

The Impact of Cinematherapy on the Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing of School going Children in Madurai

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Abstract

The school going phase is the most significant in the lives of children as they learn lifelong skills and values and also acquire lifelong beliefs. Thus, it is essential that children should be both physically and mentally healthy in order to complete their school education successfully.

However, school going children in India face a lot of mental health issues such as depression and psychological distress. Thus it becomes pertinent to address and resolve them so that they are mentally healthy. One of the various ways in which these issues could be treated, is through cinema therapy. Cinema therapy is a type of therapy which involves using commercial films for therapeutic purposes.

This study aims to analyse the impact of cinematherapy on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of school going children from the age group of 8-15 years in Madurai. Five cinema therapy sessions were conducted consecutively on five days for the children.

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The study was conducted in the form of a pre-test – post-test design with a control group and an experimental group. After the conclusion of each session everyday, discussions were facilitated and initiated with the students in the experimental group about the films by asking structured and appropriate questions and making them to think and analyse how the films could be beneficial for them to solve their emotional problems. The responses of the school children before and after the cinema therapy sessions were analysed through Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale questionnaire distributed to them before the first session (pre-test) and one week after all sessions (post-test). The pre-test and post-test scores were statistically analyzed by performing the Shapiro Wilk test and Paired Samples T-test using Jamovi.

Keywords

Cinema Therapy, Mental Health, Psychotherapy, Psychological Wellbeing

Introduction

Films have always been a constant source of entertainment for different types of audiences such as kids, adolescents and adults from its inception till now in the era of films streaming on Over-The-Top platforms (OTT) such as Amazon Prime and Disney+Hotstar either directly or after some time after its theatrical release. They have also been enjoyed by the people as they offer them an option to escape from the realities of their daily lives and relate to the characters, situations and stories brought to them through different types of films such as adventure and comedy films over a specified time of 2 to 2.5 hours.

Besides offering entertainment or gratification to the audience, films have also been used for different types of purposes such as education and even in psychotherapy as well. Cinema therapy is a type of therapy which involves using commercial films for therapeutic purposes. It is very often used as an adjunct form of therapy in psychotherapy to treat various mental health issues in countries such as the United States of America (USA) and also to improve the emotional and psychological wellbeing of people.

Cinema therapy has also been successful in treating mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression and it has also been used successfully with children. Emotional and psychological wellbeing is extremely important to the school going children as this is a vital phase in their lives where they learn a lot

from their school teachers, classmates and friends. They also develop values and habits which would be likely to last throughout their lives.

Thus, they should be in a very happy state both emotionally and psychologically. Cinema therapy could be one of the ideal forms of therapies to enable them to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing and have a happy and fulfilling childhood, by allowing to them to connect with the characters and their situations in the films and draw insights from them to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing, with the help of therapists or researchers.

This study will be analysing the impact of cinematherapy on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the school children from the age group of 8-15 years old from the Madurai Kamaraj University Public School in Madurai, Tamil Nadu and also how they relate to the films and gather insights from them to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing by conducting five cinema therapy sessions on five days for them consecutively. The impact of the cinema therapy sessions on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the school children will be measured by the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale questionnaire distributed to them before the starting of the first session and also one week after all the cinema therapy sessions had been conducted.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To study how the school children relate to films as a medium and draw insights from them to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing.
- To analyse the effectiveness of the cinema therapy sessions on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the school children.

Study Methodology

The study is a pilot study which was conducted as a part of the ICSSR Major Research project being conducted by the researchers. As this study was a pilot study about a novel area of research in the cinema therapy field which has been not addressed till now, an interview was conducted with Anupriya Bannerjee, a

drama therapist and also the founder and creative director of the organization, Doctor Drama which is based in Mumbai, which offers creative and expressive arts therapy sessions and workshops, to understand and learn more about cinema therapy and how could cinema therapy sessions could be conducted for the children in India (B. Anupriya, personal communication, August 23, 2024).

Anupriya Bannerjee had also conducted a cinema therapy workshop in Mumbai. The study was conducted in the form of a pre test-post test design with a control group and an experimental group. In addition to this, the Shapiro Wilk test, which analyses if the data sets are normally distributed and the Paired Sample T-tests were conducted with the Jamovi statistical software to analyze the significance of the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in both the control and experimental groups.

The school students studying in 4th and 5th standard from the Madurai Kamaraj University school were selected to participate in the study as a type of convenience sampling and five cinema therapy sessions were conducted with them.

Five films about various issues or themes about school children and their emotional and psychological wellbeing were selected to be shown in the cinema therapy sessions. These films were selected according to the following criteria for selecting films for cinema therapy. They are as follows:

1. The film should offer hope.
2. The film should lead a person to feel motivated or improve themselves.
3. The film should lead the viewers to think about their psychological health and issues and they should also make the viewers to think about how would they manage similar situations as depicted in the movies (Shelton, 2024).

Then, accordingly five films were selected and were also certified by psychologists that they were suitable to be watched by the school going children and also could be used for cinema therapy sessions. Then they were also edited to be screened in the cinema therapy sessions. This was due to the reason that these edited clips conveyed the messages about how to deal with certain common emotional or psychological issues in their school or to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing succinctly and successfully to the school children.

They were also edited to ensure that these edited clips do not contain some unnecessary elements such as romance and villainous characters, which may not be useful for the students. The edited versions of the films were also certified by the psychologists.

The five films selected were:

1. *Monsters Inc.* (2001)-animated film- directed by Pete Docter,
2. *Ratatouille* (2007)-animated film-directed by Brad Bird, Lee Unkrich and David Silverman
3. *The Karate Kid* (2010)-martial arts film-directed by Harald Zwart
4. *The Good Dinosaur* (2015)-animated film-directed by Peter Sohn
5. *The Lion King* (2019)- animated film which was directed by Jon Favreau

The films were also selected as they were appropriate to be watched by the children. They were also selected on the basis that each of them deals with a particular issue/theme about the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the children and they also presented solutions to these problems or discussed about the themes successfully in a manner which could be understood by them.

They were also selected on the basis that they correlate with all of the items under the three different sub-scales of the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale, which was used to measure the improvement on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the school children as a result of attending the cinema therapy sessions; both before the starting of the first cinema therapy session (pre-test) and one week after all of the cinema therapy sessions had been conducted (post-test).

The Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale is used to measure the emotional and psychological wellbeing of children aged between 8-15 years old. It also has three subscales: Positive Emotional State scale and Positive Outlook scale which comprised of six statements on the questionnaire each respectively and a Social Desirability subscale which comprised of three statements on the questionnaire.

The Social Desirability sub-scale consists of three statements in the questionnaire and it is used for the purpose of determining if the children are answering based on whether their answers should be socially desirable or not and the scores of the questionnaire should be analyzed carefully if the scores of the Social Desirability sub-scale are 14 or 15 and 3 in total.

The questionnaire was also translated into Tamil for the purpose of the study. 24 students each from the 4th and 5th standard from the school were selected and placed in the control and experimental groups for the study and both of the groups were brought to the mixing theatre at the Centre for Film and Electronic Media Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University for five consecutive days at a specified timing of 2 pm to 3.30 pm and then five cinema therapy sessions were conducted with the children selected for the experimental group for the study.

On the other hand, the students belonging to the control group did not attend the cinema therapy sessions and only the pre-tests and post-tests were conducted with them at the same time alongside with the experimental group.

Before every cinema therapy session, the children were briefed about the objectives of the cinema therapy session, why the particular film was going to be shown to them and the synopsis. After the film screening, an interaction session was conducted with the students about the film and the themes or issues about their emotional and psychological wellbeing which was being addressed or raised by it.

Then, questions were also asked to the students during the interaction sessions about the characters and their actions of the film, how could they relate to the characters and also what the students could learn from them so to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing and to resolve their emotional and psychological issues. Thus, the students were being stimulated to learn how to view films as a form of therapeutic media.

To ensure that the children in the experimental group always remembered and also were in constant touch with the films and how they addressed issues or themes about how to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing so that they would be able to attempt the post-test successfully, posters containing images of the five films and their plot summaries created on A3 papers were created and displayed in the classrooms of the students who had attended the

cinema therapy sessions, for a week after all the cinema therapy sessions had been conducted, till the date of the post-test on 25th October 2024.

Table 1

Table of the films shown on all the cinema therapy sessions

Date	Day	Duration of the session	Film shown	Duration of edited film
14/10/2024	Monday	2-3.30pm	<i>Ratatouille</i>	37 min
15/10/2024	Tuesday	2-3.30pm	<i>The Lion King</i> (2019 film)	56 min
16/10/2024	Wednesday	2-3.30pm	<i>Monsters Inc.</i>	43 min
17/10/2024	Thursday	2-3.30pm	<i>The Good Dinosaur</i>	48 min
18/10/2024	Friday	2-3.30pm	<i>The Karate Kid</i>	56 min

Data Analysis and Discussion

There were 14 boys and 10 girls in the control group. On the other hand, there were 13 boys and 11 girls in the experimental group from the school had attended the cinema therapy sessions and watched the films. Some of the insights and findings which were obtained from the study are:

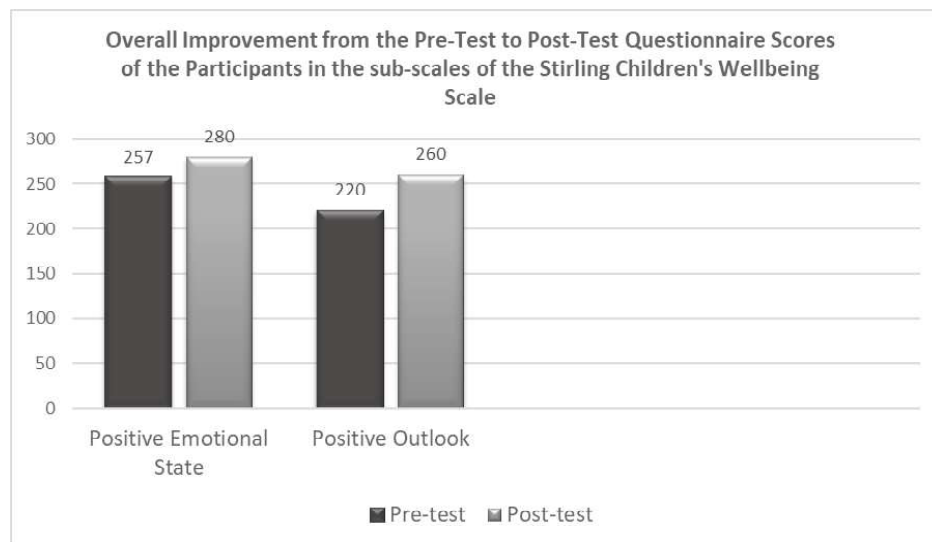
Control Group:

Analysing the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in the control group revealed that the pre-test and post-test scores of 10 students remained the same and the scores of 4 students showed a decrease from their pre-test to the post-test scores while the rest of the students showed an increase from their pre-test to their post-test scores.

However, when the Shapiro Wilk test was conducted based on the differences between the pre-test and post-test scores, as the value of p was less than 0.05, (it was 0.01), it was not a normal distribution and hence the Paired Samples T-test could not be conducted for the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in the control group. Thus, the data of the pre-test and post-test scores of the students in the control group was not significant.

Experimental Group

Figure 1: *Overall Improvement from the Pre-Test to Post-Test Questionnaire Scores of the Participants in the sub-scales of the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale*



- Analysing the overall scores of students who had improved from the pre-test to post-test, revealed that they had recorded improvements from their pre-test to their post-test scores of the Positive Outlook and Positive Emotional State sub-scales. However, interestingly, the scores of Positive Outlook sub-scale recorded more improvement than the latter.
- 46% of the boys (6 boys) have recorded an improvement in their questionnaire scores from their pre-test scores to post-test scores after the conclusion of the five cinema therapy sessions.

- However, 6 boys have also recorded a decrease in their questionnaire scores from their pre-test scores to post-test scores after the conclusion of the five cinema therapy sessions and 1 boy had recorded no change in his pre-test and post -test questionnaire score.
- While 45.5% of the girls (5 girls) had recorded an increase from their pre-test scores to their post-test scores, 5 girls had recorded a decrease from their pre-test to post-test scores. In addition to this, the pre- test and post-test scores of a girl were the same and thus there were no changes in her score.

Figure 2: *Types of Changes from Pre-Test to Post-Test Scores for Boys in the Experimental Group*

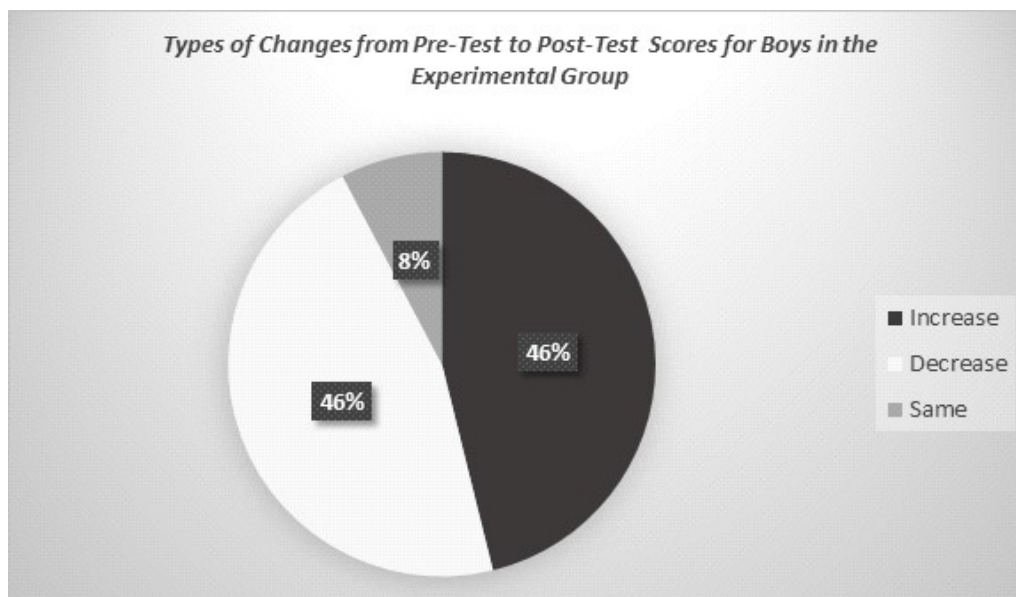
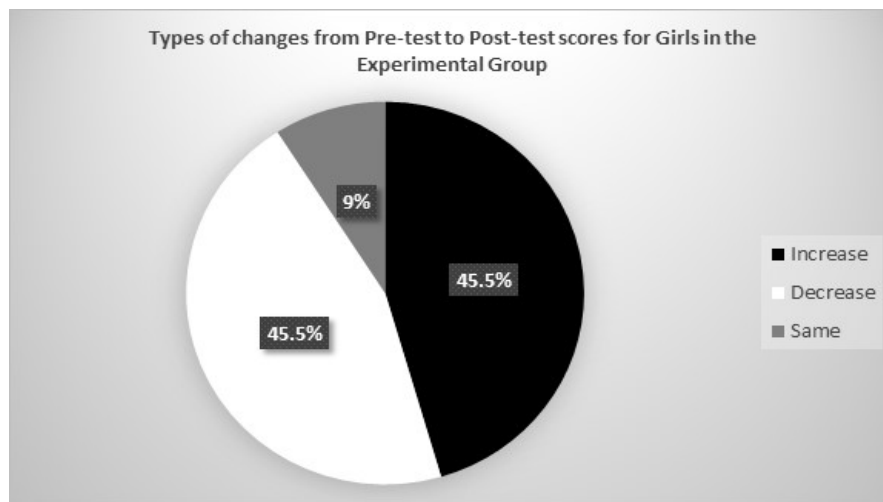


Figure 3: *Types of Changes from Pre-Test to Post- Test Scores for Girls in the Experimental Group*



Statistical Analysis

The Shapiro Wilk test and the Paired Samples T-test were performed on the pre-test and post-test scores of the students who had seen an improvement from the former to the latter. They were conducted on the basis of:

- Their gender and overall improvement from pre-test to post-test scores.
- Their gender and improvement from the pre-test to the post-test scores of the Positive Outlook sub-scale.
- Their gender and improvement from the pre-test to the post-test scores of the Positive Emotional sub-scale.
- There was a significant improvement of the boys from their overall pre-test to their overall post-test scores after attending the cinema therapy sessions as the value of p is 0.002 and thus is less than 0.05.
- There was a significant improvement of the boys from their pre-test Positive Outlook sub-scale to Positive Outlook post-test scores as the value of p is 0.004 and is less than 0.05.

- The improvement in the Positive Emotional State sub-scale pre-test to post-test scores of the boys was not significant as the value of p is 0.081 and is greater than 0.05.
- There was a significant improvement of the girls from their overall pre-test to their post-test scores as the value of p is 0.005 and is less than 0.05.
- There was a significant improvement of the girls from their pre-test Positive Outlook sub-scale score to post-test scores as the value of p is 0.013 and is less than 0.05.
- The improvement in the Positive Emotional State sub-scale pre-test to post-test scores for the girls was not significant as the value of p is 0.14 and is greater than 0.05.

Conclusion

Cinema therapy is a very interesting type of therapy and as it is a very cost-effective mode of treatment and is also liked by the children a lot. Thus, if it can be used successfully to promote their emotional and psychological wellbeing, then it can be implemented and followed in a large scale successfully throughout the country.

Thus, the aim of this study was to analyse the effectiveness of the cinema therapy sessions to promote the emotional and psychological wellbeing in school going children. The school children also enthusiastically participated in the pre-briefing sessions before each cinema therapy session about their responses while watching films and also enjoyed watching the films by laughing out aloud while watching them.

Thus, this affirms that the children relate to films a lot and their post-test results also confirmed that the cinema therapy sessions had a positive impact on most of them and they were able to enhance their emotional and psychological wellbeing after attending the cinema therapy sessions.

It was found out through the research and analysis that 11 students out of the 24 students had reported improvements from the pre-test scores to their post-

test scores after attending the cinema therapy sessions and thus they had benefitted from the sessions and this was also validated by the results of the Paired Samples T-tests carried out by analyzing the gender of the students and their SCWS scores, which indicated a significant improvement from their pre-test to post-test scores. Thus, they were able to relate to films and use them as a medium to improve their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

It was also interestingly found out that more boys as compared to girls had benefitted from attending the cinema therapy sessions (6 boys as compared to 5 girls). It was also found out that the highest increase overall from pre-test to the post-test scores of the participants was observed in the Positive Outlook sub-scale of the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale questionnaire. It indicates that the cinema therapy sessions have led to an improvement in the Positive Outlook of the school going children and this was also validated by the results of the Paired Samples T-tests carried out which had analyzed the gender of the students and their pre-test and post-test scores of the Positive Outlook sub-scale, which had also indicated a significant improvement from their pre-test to post-test scores.

The results of the Paired Samples T-test carried out between the improvements in from the pre-test to the post-test scores of the Positive Emotional State sub-scale of the students and their gender indicated that the improvements were not significant. The reason behind this aspect could be analyzed and studied in further research.

However, it was also observed that eleven students recorded a decrease in their post-test as compared to their pre-test results after attending the cinema therapy sessions and the pre-test and post-test scores of two students (a girl and a boy) had reported no changes. The reasons behind these findings could be analysed and studied in future research.

The results of this study have shown that cinema therapy sessions are effective in increasing the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the school children and they can also lead to improvements in their positive outlook and also that the children relate to films and also enjoy watching them as a part of cinema therapy sessions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and publication of this article.

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