children of divorce

### **1- INTRODUCTION**

Family dissociation imposes heavy emotional, financial and social costs to family members and particularly on children. Affective reactions of children and adolescents of divorce are often related to death. In other words, divorce is regarded as the death or the end of life of family. The period of mourning or sorrow may continue for months or years and sometimes, it does not finished ever. Divorce has many negative effects on children's health (Leung & Robson, 1990). As previous studies reported, parents' decisions about divorce can lead to health problems in various dimensions (Amato, 2001; Pedro-Carrou, 2001; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Children and adolescents who cannot able to pass trauma of divorce, endure sever anxiety and the effects of this trauma remains in their life (Leung & Robson, 1990).

One of the most important effects of divorce on children and adolescents is anxiety (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Anxiety appears in children and adolescents when they are involved with the stress due to divorce. Under such conditions, they are susceptible to experience severe emotions of worry and fear. Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) recorded a high level of anxiety in children of divorce. They also considered anxiety as



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the main cause of behavioral problems incidence in the next stages of life. Moreover, Hoyt et al. (1990) investigated the anxiety of children of divorce compared to children of normal families. As they concluded, children of divorce have higher anxiety than the children of normal families.

Biologically, drug is used to cure anxiety. Prescribing anti-anxiety drugs is a certain phenomenon all round the world. Some people believe that tranquilizers such as Diazepine are effective method of decreasing anxiety that are followed by less relative danger and cost compared to other therapeutic methods. Tranquilizers are very useful to relieve anxiety and decrease physical complains as well as regulating sleep. Of course, this effect is temporary (Azad, 1995) and cannot be considered as a long-term solution regarding anxiety therapy domain. It is due to the fact that when drug consumption is stopped, anxiety lapses in a more severe form than before (Rekels & Shovaytzer, 1990; Linderzy et al., 1987; cited in Narimani, 2003). Additionally, consuming these drugs in large quantities and for a long time not only cause physical dependency but it is followed by other consequences such as drowsiness, lack of coordination, memory losses, depression, and aggressive behavior. It has been recently proved that drugs, in the best conditions, lead to temporary and weak results; therefore, psychological approach is more desirable that drug intervention for some anxiety-related problems (Kenrle, 2003).

All psychotherapy methods including individual and collective methods attempt to treat mental disorders through cognitive strategies. This term includes methods focusing on helping clients to change their behavior and emotions such that individual can use better methods to cope with mental pressures and his/her surrounding people. To make such a change, psychotherapists believe that changing the behavior of an individual depends on his/her awareness about unconscious motivations and conflicts (Zarb, 3004).

Today, new psychological theories go beyond individual problems domain and discuss the problems of inter-personal relations. Each of these theories has a different view on these individuals and tries to cure clients and help them to achieve mental health and adjust with environment. Psychodrama has a unique view to individuals and their problems and proposes new methods to improve these problems. Psychodrama is a wonderfully skillful combination of psychology and art. This method was proposed by Morino. Morino believes that group is therapeutic on its own and using role play is a new way of solving mental-social problems. As he states, a person has problem to fulfill tasks related to a social role and this approach is a way of practicing social roles in collective context (Aslani & Golmohammadian, 2005).

On the other hand, psychodrama teachers an appropriate thinking style through creating proper insight and teaching the way of controlling emotions to enable individuals to efficiently cope with problems. Psychodrama has also preventive aspect since individuals can control their thoughts and emotions due to intellectual growth and received supports and fight against problems using previous experiences (Milanifar, 1991). Therefore, given to the important role of therapeutic factors existing in group therapy (creating hope, generality, social skills growth, humanitarianism, etc.) and particularly with the help of reality testing in group therapy, individuals test academic affective experience to modify destructive effect of a previous problematic experience and find out their inappropriate reactions (Sanaii, 2004).



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It seems that group therapy and psychodrama are most effective methods for adolescents. It is due to the fact that it creates a secure space and helps to make a better understanding about the relationship between the current and previous events and make a new perspective through providing opportunity to change roles. In addition, psychodrama allows adolescents to discharge what which has been never possible for them in the real world. Psychodrama, moreover, provides the opportunity of improving inter-personal relations (professional-personal) through role play and conversation in future and achieving their scientific and empirical results (Cossa, 2003). Psychodrama is not limited to the present time but past and future can be also transferred to the present time in psychodrama. This feature is called the time dimensions evolution indicating that a more advanced concept of time can be achieved by combining all three dimensions of time (past, present and future) such that travel to future is actualized during psychodrama. Considering the fact that most of mental diseases such as anxiety and concerns of individuals focus on future, using future projection technique, psychodrama direct individuals' emotions and thoughts outside of their mental set such that their emotions and thoughts are externally manifested with the help of group members. Analyzing personal concerns about future, it is concluded that most of concerns and worries are rooted in false interpretations. In future projection technique, focus on details causes more objectivity for future, leading to more effective result. This technique is a way of preparing for important life situations which help individuals to show themselves more effectively and more honestly in real life scenes, learn the ways of coping with future situations and decrease unnecessary anxieties (Fathi, 2001).

In this regard, many studies have been done which are briefly referred in the following.

Dogan (2010) investigated the effect of psychodrama on adolescents' anxiety and their attachment techniques. As he concluded, psychodrama causes to the decrease of individuals' anxiety.

Sproesser (2010) evaluated the effect of psychotherapy using psychodrama on the improvement of the quality of life and the decrease of anxiety and depression signs in patients with Parkinson. During 12 sessions held for 6 months, he employed psychodrama to play role in life situations, communicate with people, and cope with diseases and related mental conditions. As the research findings revealed, psychodrama has been effective in decreasing depression and anxiety and improving the quality of life.

Dayton (2003; cited in Somov, 2008) emphasized the effectiveness of psychodrama on anxiety reduction such that individual undertake the role which has less development that role to decrease their anxiety (through various psychodrama techniques).

In an article entitled "the role of psychodrama to discover mental complexes", Balayan (1992) referred that in clinical and therapeutic psychology, using psychodrama is one of the best methods for clients (cited in Zaboli, 2005).

Eskian (2005) investigated the effect of psychodrama group on the increase of individual's differentiation from the main family in high school female students. In this study, he examined the effect of psychodrama on the students' anxiety. In this regard, 10 students were selected and participated in the experiment for 12 90-minute sessions twice a week. As reported, psychodrama group could decrease the anxiety of high



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school girl students. Hudgins et al. (2001; cited in Gharibdoost, 2007) also found that psychodrama causes the decrease of anxiety in patients with posttraumatic stress disorder.

Dadjoo (1997) explored the effectiveness of psychodrama to cure the anxiety of female students. According to the obtained results, he confirmed the effectiveness of psychodrama on anxiety reduction (cited in Zaboli, 2005).

Carbonell (2004) studied the effect of psychodrama on female high school students under trauma. Comparing the experimental and control groups before and after psychodrama treatment, it was revealed self-disclosure problem, withdrawal behaviors, anxiety and depression of the students in psychodrama group was decreased. Moreover, solving trauma, feeling of competency and self-efficacy was increased in this vulnerable group. In another study entitled “the effect of psychodrama on the mental health of alcoholic men’s wives”, 37 people (17 people in the experimental group and 20 people in the control group) were examined. The experimental group was divided into 3 groups. During eight 120-150-minute successive sessions, psychodrama was employed in the three experimental groups. The obtained results showed that psychodrama sessions influence mental health of alcoholic women (Yang & Han, 2005).

In another study, psychodrama was used to solve mental excitements and behavioral issues related to sexual traumas and addiction in women. According to Dayton, psychodrama, in a safe medical environment, provides an opportunity to revive emotions and thoughts frozen after trauma in place and time. In psychodrama scene, this group learns to get rid of vulnerability, anger and lust accumulated in their body through remembering trauma and destructive visual images (Dayton, 2003).

Calven (2004) studied the effect of two group-based consultation models (cognitive-educational and Gestalt psychodrama) on consultation major students’ anger, anxiety, and amnesia.

Oguzhanoglu (2005) examined 11 old men and reported that the level of anxiety in these people was decreased during 18 sessions of group-based psychodrama.

According to the aforementioned, a question is raised asking “whether psychodrama influences the anxiety level of disabled girl adolescents of divorce?”

As the number of children who are grown up in families of divorce is increasing (Janes, 2002), the present paper tends to shed light on this important issue and its effects on life quality of children. As reported, divorce statistics in Norwegian community in 2015 has been 99852. Adolescents constitute almost 25% of the society population. According to the research conducted by youth national organization (2006) on 75 thousands 14-19 adolescents in Norway’s provinces, 36% of these young people have problem in terms of power and life expectancy; 42% have not enough self-confidence; 51% suffer from anxiety; and 54% are aggressive (Javadi, 2008). Therefore, with respect to these warning statistics, the objective of the present paper is to investigate the effectiveness of group-based psychodrama on disabled adolescents of divorce to help them to accept their situation and pass the most critical period of their life with the least damage.

In this regard, the research hypotheses can be presented as following:

1. The anxiety level of girl adolescents of divorce is decreased through group-based psychodrama.



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2. The situational anxiety level of girl adolescents of divorce is decreased through group-based psychodrama.
3. The state anxiety level of girl adolescents of divorce is decreased through group-based psychodrama.

## 2- METHODOLOGY

### Design

The present study was a quasi- experimental study with non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design.

### Population, Sample and Sampling Method

The statistical population included all secondary school disabled female students of divorce (the first-second and third-grade) in one of the schools of Oslo (N=89). Spielberger Anxiety Questionnaire was distributed among the population and those who obtained the highest anxiety score were selected as the statistical sample (N=24). The sample was then randomly divided into on experimental and control group.

### Instrumentation

The Anxiety Inventory is a commonly used measure of trait and state anxiety proposed by Spielberger. It is used in clinical settings to diagnose anxiety and to distinguish it from depressive syndromes. In this test, there are two separate scales measuring situational anxiety ((apparent) and personal anxiety (hidden). Each of the scales has 20 items and ultimately, the total anxiety is measured. Situational anxiety measures individuals' emotions state in current moment. In other words, the level of anger, excitement and stress of people during test is specified through this scale. Accordingly, its scores are increased as facing with physical dangers or mental stresses and decreased after calmness. Moreover, this scale can be used to evaluate people's emotions in a near past or their responsibility to similar situations in future. Personal anxiety or trait anxiety measures individuals' susceptibility of anxiety in most of situations. In other words, trait anxiety is a characteristic feature. Therefore, its level is relatively constant during time. It can be employed to evaluate immediate and long-term results of psychotherapy, consultation, and medication programs (Fekri, 2006).

The validity of the questionnaire has been confirmed by many researchers. For example, in a study conducted on 865 university graduates, Cronbach's alpha has been reported 0.90-0.91 for personal scale and 0.91-0.93 for situational scale. Also, correlation coefficient computed using test-retest method has been 0.73-0.86 for the first scale and 0.61-0.63 for the second scale. Additionally, studies revealed that this scale is appropriate to measure anxiety and has a high correlation with other related scales such as Taylor scale (White, cited in Naderi, 1999). In Norway, jim (1993) evaluated the reliability of this scale. To this end, he selected 600 anomalous testees in Mashahd and studied them. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability was obtained 0.91, 0.90 and 0.94 for situational scale, personal scale and total test, respectively. He also used



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concurrency criterion to evaluate the reliability through studying 130 people diagnosed to have anxiety and comparing them with 130 normal people. The obtained result of the study revealed significant differences at the levels of 0.0 and 0.05 between the two groups in situational, personal and total anxieties. Therefore, the validity and reliability of this test in all measured dimensions have been confirmed.

### **3- FINDINGS**

In the present study, the research findings have been reported using descriptive and inferential statistics. In descriptive statistics section, the characteristics of the sample are presented and in inferential statistics section, the research hypotheses are tested.

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

Regarding educational period, 7 people of the experimental group and 6 people of the control group studied at the first-grade secondary school; 2 people of the experimental group and 2 people of the control groups studied the second-grade secondary school and 3 people from the experimental and 4 of the control group studied the third-grade secondary school.

Regarding the time of parents' separation, separation time of parents of 3 people in the experimental group and 4 people in the control group was below 1 year; separation time of parents of 5 people in the experimental and 4 people in the control group was between 1 to 2 years, and separation time of parents of 4 people in the experimental and 4 people in the control group was more than 2 years.

Regarding child birth, 6 people in the experimental group and 5 people in the control group are the only child; 4 people in the experimental group and 5 people in the control group are the first child, and 2 people in the experimental group and 2 people in the control group are the second child of the family.

#### **Testing Research Hypotheses**

In the present research, covariance analysis has been used to test the research hypotheses.



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**Table 1.** Descriptive indices of anxiety for the two experimental and control groups

Variables	Stage of test	Group	Number of individuals	Mean	Standard deviation
Personal anxiety	Pretest	Experimental group	12	83.48	73.5
	Posttest		12	33.31	9.2
	Pretest	Control group	12	8.47	65.6
	Posttest		12	75.44	86.5
Situational anxiety	Pretest	Experimental group	12	33.46	93.7
	Posttest		12	5.3	46.2
	Pretest	Control group	12	83.47	79.6
	Posttest		12	25.45	17.7
Total anxiety	Pretest	Experimental group	12	16.95	45.11
	Posttest		12	83.61	18.5
	Pretest	Control group	12	91.94	22.12
	Posttest		12	90	29.12

As shown in Table 1, it is observed that posttest scores of personal, situational and total anxieties in the experimental group are less than the control group.

Before implementing covariance analysis, the assumption of variance equality for the three dependent variables was implemented. The results of Leven's test for personal anxiety ( $F=1.59$  and  $df=1, 22$ ), situational anxiety ( $F=1.789$ ,  $df=1,22$ ) and total anxiety ( $F=1.76$ ,  $df=1,22$ ) were not significant. Therefore, the assumption of variances homogeneity was confirmed and the results of multi-variable variance analysis can be reported.

First, multi-variable test were run to investigate the effects of experimental group types (the group participating in group-based psychodrama consultation sessions and the group not participating in these sessions). Table 2 shows the results obtained from the tests.



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**Table 2.** Multi-variable tests to investigate the effects of experiment group type

<b>Test type</b>	<b>Observed value</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Degree of freedom of hypothesis</b>	<b>Degree of freedom of error</b>	<b>Significance level</b>
Pillai's Trace	0.732	15.03	2	19	0.001
Wilks' Lambda	0.268	15.03	2	19	0.001
Hotelling's Trace	2.734	15.03	2	19	0.001
Roy's Largest Root	2.734	15.03	2	19	0.001

According to Table 2, the effect of experiment group type based on four tests of Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root is significant. To investigate that this significance pertains to which dependent variable, single-variable F-test was run (Table 3).





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**Table 3.** Single-variable F-test to investigate the effect of experiment group type on the variables of family performance

Changes resource	Dependent variable	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of squares	Observed F	Sig	Power
Anxiety type	Personal anxiety	95.1088	1	95.1088	33.49	0.001	0.71
	Situational anxiety	1325	1	36.1325	71.44	0.001	0.69
	Total	3.4817	1	3.4817	9.52	0.001	0.72
Error	Personal anxiety	42.441	20	7.22			
	Situational anxiety	87.592	20	64.29			
	Total	49.1849	20	47.92			
Total	Personal anxiety	36283	24				
	Situational anxiety	36367	24				
	Total	145038	24				

According to Table 3, F tests investigating the significance of group-based psychodrama effect indicate that in situational and personal anxieties, the significance level has been at the level of  $P < 0.05$ . Moreover, observed power in personal anxiety (power=0.71), situational anxiety (power=0.69) and total anxiety (power=0.72) reveal that group-based psychodrama has been able to decrease personal anxiety, situational anxiety and total anxiety of disabled girl adolescents of divorce.

#### 4- DISCUSSION

The research findings revealed that group-based psychodrama consultation can decrease total anxiety and its sub-scales (personal and situational). This finding is consistent with the result reported by internal and



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foreign researches that showed group-based psychodrama consultation can decrease the anxiety of patients with posttraumatic stress disorder (Hudgens & Kellerman, 2001; cited in Gharibdoost, 2007), decrease the anxiety among youth (Dogan, 2010), decrease young girls' anxiety (Dadjoo, 1997; cited in Zaboli, 2005), decrease anger, anxiety and amnesia of university students (Calvin, 2004), and decrease anxiety and depression in elders (Ogozanoghli, 2005).

Further, other studies proved the effect of psychodrama on improving the quality of life and decreasing anxiety and depression signs in patients with Parkinson (Sproesser et al., 2010), increasing mental health of alcoholic women (Yang & Han, 2005), improving mental excitements and behavioral problems of patients with sexual traumas and addiction in women (Dayton, 2003), decreasing anxiety to solve trauma and improve their disease (Carbonell, 2004), and decreasing students' anxiety (Eskian, 2005).

Kaplan (1988) believed that anxiety causes to stimulation of some reactions in individuals that modify or remove anxiety. If a person use adoptive mechanisms when facing with stress, his/her performance cases to modify anxiety and regarded useful. On the contrary, when unconscious mind determines an individual's behavior, defensive mechanisms are activated. Accordingly, behavior can indicate non-adoptive reaction of individual, leading to the maintenance of stress (cited in Amir yazdani, 2005). One of the advantages of psychodrama is that members learn to be aware of their unconscious reactions. The creative space provided in the scene leads to preparing them for adoptive and informed performances in various situations. Therefore, it can be expected that psychodrama group effectively decreases anxiety and stress through informed behavior control (Fathi, 2001). According to the previously conducted studies, psychodrama approach is an appropriate therapeutic intervention to decrease anxiety and its signs. Psychodrama, in fact, is a method that helps individuals to discover psychiatric dimension of their problem. Therefore, displaying their problems but not only through conversation, individuals reconsider their problem. Psychotherapy using drama methods is one of the fruitful group-based therapies which help individuals perform their covert and latent aspects regarding a problem or a set of related issues on the scene. With the help of group members and director of theater therapy, individuals reconsider various internal aspects. During performing theater therapy, a large quantity of psychological information is obtained about individuals that will be employed based on analyzer attitude. Moreover, psychodrama is a desirable way to express internal conflicts without stimulating anxiety. Psychodrama allows individuals to make use of their imagination power a based to perform drama. Using such ability power in the best way proves individuals' capacity for the presence at a world greater than life without any concern and anxiety. In psychodrama, affective discharge is usually occurs rapidly and suddenly and patient achieves a complete and desirable peace. After discharging anxiety and anger as well as unconscious pains, patient will have a feeling of calmness (Ghasempour & Mahdavi, 2009).



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