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Use of Intentional Play on Emotional Self-Regulation in Children with Trauma Histories

Erin Sullivan, OTS
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Introduction

Trauma: An event causing physical, emotional, or mental harm. Through neurological changes, prolonged trauma can impact occupational performance relating to forming trusting relationships, self-regulation, or cognitive delays.

- **Attachment:** The ability of an individual to form relationships. Based on first relationship with caregiver, sets the stage for relationship building skills.
- **Emotional Regulation:** The ability for one to receive and appropriately respond to feelings

Intentional Play: Playful engagement between a child and caregiver in a controlled environment, focusing on meeting the child's needs and following their lead

- **Developmental Therapy Teaching**
- **Developmental Individual-differences Relationship-based Model®**
- **Theraplay®**

Methods

Site: Child Crisis Center, Mesa Emergency Shelter

- Ages birth-10
- Divided into 3 Houses
- N=22 (children participants)
- 8 Staff members participated in the workshop

Program Plan:

- **3-part workshop:** Educational workshop with lead staff to discuss the the impacts of trauma on play, teach intentional play strategies and foundational theories.
- **Direct contact:** Spend time weekly in each house, modeling intentional play for staff.

Outcome Measure: Subjective pre/post-assessment filled out by participating staff members on each child present during the duration of the program. Adapted from the *Short Child Occupational Profile* (Bowyer et al., 2005) to determine any significant change in emotional self regulation.

Results

N=22 t-test	Mean Pre-Assessment Score	Mean Post-Assessment Score	Mean Difference	p-Value
Shelter Population	3.11	3.20	0.0868	0.0938
Tiny Tots/0-3 years	3.41	3.44	0.1364	0.0125*
Middlers/4-6 years	3.14	3.07	-0.0682	0.4074
Big Kids/6-10 years	2.88	3.24	0.3636	0.0001*
Volition	3.12	3.30	0.1818	0.0701
Habituation	3.12	3.06	-0.060	0.5593
Communication & Interaction	3.00	3.18	0.1818	0.0832
Environment	3.27	3.29	0.0227	0.8216

Correlation is significant at a 0.05 level

Conclusion

- Statistically significant changes in emotional self-regulation were found in the Tiny Tots and Big Kids Houses
- Clinically significant results were found in the Volition and Communication & Interaction domains.
- Significant changes indicate that the use of intentional play combined with specific educational trainings for staff can have a positive impact with this population.
- The behavioral regression seen the the Middlers house is perhaps due to the higher rate of admits/discharges within the age bracket, as well as logistical issues that resulted in the limited time this researcher was able to spend within the Middler house.
- Anecdotal data gathered from participating staff underscored a recurring theme of feelings of empowerment resulting from the ability to label intervention strategies.

Limitations

- Small sample size of children
- Limited staff participation
- Truncated assessment period
- Limited direct contact due to the novel virus COVID-19

Relationship to OT

- Recognition of play as a child's primary occupation
- Trauma impacts occupational performance indirectly and directly
- Engaging in play as a means to promote independent participation in meaningful activities
- Development of positive play skills is integral to broader social-emotional skills
- OT allows for the consideration of multiple contextual factors, a necessary lens when working with populations with trauma.

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Module number	Topics	Breakdown
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Overview of concepts/theories to be discussed • Neurological impacts of trauma • Emotional Self-Regulation • Relationship building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce myself and background • Briefly review attachment • Discuss neurological impacts from trauma on the brain • Discuss developmental impacts resulting from trauma • Discuss Emotional Self-Regulation • What is regulation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Upregulation -Downregulation -Self-regulation -Co-regulation • How to anticipate dysregulation/maintain group regulation • Discuss how attachment and emotional self-regulation are related and how trauma impacts both factors • Introduce Circle of Security • Introduce the 5 stages of Developmental Therapy and discuss what each stage would look like in the different houses • Review emotional self-regulation assessment*
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentional Play • Emotional Competency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Theraplay® concepts • Introduce DIRFloortime® concepts and theories • Introduce intentional play • Introduce Functional Developmental Levels 1-6 • Reflect on levels of current children and brainstorm ideas to increase positive engagement • What is emotional competency and what are the impacts of delayed emotional competency? • How to help identify feelings and emotions • How does emotional competency relate to emotional self-regulation?
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental gaps in groups • Structure, consistency, and adapting to changing needs • Sensory strategies • Impact of working with children with trauma on healthcare providers (Compassion fatigue, etc.)** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review typical developmental stages • Discuss how differences in cognitive development might present in a group setting as well as individually • Introduce concept of graded activities • Identify gaps in each classroom • Group problem solve classroom concerns • Review the role of the sensory system and how it pertains to emotional self-regulation and trauma • Discuss how to use the sensory room in conjunction with intentional play as well as a means for self/co-regulation • Discuss the importance of structure and consistency as it pertains to the staff's role, the group home setting, and emotional self-regulation • Discuss how environmental modifications can help address changing needs for the children • Discuss current structure in each house and brainstorm ways to improve • Discuss second hand trauma, transference, and burnout/compassion fatigue • Discuss strategies to prevent impacts of second hand trauma.

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Items From Assessment Measure, adapted from the SCOPE, (Bowyer et al., 2005)

1. Exploration

The child engages in visual, tactile, and/or oral exploration of objects, persons, and the environment.

2. Expression of Enjoyment

The child demonstrates satisfaction with activities and/or the outcomes of actions.

3. Response to Challenge

The child engages in new activities and/or accepts the opportunity to achieve more, or perform under condition of greater demand.

4. Response to Transitions

When asked by an adult or cued by something in the environment, the child is able to terminate one activity and begin another.

5. Routine

The child has an awareness of routines and is able to participate effectively in structured daily routines.

6. Roles

The child is aware of own roles and/or demonstrates behaviors associated with the roles' expectations.

7. Non-Verbal Communication

The child demonstrates appropriate and effective non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, gestures, signs, eye contact, and affection to communicate with others in the social environment.

8. Conversation

The child engages in appropriate and effective conversation with peers, teachers, parents, and therapists in order to share and exchange information, ideas, and emotions.

9. Relationships

The child maintains appropriate relationships within his/her social environment.

10. Environment

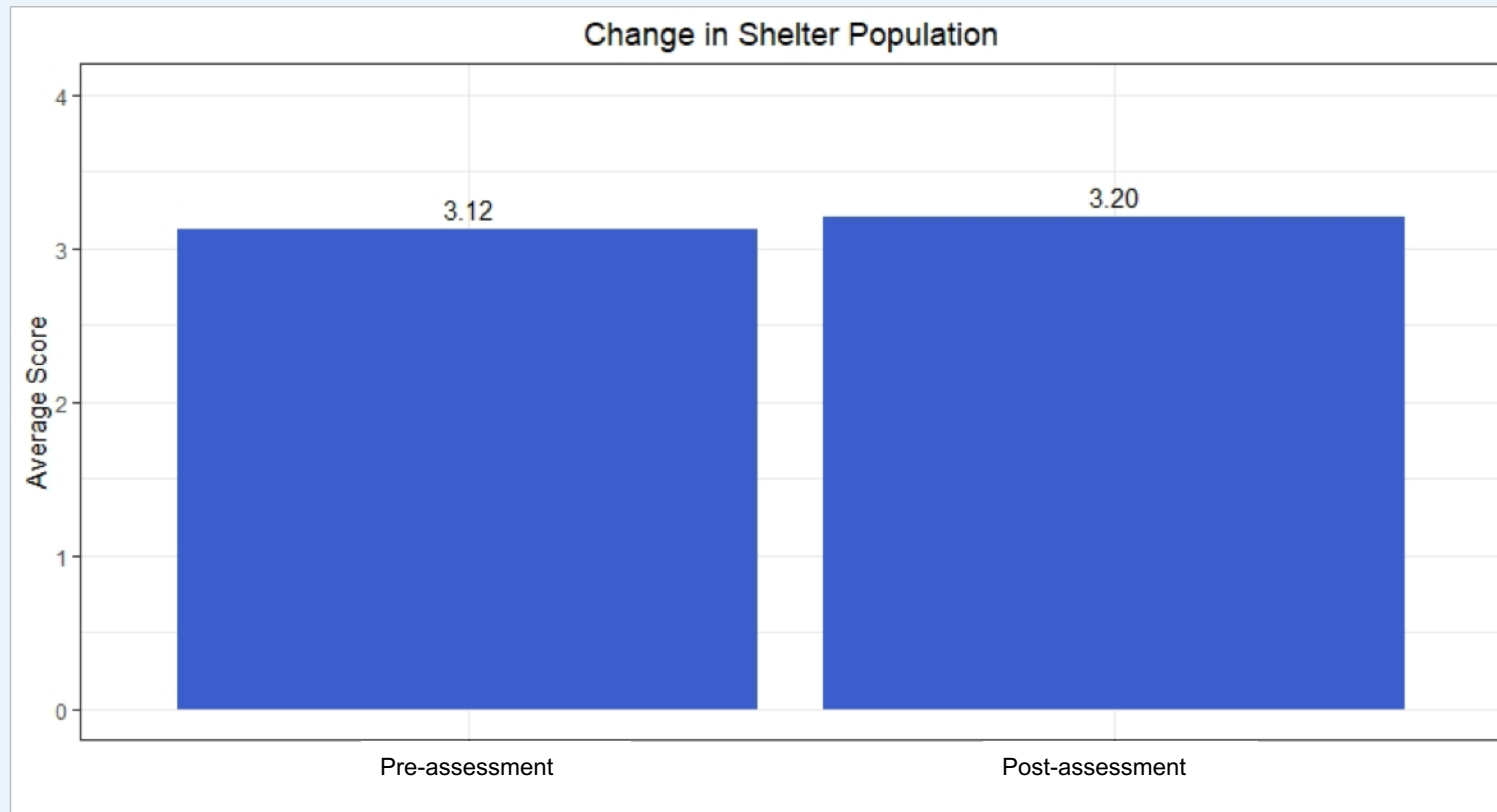
The rating should reflect how the environment affects the child (rather than the child's response to the environment)

11. Physical Resources

Availability of equipment, appropriate play/learning objects, transportation, and other resources (at home, community, school, and/or hospital) support the child's participation.

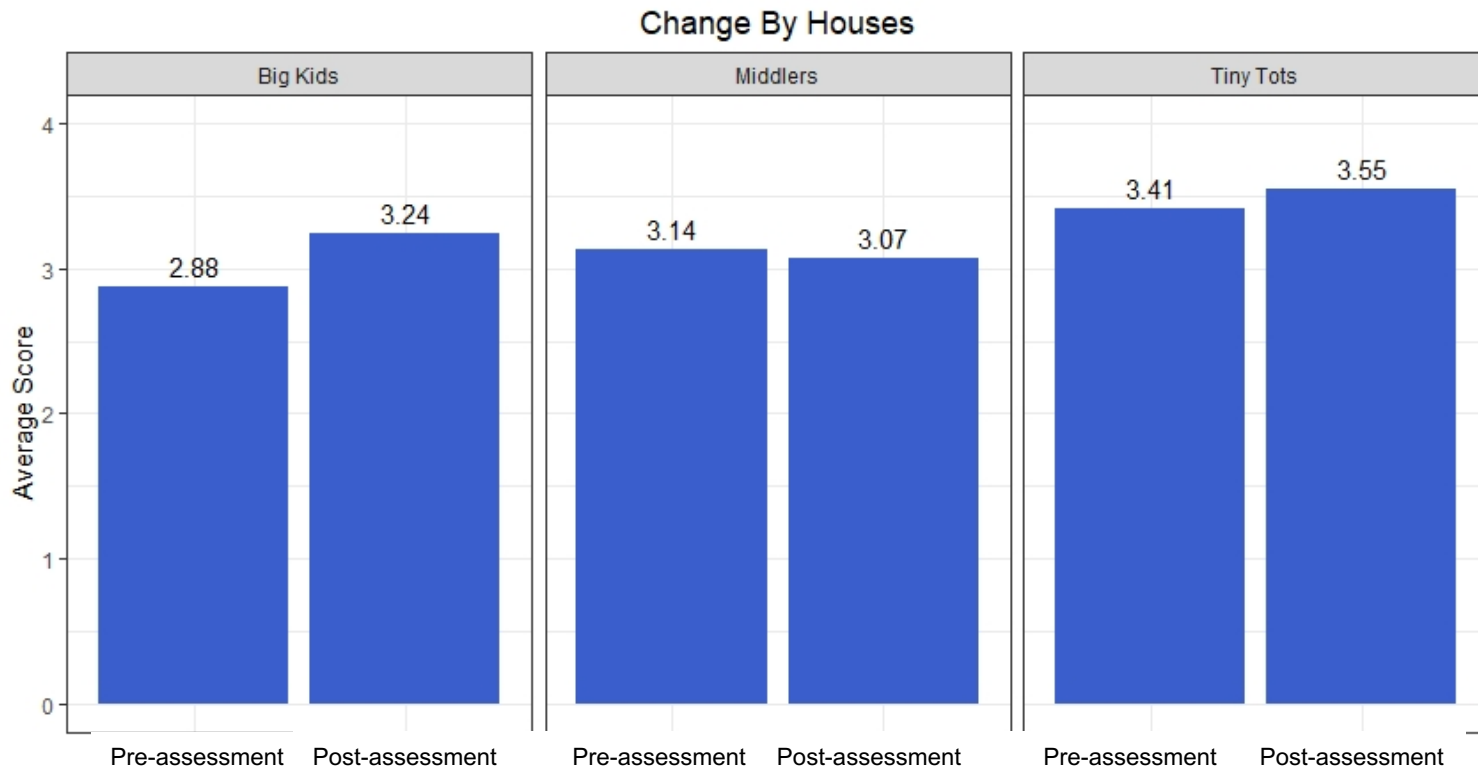
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Change by Domains

