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The effects of traditional Thai massage technique delivered by parents on stereotypical behaviors in children with autism

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Stereotypical behavior is one of the learning and social skills development problems that affect children with autism. Previous studies found that traditional Thai massage (TTM) could reduce stereotypical behaviors in autistic children. However, the effects of TTM delivered by the parents of autistic children have not been explored. This pilot study investigated the effects of TTM by parents on stereotypical behaviors in children with autism. A one-group pretest-posttest design was applied for 15 children, aged 4-16 years, with their parents' permissions. They participated in the study at the Special Education program of the Special Education Center of Khon Kaen University, Thailand. After being trained in a specialized TTM for children, the parents delivered 50-minute TTM to children once a day, twice a week for eight weeks. The severity of autism and autistic behaviors were measured using the Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS), and the Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist (ATEC), respectively. The functions of autonomic nervous systems were measured using Heart Rate Variability (HRV) to indicated physical and mental disorders such as stress. The data at baseline and the 8th week were analyzed using either an independent t-test or Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The study found that 16 sessions of TTM significantly improved measured data for autism in all children including the CARS ($p < 0.001$), ATEC, speech/language/communication ($p < 0.001$), sociability ($p < 0.001$), sensory/cognitive awareness ($p < 0.001$), health/physical/behavior ($p < 0.001$), and HRV ($p < 0.001$). The results indicated that TTM performed by parents could lower stereotypical autism behavior and stress. Additionally, it could reduce difficulty in language communication, sociability, sensory and cognitive awareness, as well as improve health and physical behavior. Caregiver-based interventions by TTM may facilitate better relationships between children and their parents.

Keywords: Traditional Thai Massage, Stereotypical Behaviors, Autistic Children, Parent

Biography

Chanada Aonsri, a 29-year-old professional in the field of physical therapy and a current Ph.D. candidate, is actively involved in research initiatives at the Autistic Research Centre situated within Khon Kaen University, Thailand. Her research primarily revolves around the application of Thai massage therapy for children with autism, with a broader emphasis on various aspects of the developmental journey of autistic children. Concurrently, Chanada is wholeheartedly committed to her doctoral studies, where she immerses herself in the study of the cognitive executive functions of children and adolescents diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Leveraging her substantial professional experience within the field, she has gathered invaluable insights into the obstacles faced by children with autism, cultivating a profound interest in nurturing their latent potential and empowering both the children and their parents. Her ultimate goal is to share knowledge with the aim of fostering enhanced developmental outcomes for children with autism.

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