



# The effectiveness of Friends program training on behavioral disorders of children with separation anxiety disorder

Mona. Falsafi<sup>1</sup>  
Hasan. Ahadi<sup>2\*</sup>  
Parviz. Asgari<sup>3</sup>

1. Department of Psychology, Kish International Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kish Island, Iran

2. \*Corresponding author: Professor, Department of Psychology, UAE Branch, Islamic Azad University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

3. Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran

Email: drahadi5@gmail.com

Received: 11.10.2022

Acceptance: 04.09.2023

Journal of  
Applied Family Therapy

eISSN: 2717-2430  
http://Aftj.ir

Vol. 4, No. 3, Pp: 308-322  
Summer 2023 Special Issue

Original research article

## How to Cite This Article:

Falsafi, M., Ahadi, H., & Asgari, P. (2023). The effectiveness of Friends program training on behavioral disorders of children with separation anxiety disorder. *aftj*, 4(3): 308-322.



© 2023 by the authors. Licensee Iranian Association of Women's Studies, Tehran, Iran. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

## Abstract

**Aim:** The current research was conducted with the aim of the effectiveness of Friends program training on behavioral disorders of children with separation anxiety disorder. **Method:** The current research method was quasi-experimental and pre-test and post-test design with a control group. The statistical population in this research includes all children referred to behavioral disorders treatment clinics in the west of Tehran. The sampling method was available and was done on 7 to 12-year-old children with separation anxiety disorder, and they were randomly divided into two groups of 15 experimental and 15 second (control) groups. Then the experimental group underwent intervention for 10 sessions, 2 sessions of 30 to 45 minutes per week. The research tools included Achenbach's Child Behavior Inventory and Asghari Nikah et al.'s Cognitive Behavioral Play Therapy Intervention Protocol (2012) as well as the Friends training program designed by Barat (1990) and finally data were analyzed using the covariance analysis method and SPSS version 21 software. **Results:** The results showed that the training of Friends program for behavioral disorders of anxiety/depression ( $F=11.04$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), isolation/depression ( $F=10.21$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), physical complaints ( $F=10.08$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), social problems ( $F=11.41$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), thinking problems ( $F=9.17$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), attention problems ( $F=11.75$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), Law-breaking behavior ( $F=9.81$ ,  $P<0.001$ ) and behavior ( $F=10.16$ ,  $P<0.001$ ) of children with separation anxiety disorder were effective. **Conclusion:** Therefore, it can be concluded that Friends program training can be used to improve the behavioral disorders of children suffering from separation anxiety disorder. **Keywords:** Friends program, behavioral disorders, separation anxiety disorder.

## Introduction

Anxiety disorders are part of the category of introverted disorders (Mirzadeh & Taher, 2022). This emotion has a negative emotion and includes a feeling of concern about the danger that may occur. The symptoms of anxiety in children and adults are almost the same, but its manifestations are different at different ages (Lawrence, Murayama, and Creswell, 2019). One of the types of anxiety that can be indicative of anxiety disorders starting in childhood is separation anxiety disorder (Astuti, Hartono, and Sanavan, 2020). Regarding the prevalence of this disorder, which is the most common anxiety disorder among children, various statistics have been presented. Druze has stated that its prevalence in 2 to 4-year-old children is 17%. In a study conducted by Hatton, McNicoy, and Dubleri (Amoyot et al., 2019) on anxiety disorders in children under 12 years of age, they found that the prevalence of each of them was reported to be significantly different in the studies. The minimum rate is 2.6% and the maximum is 41.2%, and separation anxiety disorder is the most common anxiety in this age group.

One of the most widespread methods of intervention (preventive and therapeutic) in the last one or two decades, which the World Health Organization emphasizes on, considering the sufficient evidence to prevent and reduce children's anxiety, is the Friends program. It is based on the cognitive behavioral therapy approach, founded by Paulo Barrett in Australia (Connell, 2022). The Friends program helps children and teenagers learn ways to cope with fear, worry and depression and provides the necessary grounds to promote and develop their emotional resilience and self-esteem. This program has been effective by helping children manage psychological stress such as fear, worry, and anxiety, as well as improving skills for their present and future lives (Mirghaforian, Miri, and Taher, 2022). Also, another intervention considered in this research, which will be compared with the Friends training program, is play therapy. One of the functions of play in the growth and development of children is its therapeutic role (Parker et al., 2021).

Therefore, due to the fact that today children are facing many challenges and problems. It can affect their anxiety level, it is necessary to intervene and train these children in time to prevent their anxiety because the prevention of children's behavioral and emotional problems with timely intervention has been emphasized and confirmed. Therefore, researchers conduct comparative studies to choose the most effective and at the same time least expensive treatment among various treatments. Of course, sometimes this leads to the discovery that the integration of different treatment methods is more effective than each of the treatment methods alone. According to the mentioned materials and the lack of comparative research in the country, the innovation of the present research is that it deals with the effectiveness of the Friends program in reducing the behavioral disorders of children suffering from separation anxiety. From a practical point of view, it helps to rehabilitate and correct the behavior of children suffering from separation anxiety and to improve their mental well-being. It is obvious that conducting such studies will help the therapists to decide on selective treatment in order to improve psychological symptoms (such as depression and anxiety) in anxious children. Therefore, the present study sought to answer the following questions:

1- Was the Friends program effective on the behavioral disorders of children suffering from separation anxiety in the post-test stage?

2- Was the Friends program on behavioral disorders of children suffering from separation anxiety stable in the follow-up phase?

### **Method**

The current research method was quasi-experimental and pre-test and post-test design with a control group. The statistical population in this research includes all children referred to behavioral disorders treatment clinics in the west of Tehran. The sampling method was available and was done on 7 to 12-year-old children with separation anxiety disorder, and they were randomly divided into two groups of 15 experimental and 15 second (control) groups. Then the experimental group underwent intervention for 10 sessions, 2 sessions of 30 to 45 minutes per week. The research tools included Achenbach's Child Behavior Inventory and Asghari Nikah et al.'s Cognitive Behavioral Play Therapy Intervention Protocol (2012) as well as the Friends training program designed by Barat (1990) and finally data were analyzed using the covariance analysis method and SPSS version 21 software.

### **Results**

The results showed that the training of Friends program for behavioral disorders of anxiety/depression ( $F=11.04$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), isolation/depression ( $F=10.21$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), physical complaints ( $F=10.08$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), social problems ( $F=11.41$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), thinking problems ( $F= 9.17$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), attention problems ( $F= 11.75$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), Law-breaking behavior ( $F=9.81$ ,  $P<0.001$ ) and behavior ( $F=10.16$ ,  $P<0.001$ ) of children with separation anxiety disorder were effective.

### **Conclusion**

The current research was conducted with the aim of the effectiveness of Friends program training on behavioral disorders of children with separation anxiety disorder. According to the results of analysis of covariance after adjusting the pre-test scores, there is a significant effect of the factor between the subjects of the group. As a result, Friends program training is effective in improving the components of behavioral disorders. In other words, the training of Friends program has improved the average components of behavioral disorders of the experimental group compared to the average of the control group. Therefore, it can be said that Friends program training is effective on behavioral disorders of children suffering from separation anxiety disorder.

According to the findings of the present research, it is possible to recommend mental health professionals and people active in the field of health and hygiene to improve the mental health of children and adolescents by designing and applying appropriate methods inspired by the Friends program. Considering the effect of the Friends program on the behavioral disorders of children with separation anxiety disorder, it is suggested that psychologists use the Friends program widely as a group. The results of this test should be used in specialized clinics for children and adolescents. Interventions of the Friends program should be carried out periodically in schools. Considering that play therapy and Friends program is an effective and useful treatment method, it is suggested to educational institutions and universities to provide conditions for counseling and psychology students to learn and use this treatment method to help clients. Similar educational programs should be developed and implemented by providing effective explanations about

the necessity of learning them for teachers and counselors, and also the necessary arrangements should be made to implement these programs in educational centers. Educational programs should be easily available for the use of all parents with children suffering from separation anxiety disorder.

### References

- Amuyot, A. L. L., Sanchez, C. H. F., Bunagan, M. F. C., & Ruto, P. O. (2019). Separation Anxiety of Kindergarten Pupils in the First Month of the School Year of Buhay na Tubig Elementary School. *Ascendens Asia Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Abstracts*, 3(2).
- Astuti, U., Hartono, H., & Sunawan, S. (2020). The Influence of Parental Attachment toward Early Childhood Children's Separation Anxiety. *Journal of Primary Education*, 9(5), 501-510.
- Barrett, C. E., Zhou, X., Mendez, I., Park, J., Koyama, A. K., Claussen, A. H.,... & Bullard, K. M. (2022). Prevalence of mental, behavioral, and developmental disorders among children and adolescents with diabetes, United States (2016–2019). *The Journal of Pediatrics*.
- Gazestan, E. M., Heydari, A., Makvandi, B., & Moradimanesh, F. (2021). The Effect of Group Play Therapy on Anxiety in Children Diagnosed with Leukemia. *Preventive Care in Nursing & Midwifery Journal*, 11(2), 49-55.
- Ghajarieh, M., Alipour, S., Shahni Yilaq, M., & Davoudi, I. (2018). The effectiveness of the Teenage Friends resilience training program on the anxiety of female students in Ahvaz city. *Psychological methods and models*. 9 (31), 61-84. (In Persian)
- Gittelman, R., & Klein, D. F. (2019). Childhood separation anxiety and adult agoraphobia. *Anxiety and the anxiety disorders*, 389-402.
- Hateli, B. (2021). The effect of non-directive play therapy on reduction of anxiety disorders in young children. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*.
- Khosravi, S., & Latifi, Z. (2020). The effectiveness of the international Friends program on improving emotional resilience and increasing mental peace of children. *Shabak*, 6 (1): 107-114. (In Persian)
- Knell, S. M. (2022). Cognitive behavioral play therapy. In *Creative CBT with Youth* (pp. 65-82). Springer, Cham.
- Lavallee, K. L., & Schneider, S. (2019). Separation Anxiety Disorder. In *Pediatric Anxiety Disorders* (pp. 151-176). Academic Press.
- Lawrence, P. J., Murayama, K., & Creswell, C. (2019). Systematic review and meta-analysis: anxiety and depressive disorders in offspring of parents with anxiety disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 58(1), 46-60.
- Manicavasagar, V., & Silove, D. (2020). *Separation anxiety disorder in adults: Clinical features, diagnostic dilemmas and treatment guidelines*. Academic Press.
- MirGhafourian, Z. S., Nohi, S., & Taher, M. (2022). The Effect of Sand Play Therapy with a Cognitive Behavioral Approach on the Reduction of Emotional Recognition Problems and Social Growth in Boys with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Community Health Journal*, 16(2), 82-93.
- Parker, M. M., Hergenrather, K., Smelser, Q., & Kelly, C. T. (2021). Exploring child-centered play therapy and trauma: A systematic review of literature. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 30(1), 2.

- Rodgers Alish & Dunsmuir Sandra (2015). A controlled evaluation of the 'FRIENDS for
- Rostami, M., & Saadati, N. (2018). Role of maternal parenting styles in predicting oppositional defiant, behavior, conduct, mood, and separation anxiety disorders among students. *Journal of Research and Health*, 8(5), 418-424.
- Stallard, P., Skryabina, E., Taylor, G., Anderson, R., Ukoumunne, O. C., Daniels, H.,... & Simpson, N. (2015). A cluster randomised controlled trial comparing the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a school-based cognitive-behavioural therapy programme (FRIENDS) in the reduction of anxiety and improvement in mood in children aged 9/10 years. *Public Health Research*, 3(14).