

The Importance of Puppet Plays to Children in Disaster Preparedness Programmes

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Abstract

In disaster preparedness programmes, puppet plays are an important therapeutic medium for children. Accordingly, this qualitative study was aimed to investigate the importance of puppet plays for children who were enrolled in the said programme. In-depth *interviews were conducted on* six respondents, two of whom were males included a school head, and a worker from the rehabilitation centre respectively. Meanwhile, the four remaining females included a teacher, two caretakers, and a disaster survivor among the disaster community. Following thematic analysis, it was found that the inclusion of puppet plays in a disaster preparedness programme not only educated nursery, kindergarten, and primary school children on disaster preparedness; they helped reduce the emotional impact caused by such untoward incidents as well. Hence, puppet plays can be useful in psychotherapy for children in such programmes.

Keywords: Children, Puppet Play, Disaster Preparedness

Introduction

Puppet plays have an important role in disaster preparedness programmes, in that the plots of the plays improve the children's awareness of and preparedness for disasters. These children then become mentally and emotionally prepared to face disasters that damage property and take away the lives of their loved ones (Viklund, 2017; Loy, 2017; Compton, 2016; Kruger, 2008). Children should be given the opportunity to participate in disaster prevention and mitigation events (Lopez, Hayden, Cologon, & Hadley, 2012; Benson & Bugge, 2007), through which they can learn through experience as puppeteers or audiences. Specifically, they can learn the ways to prepare and mitigate the effects of disasters like the scarcity of resources and time (Avianto, 2017; Viklund, 2017; Teng, Qismullah, & Thuraiya, 2013, Selby & Kagawa, 2012; Benson & Bugge, 2007). This exercise is important to relieve the traumatic consequences of disasters in children as well, as the messages conveyed through the puppet plays help improve security, reduce property loss, and save maximum lives during disasters. Additionally, these children will be able to adjust and return to their normal physical and mental states within short periods (Sabhanaz & Busell, 2017; Ehrenreich, 2001; Wannachan, 2010). While puppet plays are an effective medium to convey disaster-

preparedness messages, children are underexposed to the same. Therefore, puppet groups which comprise professionals, schools, communities, and volunteers need to be established for the benefit of nursery, preschool, and primary school children, in particular (Loy, Gan, & Tan, 2017).

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was to determine the importance of puppet plays to children in disaster preparedness programmes.

Methodology

In this qualitative study, in-depth *interviews* were conducted on six respondents. Respondent A was a 54-year-old male school head, Respondent B a 49-year-old male rehabilitation centre worker, Respondent C a 50-year-old female school teacher, Respondent D a 55-year-old female caretaker, Respondent E a 54-year-old female caretaker, and Respondent F a 47-year-old female survivor.

Data on puppet plays in disaster preparedness programmes were obtained via interviews which identify the current status, troubles, and needs of the disaster community as well as the importance of puppet plays. The interview data was then analysed thematically according to the scope of this study. In compliance with the ethics of research, the organisation's and respondents' actual names were kept confidential.

Literature Review

According to the 1992 post-hurricane Andrew (Florida) report, about 30 percent of children in the affected area experienced loss of property and family members as well as emotional trauma one year after the disaster. Specifically, the children had nightmares, anxiety, and loss of enthusiasm in their daily lives following the aftermath. On another note, the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and the Red Crescent Societies (RCS) have reported that puppet plays provided children with an opportunity to showcase their creativity as well as receive important messages about the disaster. Such puppet plays should be performed at the where the disaster victims are gathered so they can get entertainment, relieve their minds, and forget their pains after watching puppet plays by the volunteer groups and community members (IFRC & RCS, 2011).

Cvetkova and Andonovska-Trajkovska (2012), who investigated the role of puppet plays in early childhood development, have found that puppetry facilitated the children's cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and personality development. Accordingly, the research team has encouraged parents and families to engage in puppet play activities as early childhood development is the responsibility of the entire community.

As per Muhammad, Kurnia, Tigo, Rini, and Hanggoro (2016), entertaining puppet plays are a feasible medium for creating awareness of landslides in children of age four to thirteen years. To elaborate, their knowledge of the dangers of landslides has increased by 10.5%, thereby reducing the hazards of landslides. Hence, apart from providing entertainment, such puppet plays also enhance the children's knowledge of the causes and dangers of landslides.

Overall, the report by the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and the Red Crescent Societies (RCS) as well as the studies conducted by Cvetkova and Andonovska-Trajkovska (2012) and Muhammad, Kurnia, Tigo, Rini, and Hanggoro (2016) have shown that puppet plays enhance children's holistic development especially emotional development in

readiness to face disasters. Additionally, puppet plays also improve their knowledge and awareness of disasters.

Finding

The results of the investigation into the importance of puppet plays to children in disaster preparedness programmes are presented and discussed in this section. The importances of such plays are categorised into the following age groups: (i) early childhood and (ii) primary school children.

The Importance of Disaster-Preparedness Puppet Plays in Early Childhood

After a disaster, nursery and kindergarten children experience sleep disorders due to fear of separation from or loss of their beloved family members and pets. They also become afraid of strangers, giants and animals in their dreams. Therefore, puppet plays educate as well as help children cope with and recover from trauma and losses following disasters.

Puppets help children recover from shock and huge losses... (Respondent A)

Puppet plays provide children with an opportunity for to express their feelings. The children can be comforted by watching the puppet plays as well.

During the puppet plays, children show how they connect with the roles played by the puppets. The children gain emotional support and feel (a sense of) salvation... (Respondents C and D)

When children are comforted, they allow themselves to be helped. As per the messages of puppet plays, these children become more capable of expressing their feelings and seeking help from adults when in trouble or distress.

When children see similarities between the puppet role-plays (and their actual experiences), they become more comfortable and enable others to help them. One of the best ways to help children to prepare for a disaster is by let them watch puppet plays and appreciate the stories... (Respondent F)

The importance of Disaster-Preparedness Puppet Plays to Primary School Children

Primary school children can recount the stories of the disasters in the puppet shows and hence, know the ways to navigate disasters. These shows have an entertainment value as well since the children can interact with the puppets. The sympathy depicted in the plays also alleviate the sadness experience by the disaster victims, who will then portray good behaviour and be more prepared to face the future.

When watching puppet plays, certain behaviours or reaction towards the disaster may disappear... (Respondents C and E)

Puppet plays enable children to relate the storyline with their own experiences, apart from expressing their feelings and concerns over their family members, peers, and pets.

Children relate their own bitter experiences with the puppet plays. For example, the raining scene and flood from the puppet plays. Thus, (the plays) help comfort and decrease the children pain. (Respondents B and C)

The messages in a puppet plays make children aware of the intricacies of a disaster. From there, these children can think positively and experience less trauma following such untoward occurrences. In the event of a disaster, they know a lot of people who will be with them to resume life. This in turn encourages them to always be grateful with what they currently have.

Certain characters in puppet plays correct the children's misunderstanding of issues relating to disasters. Puppets provide the 'magical' means for children to avoid trauma during disasters... (Respondent F)

Discussion and Conclusion

All in all, the findings of the study have shown that the inclusion of puppet plays in the disaster preparedness programmes do not only educate nursery, kindergarten, and primary school children on the methods to prepare for various disasters; they help lessen the emotional impact caused by the disasters as well. Puppet plays can be a useful psychotherapeutic tool for children following disasters. Our findings were consistent with the report by the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and the Red Crescent Societies (RCS) in that puppet plays provided children with opportunities to express their creativity as well as to receive important messages about disasters. The findings also concurred with those of Cvetkova and Andonovska-Trajkovska (2012) as well as Muhammad, Kurnia, Tigo, Rini, and Hanggoro (2016) whereby puppet plays promoted emotional development in children and improved their knowledge of disasters, both of which are important elements of disaster preparedness.

According to volunteers, educators, rehabilitation centre workers, caretakers and disaster survivors, puppet plays constitute a method to convey important disaster-related messages. Additionally, puppet plays are an important part of early childhood development and disaster education. Accordingly, this paper has provided a clearer picture of disaster preparedness, and has highlighted the ability of puppet plays to alleviate trauma brought about by stress, catastrophe, or violence. Puppet theatre groups, disaster volunteers, childcare providers, teachers, parents, guardians, and the community should advocate the use of puppet plays as a means to develop children's disaster preparedness. Following disasters, such plays can be employed as psychosocial and therapeutic tools to rebuilding communities and help them recover from losses.

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