

Process Analysis of the Intervention of Parent-Child Interaction for Children Who Witnessed Domestic Violence and Their Battered Mothers in Parent Child Art Therapy

Nai-Wen Chang¹

Hui-Chuang Chu²

Summary

Previous studies have found that assisting violent mothers to understand and respond to their children's inner needs can improve the quality of parent-child relationships and the resilience of mothers and children (Graham-Bermann et al., 2009). Parent Child art therapy uses visual symbols to express, which can capture implicit characteristics of the parent-child relationship. Other treatment models do not work as well (Gavron & Mayseless, 2018). In addition, therapists can use both process and content to assess the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics of family members, and induce changes in the process and content (Landgarten, 1994). Art therapy can reflect an individual's current situation, abilities, and inner state through the creative process. The individual's experience can be expressed and understood through artistic creations, and be witnessed and accepted through the presence of family members. This is important as it is therapeutic and restorative, and can also lead to a more stable and secure family relationship.

The study examined parent-child interactions in parent-child art therapy (PCAT) sessions for children who witnessed domestic violence and their injured mothers. Social workers in NPOs assisted us in recruiting three school-aged children who witnessed domestic violence and their mothers. For ten weeks they attended 90 minute PCAT sessions. The research framework used

¹ Counselor / Hsinchu County Student Guidance & Counseling Center

² Associate Professor / Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling, National Tsing Hua University

comprehensive process analysis, which focuses on analyzing the therapist's interventions, to understand changes in parent-child interactions.

Following the Marschak Interaction Method, the interventions for parent-child interaction in PCAT fell into four categories. First, the interventions for Structure were included in parent-child art products and the boundaries of their interactions. Second, Engagement consisted of the insight and balance between parent-child's engagement. Third, Nurture included both parent-child art processes and the art produced. Fourth, Challenge involved developing challenging tasks in the parent-child art process and empowering children who witnessed domestic violence in parent-child art process and interactions. Because each group of parents and children had ten parent-child interviews, the researcher divided the ten interviews into three periods. The interview periods were divided according to the topic and progress of the interview. To evaluate and design art creation activities, the early stage of the interview mainly focused on family structure, important family conflicts and losses, and parent-child interactions. The mid-term explored, revealed, and tolerated emotions and relationships between parents and children. In the later stage, we focused on parent-child interaction issues between groups of children who had witnessed domestic violence and mothers who had been abused.

The results showed that PCAT can promote the structure, nurturing, and challenging nature of parent-child interactions, adjust the psychological boundaries of their interaction process, and catalyze the participation of parents and children into creative works. According to the time and space structure of PCAT, mothers' willingness to create time and space to bring parents and children together is healing in itself (Regev & Snir, 2015). Art therapy is a creative and playful process, which can help family members become curious about each other and explore their resources (Manicom & Boronska, 2003). In our study, the therapist used open-ended questions to allow participants to reflect and express their feelings for each other. Through the nurturing intervention, the abused mother could empathize, accept, and allow the child to express their needs. Faced with difficult family communication and interactions revealed in the parent-child art creation process, the therapists used the family's creative resources to respond to the difficulties presented by the images in order to improve family support (Malchiodi, 2002/2007; Manicom & Boronska, 2003), such as empowering a group to deal with the difficulties and challenges in their real lives. Physical closeness, division of labor, connection, emotional expression, and language interactions in the parent-child creative process show that PCAT could help parents and children soothe their anxiety in body perception. The mutual coordination and following of body

kinesthetic between parents and children could also lead to non-verbal dialect communication, which can improve emotional expression and verbal interactions between parents and children through image symbolism and embedded emotions, forming a safe attachment between parents and children.

Finally, the research shows that future application of PCAT should consider the four aspects of process, interaction, intervention, and image. In addition, art therapy education programs should consider the more nurturing qualities of media materials. Future research can also consider different family combinations, such as violent fathers and children, to expand the field of inquiry.