

ART THERAPY AND MARITAL SATISFACTION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER'S PARENTS

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Mg. Aida Ravarian
Tehran University of Medical
Sciences, *Occupational
Therapy, Arash Women's
comprehensive Hospital,*

**PhD. Ali Zadeh
Mohammadi, Institute of
Family and Art Therapy
Studies, Shahid Beheshti
University. Tehran, Iran.**

PhD Kaveh Moghaddam,
Islamic Azad University,
*Psychology and Education of
Exceptional Children;*
*A lecturer at the Islamic Azad
University; A member of the
Young Researchers and Elite
Club; Tehran, Iran.*
kaveh_m_2000@yahoo.com

PhD Parviz Sharifi Daramdi,
Allameh Tabatabaee University
*Exceptional Children Psychology,
Tehran, Iran.*

**PhD. Farhoud Saied
Ershadi, University of Social
Welfare and Rehabilitation
Sciences,**
*Orthotics and Prosthetics,
Tehran, Iran.*

PhD. G. Ali . Afrooz
University of Tehran,
*Exceptional Children
Psychology.*

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio fue investigar la efectividad del programa de arteterapia centrado en la familia en la satisfacción marital de los niños con padres del trastorno del espectro autista. En este estudio experimental aplicado se utilizó el pre-test-post-test con seguimiento y grupo de control. En este estudio, 20 niños con trastorno del espectro autista y sus padres fueron seleccionados por el método de muestreo disponible y luego, fueron divididos al azar en los grupos experimental y de control. El programa de arte-terapia centrado en la familia se aplicó sólo para el grupo experimental. Y para la recolección de los datos, la Escala de Satisfacción Marital de Afrooz se usó en las etapas de pre-prueba, post-prueba y seguimiento. Los datos fueron analizados por el ANCOVA y las medidas repetidas; Además, hubo una diferencia significativa entre los grupos experimentales y de control. En conjunto con la satisfacción marital entre padres y madres en el nivel alfa = 0.05, existe una diferencia significativa entre los grupos experimental y de control. Pero un análisis de medidas repetidas no mostró ninguna diferencia significativa. Los resultados de este estudio demostraron que el programa de terapia de arte centrado en la familia no puede ser eficaz en la satisfacción marital de los niños con trastornos del espectro autista de madres y padres a largo plazo, pero ha sido eficaz sólo en el corto período.

Palabras clave: Programa de arte-terapia centrado en la familia; Desorden del espectro autista; Satisfacción marital

Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the *family-centered* art therapy program in marital satisfaction of children with autism spectrum disorder's parents. In this applied experimental study the pre-test-posttest with follow-up and control group design was used. In this study, 20 children with autism spectrum disorder and their parents were selected by the available sampling method and then, they were randomly divided into the experimental and control groups. The family-centered art therapy program was applied just for the experimental group. And for collecting the data, the Afroz Marital Satisfaction Scale was used at pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages. Data were analyzed by the ANCOVA and the repeated measures; in addition, there was a significant difference between experimental and control groups. In conjunction with the marital Satisfaction among fathers and mother in the alpha level = 0.05, there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. But a repeated measures analysis did not show any significant difference. The findings of this study showed that the family-centered art therapy program cannot be effective in the marital satisfaction of the Children with autism spectrum disorder's Mothers and Fathers in the long-term, but has been effective just in the short period.

Keywords: Family-centered art therapy program; Autism Spectrum Disorder; Marital Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important definitions of the concept of marital satisfaction was conducted by Hopkins. He defines marital satisfaction as "marital satisfaction with objective feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure experienced by the husband or wife when we consider all aspects of their marriage." Satisfaction is an attitude variable, so it is considered an individual attribute of a couple; according to the above definition, marital satisfaction, in fact, is a positive and pleasurable attitude that a husband and a wife have about different aspects of their marital relationships; and marital dissatisfaction is actually negative attitude and unhappiness that there are about different aspects of marital relations. Basically, if the parity satisfaction is the result of an exchange of rewarding behaviors, lack of satisfaction will be only when the two partners suffer from something (Payamani, 2013). According to Olson et al. (1989), three general areas of marital satisfaction that interact with each other, and depend on each other, are as follows: 1) the people's satisfaction with their marriage; 2) conjugal life satisfaction, and 3) the people's satisfaction with life in general. Olson believes that the people's satisfaction with their marriage is the underlying core of life satisfaction, and it can be said that the health of the community and the family depends on the consent of the people of their marriage. According to Rough (1995), quoted Goudarzi, there are several aspects for definitions of marital satisfaction too, but he believes that marital satisfaction is generally positive feelings of love, sexual satisfaction, agreement on the income and expenditure, housekeeping and child rearing (Ibid). During the marriage, several variants are effective on how relationships of couples together and the variables that are followed by couple's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the conjugal relations, are:

communicative and social behaviors, marital satisfaction, spouses' optimal thinking, problem-solving procedure, finance, personal conduct, economic activities, religious feel and behavior, parenting methods, leisure and emotional interaction (verbal and visual) and the birth of the baby (Greif, 2000 Translated by Rezaeian, 2012). Among the variables, the birth of the child is a sign of a fundamental change in the family's organization and system in which the intimate and emotional attachment to the child requires a change in interactional patterns of couple, and forces the parents to, according to the new subsystem that has been created, change their behavioral patterns to coordinate with a new situation. The effect of children on marital satisfaction is statistically significant, this means that couples without children were more satisfied with their lives than couples with children, and vice versa (Main kem, 1990 and Minochin, 1994 Translated by Sanaee, 2002, quoted by Islami, 2012). One of the main issues and problems that can overshadow inevitably relationships between couples and put a negative effect on couples' life and their satisfaction with joint life, is the birth of a child with a special disability or disabilities, or are factors that would cause problems for children later, followed by the challenges. Special children or children who, for any reason, are born with particular sensorimotor defects as blindness, deafness, cerebral palsy, mental retardation or perturbations such as behavioral disorders or autism spectrum disorders (ASD), or later are affected these disorders, create certain conditions in terms of interpersonal communication with parents in the home; and meanwhile handicap, is a phenomenon that imposes very high costs to society and family, especially parents, and increases stress, anxiety, and fear of the future in these families (Glaser, 2000, translated by Khosniat and Barazandeh, 2009).

Meanwhile, the impact of the birth of children with ASD or having a child with these disorders in the early years can create numerous gaps between parents of these children and have many problems in all aspects of their parents' life (The Autism Society of America (ASA), 2006, 2013 and 2014). ASD or Autism is one of the most complex psychological disorders in children that can be specified with deficits in social interactions, poor, strange and complex verbal communication, as well as stereotype behaviors, movements, and interests, and the symptoms reveal themselves usually up to 36 months (ASA, 2014; DSM V, 2013; translated by Ganji, 2013). Based on studies and research done in the field of this disorder, care of the people with disability and certain disorders such as autism can cause many parents and family members to be faced with many challenges, and affect their lives. At the time of being faced with a problem referred to as autism, family, especially the children's parents will be suffering from a lot of stress and will experience the different emotions such as anxiety, fear, emotional problems, depression and feelings of guilt and the level of stress in the parents is huge (Samadi, 2010, Samadi, 2013, Alidoost, 2006). When a member of the family is affected by a serious disability, such as autism, most families experience a crisis or a degree of the psychological pressures and concerns. Most parents of autistic children for harmonization of their lives with a disability of their child will have to revise the ways of life or routine programs, and complex symptoms of this disorder such as behavioral and communication problems, increases the amount of these stresses and anxieties up to several folds (Pooheidar, 2011 Wall, 2004, Wall, 2006 translated by Jahanian Najafabadi, and Aflakian, 2009). The parents of this group of children change issues of leisure, financial costs, problem-solving methods and styles of parenting and type of their connection and social behaviors and communication that fits their child's particular circumstances and in most cases, these changes are in line with the child's problems. For example, by observing certain and unusual behaviors of these children, especially stereotype behaviors, the parents may refrain from relations and interaction with family members, friends, and acquaintances, or incur high costs for treatment, education of the children, and neglect other family members and the same decreases the quality of life of members. In some cases, it decreases their marital satisfaction, and sometimes they believe that mother and father of each are the culprits in the emergence of the disorder and sometimes also in the event of the involvement of the people, their feelings of guilt and blame increase, and generally these factors severely affect

quality of life and mental health of the parents of the children (ASA, 2013, Wall, 2006 translated by Aflakian and Jahanian Najafabadi, 2009). According to the studies carried out, one of the best interventions that help families of all exceptional children, including autistic children, is the family-centered art therapy as a palliative -support approach (Case and Dalley, 2008, Silvers, 2008 Translated by Tavakoli Toroghi and Shafieefar, 2013). Family therapy is especially a family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) and family-centered art therapy, have had a number of striking similarities in its context of growth and flourish. Both approaches were established based on enthusiastic work of experts who spontaneously, but independently explored the unexplored territories of this new profession. Kawatska and Bowen, both as a result of the observations and lack of conclusions of efforts to engage with the families of patients with schizophrenia, moved to family therapy. In this respect, family therapy and family-centered art therapy are comparable from the perspective of the history. But for some reasons, it was that family therapy that could enter the mainstream of psychotherapy and developed quickly. According to the founder of the family-centered art therapy, Kawatska (1978), family-centered art therapy is older than family therapy. However, it developed the more slowly. The family art therapy founders never limit their work to complex family relationships and they generally focus on the development of clinical adequacies and development of the art measurement methods, to help the families through art therapy and methods to measure it. From the perspective, art in itself was a complete theoretical way by which stories, dynamics and structural characteristics of the family was measurable and did not a need for a solid theoretical foundation. But today the link between psychological approaches and art therapy has been strengthened and become an important part of the family-centered art therapy (Zadehmohamadi and Abedini, 2011). In addition, the art therapy can be used as a complementary treatment, or a valuation technique in family therapy, and art therapy process extend the familial relationship between family members (Landgarten, 1996, translated by Hashemian and Abu Hamza, 1387, Case and Dalley, 2006). In fact, under this approach, artistic as an enabling and empowering the vehicle creation provides the energy necessary to change and allows the family members to have a sense of self-esteem through artistic activities. Another point is that artistic process makes communication for family members as possible. In family therapy, the effort is made to genuine dialogue between the wife and husband; mother, daughter, and son; father, daughter,

and son, and brothers and sisters. Meanwhile, the nonverbal nature of the artistic process provides a way to release limited interpretive style and full redundant and waste that often interferes with communication (Zadehmohamdi, 2011, zadehmohammadi, 2010, the *American Art Therapy Association*, 2009). In addition, art, whatever, is a natural way to communicate. The artistic activities such as painting, collage, crafts, pottery and music decreases the stress and establishes relaxation in both children and adults and in fact, it is a way to drain the emotions, feelings, and emotions (Arun Rubin, 2005, translated by Hiradfar, 2010).

Now, with the introduction and given the importance of the issue of autism and effects that affect the lives of family members, especially parents of children and eclipse other aspects of life, this study sought to address the issue is whether to use the program of family-centered art therapy improve autistic children's parents' marital satisfaction has been the most effective and is this a lasting effect?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Population, sample, sampling method and research tools

In this applied semi-experimental study the pre-test-post-test with follow-up and control group design was used. In this study, the study population consisted of all parents of children with autism in Tehran, who refer to the private and public clinics and rehabilitation centers and also special schools to receive rehabilitation and educational services for their children, and among them, using convenience sampling method, the number of 20 parents of the children, who were receiving rehabilitation and educational services in *Aeen Mehvarzi* Special school for autistic children, were selected as samples and assigned into experimental and control groups. And in the pre-test stage, the *Afroz Marital Satisfaction Scale (AMSS)* was used for collecting data and then the 15 family-centered art therapy sessions were held for the parents of the experimental group (but not for experimental group), and they were taught to run this program on their children; and one month after of completion of the program, the follow-up was performed, as well. Notably, the diagnosis of ASD in these children had been done by the Special Education organization in the entire country and using Diagnostic tests for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) or the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R).

2.2. Family-centered art therapy program

The program's practices, which are derived from studies and clinical research by Landgarten (2003), Case and Dalley (2008), Silver (1200) and Zadeh mohmadi et al. (2011) are a combination of visual arts such as painting, ceramics, drawing and audiovisual arts such as music and poetry and in the formulation of the program, the target behaviors (the original signs) autistic children have been considered, parents of autistic children were taught the program to observe and follow it at home. And, importantly, the parents were asked to repeat and practice the exercise with their children in training meetings. In addition, due to the presence of music and poetry in this program, it can be called as a creative art therapy program, too.

3. RESEARCH TOOLS

3.1. The *Afroz Marital Satisfaction Scale (AMSS)*

AMSS is a measurement tool to assess marital satisfaction devised by an Iranian professor, Dr. Gholam Ali Afroz for applied areas such as family counseling about evaluating the rate of marital satisfaction. This scale short format of 50 questions, and long format of 110 questions. The questions are multiple-choice and on the Likert scale from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The 110-question version that is the original form, according to its author, examines 10 factors, which include: spouses' optimal thinking, marital satisfaction, personal behaviors, communication and social behaviors, problem solving techniques, finances and economic activities, religious feelings and behaviors, parenting methods, leisure, manner of interaction (verbal, visual, motor, behavioral). In a study conducted by Ghodrati (2009), entitled "An analytical study of the relationship between creativity and marital satisfaction among parents of gifted students in ordinary and non-profit *Sampad* schools in Tehran, the validity of the short form of the tool was calculated using the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) that correlation of 0.43 in significance level of $p=0.001$ and with 99% confidence was gained. Furthermore, the validity coefficient of 0.957 was obtained using Cronbach's alpha for short-form (50 questions), which represents a very favorable validity of the AMSS. The scale includes 110 items that the most appropriate and best way for its scoring is the use of a Likert model, and based on this method, each option: "Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree"

obtain the scores 0, 1, 2, and 3, respectively. A high score on this scale indicates more satisfactory level, and its low level is a sign of lower sign of satisfaction. In a study by Mohebi (2011), the feasibility, reliability, and validity of the scale were assessed and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to calculate the validity of the scale that the value of this data (0.989) was obtained, indicating a high reputation and favorable validity of AMSS.

Also, factor analysis and construct validity of this scale showed the number 9 factors. To determine its criterion validity, the EMS was used simultaneously with the implementation of this test that a correlation of 0.437 was obtained at a significance level of 99 percent. The results showed a good convergent validity of the tool in this study. Importantly, in this study, the total score of the AMSS has been important.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of variable marital satisfaction of the autistic children's parents in control and experimental groups (three- time steps of the test)

Variable	Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Follow-up	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Mothers' marital satisfaction	Experimental	218.8	36.4472	223.5	44.3778	223.5	40.5908
	Control	170.714	62.4172	171.286	45.6535	170.714	52.1367
Fathers' marital satisfaction	Experimental	223.3	30.3207	226.2	28.5182	224.4	26.8668
	Control	187	36.1571	187.286	30.2309	184.857	41.8387

According to the data in Table 1, comparison of the mean scores of the pre-test of marital satisfaction among the autistic children's parents in the two groups implies that there is not much difference in mean scores in the pre-test. This means homogeneous groups before the intervention. In the post-test and follow-up stages, changes in the marital satisfaction rate of parents of autistic children in the experimental group are more evident than the control group.

4.1. Normal distribution of scores

To check the normality of scores, if the participants are 40 people or less, Kolmogorov- Smirnov, and Shapiro-Wilk tests are used. Otherwise, report of the values of a distribution index: tilt and stretch marks or visual depiction of the scores' chart will suffice. Since sample size studied in research groups is less

than 40 persons, based on the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, since the values obtained for the test in a group at 0.05 was not significant, so the condition of equality of intragroup variances and normal distribution of data is established and Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) can be used for analyzing the research hypothesis.

Table 2. A summary of the results of ANCOVA in maternal marital satisfaction

Indicator Sources of changes	DF	MS	F	Significance level	Coefficients for ETA	Power of Test
Effect of pre-test	1	641759.01	318.44	0	0.955	1
Effect of group	1	11226.071	5.57	0.032	0.271	0.598
Error	15	2015.329				
Total	17					

According to the data in Table 2, the value of $F = 5.570$ with degrees of freedom (1 and 15) in the studied variable at the level of $\alpha = 0.05$ is significant. Therefore, we can conclude that the family-centered art therapy program has a significant effect on the marital satisfaction of mothers of the autistic children. ETA showed that the amount of the effect of the program in the marital satisfaction of mothers of the autistic children is 27.1%. So, the research hypothesis is confirmed with 95% confidence.

Table.3. Results of the four characteristics of the F related to the analysis of the repeated measurements of test of the follow-up - marital satisfaction of mothers (experimental group)

Indicator Sources of changes	Sum of squares	DF	MS	F	Significance level
Effect of time	147.27	2	73.633	0.129	0.88
	147.27	1.094	134.6	0.129	0.75
	147.27	1.131	130.22	0.129	0.758
	147.27	1	147.27	0.129	0.728
Error	10275	18	570.86		
	10275	9.847	1043.5		
	10275	10.178	1009.5		
	10275	9	1141.7		

As it can be concluded from the Table 3, the statistical characteristic of F with a value of 0.129 of

the time factor at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ is not significant, i.e. it can be concluded that the change (increase) at the various stages of the test is not significant. So, the effectiveness of the program in marital satisfaction of the mothers of these autistic children after three months has not remained stable.

Table 4. A summary of results of ANCOA of marital satisfaction of the fathers

Indicator Sources of changes	DF	MS	F	Significance level	Coefficients for ETA	Power of Test
Effect of pre-test	1	703995.91	824.8	0	0.982	1
Effect of group	1	6235.442	7.305	0.016	0.328	0.715
Error	15	853.535				
Total	17					

As the data of Table 4 show, the value of $F = 7.305$ with degrees of freedom (1 and 15) in the variables studied at a level of $\alpha = 0.05$ is significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the program has a significant effect on marital satisfaction of the fathers of these autistic children. And the value of the ETA indicates that the effect of the program on the marital satisfaction of the fathers of these autistic children is 32.8%. So, the research hypothesis is confirmed at 95% level of confidence.

Table 5. Results of the four characteristics of the F related to the analysis of repeated measurements related to the test of follow-up - marital satisfaction of the fathers (experimental group)

Indicator Sources of changes	Sum of squares	DF	MS	F	Significance level
Effect of time	42.867	2	21.433	0.206	0.815
	42.867	1.24	34.567	0.206	0.71
	42.867	1.34	31.982	0.206	0.728
	42.867	1	42.867	0.206	0.66
Error	1868.47	18	103.8		
	1868.47	11.161	167.41		
	1868.47	12.063	154.89		
	1868.47	9	207.61		

As It can be concluded from the Table 5, the statistical characteristic of F with a value of 0.206 of the time factor at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ is not significant, i.e. with 95% probability it can be concluded that the change (increase) at the various stages of the test is not significant. So, the effectiveness of the program in marital satisfaction of the fathers of these children after three months has not remained stable.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the art therapy program has had relatively constructive effects in the emotional interaction (verbal and visual), and communicative and social methods as well as parenting methods among the autistic children's mothers. The mothers of these children believe that art was able to change their feelings and attitude to life and how to communicate with the child and spouse as well as it could affect in parenting and contributions of spouses in this respect. In fact, it can be concluded that in a short period, art as a flexible tool and beautiful can affect components such as parenting styles, and social and communicative behaviors and emotional interaction, of a mother with her husband. In addition, teaching the family-centered art therapy program exercises to mothers and to do them at home for children, can raise the couple's active participation in the process of training and rehabilitation of their child and create relative calm in them by improving the child's condition. These findings are consistent with findings from studies conducted by Zadeh Mohammadi and Abedini (2011), Case and Dalley, (2008), Landgarten (2003) and the *American Art Therapy Association* (2009), but this fact should not be ignored that problems of a couple, who are already parents of an autistic child, in some cases, are so much persistent that an art therapy program, just for a few sessions, can fix them, and in fact, marital satisfaction still remains low; so, to improve this situation, more time must be allocated to the art therapy program as an intervention along with consulting and training to parents. In relation to the fathers, the fluidity, flexibility and diversity in trainings of family-centered art therapy program led the fathers of families communicate and interact better with their children, in areas such as problem - solving techniques, parenting styles, the communicative and social behaviors, emotional interaction, and..., exchange ideas with their wives, and select art as an effective way to achieve serenity in life and then use it. In addition, art was considered as a way to fill the leisure time of fathers with mothers and these findings are consistent with the findings of e

American Art Therapy Association (2009), Case and Dalley, (2008), and Zadehmohammadi and Abedini (2011). As mentioned in the mother's marital satisfaction, it can be concluded that art in a short period, cannot have long-lasting impact on overall marital satisfaction; because the autistic child's issues cast a shadow on conditions and components of marital satisfaction like leisure, emotional interaction, the spouses' good thinking, the communicative and social behaviors; so, along with art and art therapy programs, tools and the constructive and basic interventions such as family-centered therapy, individual and group counseling and group therapy must be used to improve living conditions and overall marital satisfaction. In some cases, such as marital satisfaction, personal, emotional and religious behaviors and financial affairs and economic activities are of deeper roots so that the art therapy program cannot have an impact on solving them. Finally, the family-centered art therapy program as a support and palliative intervention along with other interventions related to autism such as the Applied behavioral analysis (ABA), play therapy, drug therapy, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication- handicapped Children (TEACCH) approach, behavioral therapy and ... can help autistic children and their families, if it is applied coherently, planned and applied for the long term.

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