TPKP

Araştırma Makalesi

OPINIONS OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN TURKEY TOWARDS PLAY THERAPY

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Abstract

Play Therapy is one of the effective interventions for school children's problems. The aim of the study is to investigate Turkish school counselors' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, use and non-use of play therapy. This descriptive study consisted of 116 school counselors (60% female). The data collection method utilized for this study was a total 30-item questionnaire consisting of a 14-item Likert type to determine perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, close-ended questions, and biographical questions. The purposeful sampling method was used in order to determine only school counselors' opinions about play therapy. Findings revealed that the majority of school counselors, 84.5% (n=98) do not use play therapy, but do believe it is an effective technique to handle students' issues. However, majority of participants indicated that they do not use play therapy because lack of education and training during undergraduate. Moreover, there was a strong agreement among respondents on necessity of having education and training related to play therapy. It is recommended that play therapy education and training would be beneficial for school counselors.

Keywords: Play therapy, school counselor, school children.

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ OKUL PSİKOLOJİK DANIŞMANLARININ OYUN TERAPİSİNE YÖNELİK GÖRÜŞLERİ

Öz

Oyun terapisi okul çağındaki çocukların sorunlarına yönelik etkili müdahale yöntemlerinden birisidir. Bu araştırmanın amacı Türkiye'deki okul psikolojik danışmanlarının oyun terapisine yönelik algı, görüş, tutum, bilgi ve seanslarında oyun terapisini kullanma durumlarını incelemektir. Bu betimleyici araştırmaya Türkiye'nin farklı bölgelerinden 116 psikolojik danışman katılmıştır (70 Kadın, %60). Araştırmada araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen algı ve tutumları belirlemeye yönelik 14 maddelik Likert tipi, kapalı uçlu sorular ve demografik bilgilerden oluşan 30 maddelik bir anket kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada sadece okul psikolojik danışmanların oyun terapisine yönelik görüşlerini belirlenmek için amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bulgular okul psikolojik danışmanlarının çoğunluğunun %84,5 (n=98) oyun terapisini seanslarında kullanmadığını fakat öğrencilerin sorunlarını gidermede etkili bir teknik olduğuna inandıklarını ortaya

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koymuştur. Katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğu lisans öğrenimi sırasında oyun terapisi ile ilgili herhangi bir eğitim almadıklarından dolayı oyun terapisini kullanmadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca oyun terapisi ile ilgili eğitim ve öğretim almanın gerekliliği konusunda katılımcılar arasında görüş birliği olduğu bulunmuştur. Oyun terapisi eğitimi ve uygulamalarının okul psikolojik danışmanları için faydalı olacağı önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Oyun terapisi, okul psikolojik danışmanı, okul çocukları.

Introduction

School Counseling Services (SCS) supports students' holistic development in personal, social, educational, and professional areas (Yeşilyaprak, 2015). School counselors adjust their approach regarding unique needs and developmental characteristics of students depending on their grade levels (e.g., early education, elementary, and secondary schools) (Yüksel-Şahin, 2012). Therefore, SCS must consider students' unique developmental needs and prepare their curriculum regarding their academic/educational, career, personal, and social development. As Drewes and Schaefer (2010) stated that implementing developmentally appropriate interventions is a vital task for school counselors.

Psychological counselors in schools provide psychological counseling services within the scope of personal-social guidance. Counselors help students based on different counseling theories. However, the nature of helping students, especially in preschool and primary school, can change. Play therapy can be seen as an important tool in helping children who have difficulty in expressing themselves verbally or who cannot express themselves well verbally due to their cognitive development. Unlike the United States, counseling is seen as more guidance and advising in Turkey. To provide a quality counseling services to students in schools for their healthy development (Can, 1998a), there is a need to create an appropriate environment with various school children focused activities such as play therapy. The Ministry of National Education of Turkey (2001) emphasized the vital importance of early intervention and preventive and developmental approaches to stop the unwanted behaviors before happened in schools. In this essence, play therapy becomes prominent in the process of counseling. Last a few decades, play therapy has been known an effective intervention for school children (Drewes & Schaefer, 2010).

Play Therapy

The history of play therapy has come such a long way from the Sigmund Freud era to 21st century. Freud acknowledged the importance of using toys in his work with Little Hans (LeBlanc & Richie, 2001). Later, Melanie Klein and Anna Freud used play therapy and that was closely aligned with Sigmund Freud's psychodynamic theories (Landreth, 2012). Klein and Freud used different approaches when working with children depending on the interpretation of the child's actions. Anna Freud used more analysis components and believed that it was vital to establish a therapeutic alliance with children (Schaefer, 2011); conversely, Melanie Klein, used miniatures in working with children because she believed that children could have a sense of control over their smaller world. They both noted that the therapy requires different process when working with children than working with adults (Landreth, 2012).

Play is a vital activity of childhood and it is essential to children's healthy development and creative thinking (Nash & Schaefer, 2010). Play helps children to improve their problem solving skills (Blanco & Ray, 2011), to handle their psychological issues and to become self-

confident individuals in their later ages (Fall et al., 1999). Vygotsky (1967) defined play as holistic activities that improve children's abstract thoughts and it is the primary resource of pre-school period. Piaget (1962) specified appropriate play for periods as; (a) 0-2 year play (perception of time and place), (b) 2-11 year symbolic play (based on being a role model or taking someone's role), and (c) 12 year and later ages regular play (expedite cognitive development, complete language development, improve cooperation and social perspective). Play is a tool for children to express their emotions freely. Play therapy is distinguished from just play through the ways to cope with fears, anxieties, and negative emotions (Phillips, 2010).

In play therapy, children determine the form and content of the exploration. This approach helps children to have the sense of their experiences as appropriate with their developmental stage (Nash & Schaefer, 2010). Play therapy consists of four core components including the importance of the therapeutic relationship (therapist-child), developmental stage of the children (appropriate for play), goal of therapy, and healthy development of children (Landreth, Ray & Bratton, 2009). Although there is no consistency on the number of stages exists in the play therapy, gestalt approach makes a comprehensive categorization of the process with three stages including beginning/initial, middle, and ending or termination stages (Oaklander, 2011).

To implement play therapy techniques, school counselors do not need to become registered play therapists in order to deliver play therapy at their schools. They must constantly participate in play therapy workshops and improve their skills that sure help them use play as a counselor in their school settings (Campbell, 1993). School counselors can use play therapy to build an effective therapeutic relationship with children (Kottman & Johnson, 1993). Play therapy is known as developmentally appropriate intervention (Drewes & Schaefer, 2010); therefore, it is beneficial to implement it when working at schools where responsive services are required.

Literature revealed various positive outcomes of individual and group play therapy with school children. In their meta-analysis research, Bratton et al. (2005) reviewed ninety-three (thirty-six of them were in school settings) play therapy studies. Their results revealed that play therapy was perceived to be effective across age, gender, and issue among children. Specifically, elementary school students who received Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT) demonstrated statistically significant greater self-efficacy and self-esteem than their peers who did not receive CCPT (Fall et al., 1999). White, Flynt, and Jones (1999) found that kindergarten teachers who received a six hours Kinder Therapy were able to help their students to improve their language, arts, and mathematics skills, and to demonstrate appropriate social skills. Additionally, the students' negative social skills behaviors including hyperactivity, aggressiveness, depressive and attention related behaviors decreased after the teachers executed a kinder therapy session.

Play therapy might be the most effective way to assist students with their issues. Research showed effectiveness of play therapy with school children who are suffering from conduct disorders (Cochran & Cochran, 1999), autism, obsessive–compulsive disorder (Johnson, McLeod,& Fall, 1997), posttraumatic stress disorder (Shen & Sink, 2002), attention and hyperactivity issues (Ray, Schottelkorb, & Tsai, 2007), aggressive behavior (Ray, Blanco, Sullivan, & Holliman, 2009), and children at risk (Post, 1999).

Using play therapy with school children also help with their social and emotional growth (Coplan & Rubin, 1998; Holmes & Willoughby, 2005), academic performance (Blanco, Ray, & Holliman, 2012), self-efficacy and self-esteem (Fall et al., 1999), social skills (White et al., 1999),

and self-control (McGuire, 2000). Moreover, play therapy is an effective intervention and protective factor for several issues such as emotional adjustment (Burroughs, Wagner, & Johnson, 1997), attention deficit hyperactivity behavior (Schottelkorb & Ray, 2009) problem behaviors (Packman & Bratton, 2003), school adjustment problems (Rennie, 2000).

Landreth (2012) indicated that implementing play therapy in schools is even possible with minimal space, limited accessibility to specific materials (e.g. miniatures, sand), and little support of the school administration. However, by doing this SCS are able to help students in an effective way for their mental health and overall wellbeing as they are required by the school curriculum (Landreth, 2012).

Shen (2008) found out that school counselors use play therapy because they value play, it is consistent with their philosophy, and it demonstrated rewarding outcomes. However, Ray et al. (2005) stated that school counselors may perceive barriers to implementation of play therapy although they know the outcomes of this therapy. They suggested more comprehensive research on school counselors' use of play therapy in delivery, overcoming barriers to implementation, and training. This encouraged the present study to explore Turkish school counselors' perceptions of play therapy and its effectiveness.

As consistent with the literature in other countries, play therapy studies conducted in Turkey demonstrated the positive outcomes and effective intervention influence. Play encourages children to disclose their own personal character and develop their self-esteem (Koçyiğit et al., 2007, Ramazan & Unsal 2012), vocabulary, story-telling and communication skills (Pehlivan 2005). Sezici (2013) stated that play therapy helped preschoolers improve their self-esteem, communication, and coping skills and decrease their fear and anxiety levels. Koçkaya and Siyez (2017) discussed the perceptions of preschool children's teachers and mothers on outcomes of play therapy. Their results showed that both teachers and mothers believed play therapy is an effective and significant intervention for behavioral problems of preschoolers since it reduced emotional and peer relation problems and increased prosocial behaviors of children.

Purpose of the Study

Research about the perceptions and practice of school counselors regarding play therapy is needed to better inform counselors and school administrators about this rapidly expanding therapy option in schools. Thus, the purpose of this study is to evaluate questions related to the knowledge, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes of play therapy by surveying Turkish school counselors who are currently practicing in schools in Turkey. The following research question guided our study: What are school counselors' perceptions, opinions, knowledge and attitudes about play therapy? The current study also examined either use or non-use play therapy techniques, what factors affect school counselors' use or non-use of play therapy techniques.

Given the theoretical and empirical evidence about the importance of play therapy for school children, there is no clear information about the estimation of Turkish school counselors' use and non-use of play therapy in their sessions. By investigating school counselors' knowledge and use of play therapy, this study might provide information for counselor educators, school administrators, and the Ministry of National Education that they may design play therapy related courses, workshops, and trainings. Moreover, the findings of this study might also encourage school counselors to apply/ to change their therapeutic models based on play therapy.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The current study utilized a cross-sectional descriptive online survey research design to explore school counselors' perceptions and knowledge of play therapy. Johnson and Christensen (2016) indicated that descriptive study aims to learn characteristics of population including perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes. The target population for this study was school counselors who had been working in a school more than one year. We used purposive sampling method to examine this specific population.

The demographic data of the participants is shown in Table 1. A total of 116 school counselors participated in the current study that 46 (39.7%) were male and 70 (60.3%) were female. The participants' years of employment as school counselor were as follows: 27 (23.3%) with one to three years, 37 (31.9%) with four to six years, 29 (25%) with seven to nine years, 8 (6.9%) with 10 to 12 and 15 (12.9) more than 12 years. 104 (89.7) participants work in public school and 12 (10.3%) work in private school. Also, participants came from various work settings: 35 (30.2%) working in elementary setting, 46 (39.7%) in middle and 35 (30.2%) in high school. Regarding educational level of the participants, 79 (68.1%) reported having bachelors degree, 36 (31%) reported having Master Degree and 1 (.9%) reported holding a doctoral degree in counseling.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the corresponding authors' institution (01/06/2021-2021/141). The online survey was administered via Google Forms for ease and convenience of participants and researchers. Informed consent was obtained from participants before data collection. The 30-item survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Measures

No previous studies have specifically explored Turkish school counselors' perceptions, opinions, knowledge, and attitudes of play therapy, thus, no appropriate instrument was available for use in the present study. The survey questions were derived through a process of analysis of the related literature (Ebrahim et al., 2012; Ray et al., 2005; Shen & Herr, 2003; Van Horne et al., 2018). The survey consisted of demographic categorical information, five point Likert type knowledge, perception, opinion, and attitude questions about play therapy, a checklist of characteristics and effectiveness of play therapy, and last two yes-no questions about receiving training and attending play therapy workshops. One school counselor, two counselor educators, one play therapy expert, and one faculty member from Assessment and Evaluation department reviewed the draft questionnaires that face and content validity and readability were improved. The expert panel advised specific grammatical changes. Based on responses from expert panel, the researchers changed and have added several questions prior to distribution of survey. We added "Do you use play therapy in your counseling sessions?" and "If not please explain because …". Also, problems in which play therapy is effective were separated from each other that following questions like " Play therapy is an effective method for students with emotional problems", " Play therapy is an effective method for students with learning problems" included in the five-point Likert (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree) part. The results of factor analysis yielded factor structures that did not generate interpretable

factors, thus, each item was analyzed individually regarding to content validity. Lastly, the survey consisted of 30 items to collect categorical and numerical data from the participants.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS Statistic 22.0 (IBM SPSS). In the current study, the dependent variable was use or non-use of play therapy. The independent variables were socio-demographic characteristics, school counselors' years of experience, type of school, primary practice setting, number of therapy session in a week, play therapy related courses and trainings, perceptions, opinions, and knowledge about play therapy. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for all categorical data. Also, means, standard deviations, correlations and chi-square test were calculated to examine the relationships of selected variables.

Results

Participants were asked about their play therapy education and trainings, number of counseling session in a week, using play therapy techniques in their sessions, and reasons not to use play therapy in sessions. As shown Table 1, majority of participants did not take any play therapy course or training 98(84.5%). Only 18(15.5%) participants were found to be familiar with play therapy. Almost half of the participants 56 (48.3%) reported doing one to five hours of individual or group therapy in a week. 30 (25.9%) participants reported six to 10 hours and only eight (6.89%) participants reported doing 10 and more hours of individual and group therapy. 22 (19%) participants stated that they have never done any counseling session in a week.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Categorical Variables

		F	%
Gender			
	Male	46	39.7
	Female	70	60.3
Years of employment			
	1-3	27	23,3
	4-6	37	31.9
	7-9	29	25
	10-12	8	6.9
	12 and above	15	12.9
Type of school			
	Public	104	89.7
	Private	12	10.3
Work setting			
	Elementary	35	30.2
	Middle	46	39.7
	High	35	30.2
Level of education			
	Bachelors	79	68.1
	Master	36	31
	Doctorate	1	.9
Play therapy courses			
	Yes	18	15.5
	No	98	84.5
Counseling sessions (Hour)			
	0	22	19
	1-5	56	48.3
	6-10	30	25.9
	11-15	6	5.2
	16-20	2	1.7
Using Play Therapy Techniques			
	Yes	18	15.5
	No	98	84.5

Reasons not to use play therapy			
	Not enough time during the day	14	12.1
	Not enough training about play therapy	101	87.1
	Play is not an effective intervention	1	.9

Results regarding to use and non-use play therapy techniques showed that 84.5 percent (n=98) participants did not use play therapy techniques (Table 2). Results also showed that participants do not use play therapy because (1) not having training about play therapy (n=101, 87.1%) and not having enough time during the day (n=14, 12.1%). Among participants who use play therapy in their sessions, only 14 (12.1%) participants were from public and 4 (3.4%) participants were from private schools. Also, participants who are having 12 and more years experience reported the highest rate of use play therapy (n=5, 5.3%) in their sessions. Regarding to work setting, elementary (n=7, 6%) and high (n=7, 6%) school counselors use play therapy more than middle school counselors (n=4, 3.4%) in their sessions. The results of chi-square tests also examined the relationship between school types, years of experience, work setting, and whether participants use play therapy in their sessions (Table 2). Relationship between school type and use and non-use play therapy $\chi^2(1)=3.241$, $p=.072$, years of experience and use and non-use play therapy $\chi^2(4)=5.806$, $p=.214$, work setting and use and non-use play therapy $\chi^2(2)=2.706$, $p=.258$ were found to be not statistically significant.

Table 2: Frequencies and Chi-Square Analyses of Play Therapy Use and Non-Use Based on School Type, Years of Employment, and Work Setting

	Play Therapy			
	Yes	No	χ^2	p
School Type			3.241	.072
Public	14 (12.1)	90(77.6))		
Private	4(3.4)	8(6.9))		
Years of employment			5.806	.214
1-3	4(3.4)	23(19.8)		
4-6	3(2.6)	34 (29.3)		
7-9	4(3.4)	25(21.6)		
10-12	2(1.7)	6(5.2)		
12 and above	5(5.3)	10(8.6)		
Work setting			2.706	.258
Elementary	7(6)	28 (24.1)		
Middle	4(3,4)	42(36.2)		
High	7(6)	28(24.1)		
Total	18(15.5)	98(84.5)		

Participants indicated their play therapy knowledge as very poor (n=46, 39.7%), poor (n=49, 42.2%), fair (n=15, 12.9%), and good (n=6, 5.2%). The composite self-reported knowledge of play therapy score were calculated and yielded a mean of 1.84 with a standard deviation of .844 (1=very poor, 2=poor, 3= fair, 4=good, 5=very good).

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviations of school counselors' perceptions, opinions, and attitudes of play therapy. An answer of strongly disagree represented a lower mean, while an answer of strongly agree represented a higher mean score. Results illustrated that participants believe play is a child's natural form of communication, as 91.4% (n=106) of participants either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement (M=4.31, SD=.796). Results also showed that majority of participants strongly agree or agree about the basic tenets of play therapy align with counseling values and ethics. Most of participants indicated that they agree or strongly agree about children with emotional problems (n=95, 81.9%) and learning problems (n=79,

68.1%) can benefit from play therapy with a mean score of 3.91 (SD=.753) and 3.72 (SD=.822), consecutively. On item five, lower mean scores (M=1.80, SD=.749) showed that school counselors responded in disagreement that children with physical disabilities cannot benefit from play therapy. Lower mean scores (M=1.40, .509) on item seven indicated that school counselors are strongly disagreed with the statement about children's play which is unrelated their lives. According to the item six, school counselors are also strongly disagreed about taking a child to the play therapy is waste of time (M=1.50, SD=.536).

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for Perceptions, Opinions, and Attitudes of School Counselors about Play Therapy

Item	M	SD
1. Most school counselors have knowledge about play therapy	2.01	.909
2. Play therapy is fairly new method of intervention	2.70	.887
3. A child with emotional problems can benefit from play therapy	3.91	.753
4. Children with learning problems can benefit from play therapy	3.72	.822
5. Children with physical disabilities cannot benefit from play therapy	1.80	.749
6. Taking a child to the play therapy session is a waste of time	1.50	.536
7. What children are playing out has nothing to do with what is happening in their lives.	1.40	.509
8. Play therapy is more effective in some cultures than others, therefore the outcome would not be the same.	2.97	.899
9. My undergraduate/graduate education prepared me to effectively conduct play therapy in my place of employment.	2.10	1.058
10. Play is a child's natural form of communication.	4.31	.796
11. The basic tenets of play therapy align with counseling values and ethics.	4.11	.789

Note. N=116, Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly Agree=5

Discussion

In this study, it was examined school counselors' perceptions, opinions, knowledge, attitudes and use and non-use of play therapy regarding their education level, school type, work setting, years of employment. Results revealed that majority of school counselors do not use play therapy techniques in their work setting. Most of school counselors reported that they do not have enough training about play therapy. Thus, play therapy, as an intervention, is not commonly used among counselors in schools. The results of the current study also investigated the relationship of school type, years of employment, and work setting on the use of play therapy techniques. Results revealed that use or non-use of play therapy did not differ based on school type (public, private), years of employment, and work setting (elementary school, middle school, high school). Overall, these findings suggest that school counselors do not use play therapy regardless of their work related variables. According to these results, in-service trainings and workshops might be provided to Turkish counselors who are currently practicing in school settings.

School counselors also reported their knowledge of play therapy as very poor (n=46, 39.7%), poor (n=49, 42.2%). Accordingly, school counselors might feel incapable of applying play therapy techniques. However, school counselors do not need to be a registered play therapist in order to deliver play therapy techniques at their schools (Campbell, 1993). In recent years, various play therapy workshops have been offered by institutions and agencies in Turkey. School counselors might participate in those workshops and improve their knowledge and skills that help them to use play therapy techniques as a counselor in their schools. In addition, school counselors might implement play therapy techniques even with minimal space and limited accessibility to specific materials (Landreth, 2012). Several school counselors (n=14, 12.1%) indicated that they do not have enough time during the day to implement play therapy. School administrators and

principals believe that the counseling services are necessary for students' healthy development (Özabacı, Sakarya & Doğan, 2008) and they might reduce administrative roles of counselors with providing time to implement individual and group play therapy sessions.

Regarding the school counselors' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about play therapy, most of school counselors believe that "play is a child's natural form of communication" and "the basic tenets of play therapy align with counseling values and ethics". They indicated that play therapy is an effective intervention for children with emotional and learning problems. However, they also reported that their undergraduate/graduate education did not prepare them to effectively conduct play therapy in their place of employment. This result is consistent with previous studies that counselor alumnae indicated the difficulties and deficiencies related to counseling curriculum such as applying theoretical concepts in practical settings (Owen et al., 2013). Researchers also suggested that it would be beneficial to create courses for different age groups and subjects. It is pointed out that pre-vocational and in-service trainings should be considered as a whole in supporting the knowledge and skills of counselors. The experiences of school counselors during their undergraduate education affect their professional practices and competencies in the following years, and that the self-efficacy levels increase when they receive theoretical and practical training before the service (Kodaz & Batık, 2018). Taken all together, implementing play therapy related courses in to the counseling curriculum might increase the knowledge and skills of counseling students.

Although school counselors did not take any courses related play therapy, they reported that taking a child to the play therapy session is not a waste of time and there is a relationship between children's plays and their lives. Regarding to these statements, school counselors perceive play therapy is an effective and necessary intervention technique in their practice. The results of the current showed that a large proportion of school counselors (54 %) uncertain about "play therapy is more effective in some cultures than others, therefore the outcome would not be the same". However, as consistent with the literature in other countries, play therapy studies conducted in Turkey demonstrated the positive outcomes and effectiveness (Koçyiğit et al., 2007, Pehlivan, 2005; Ramazan & Unsal, 2012; Sezici, 2013). Also, 16% of school counselors are agree and 41% of school counselors are unsure about play therapy fairly new method of intervention. This possibly could be due to lack of knowledge about play therapy and its effectiveness. Overall, these results also another indicator reflective of the lack of play therapy education, training, and workshops.

In their study, Tuzgöl-Dost and Keklik (2012) found that school counselors felt incompetent in the areas of psychological counseling, special education, and exam anxiety problems. Moreover, school counselors also reported the inadequacy of their undergraduate education. Using play therapy with students help their social and emotional growth (Coplan & Rubin, 1998; Holmes & Willoughby, 2005), academic performance (Blanco, Ray & Holliman, 2012), self-efficacy and self-esteem (Fall et al., 1999), and social skills (White et al., 1999). In order to increase school counselors' competency in these areas as well as improving undergraduate counseling curriculum, education and training about play therapy are seen indispensable.

To intervene in problems that arise in children and adolescents, SCS become prominent within the scope of preventive mental health services. Therefore, school counselors need to know specific and effective intervention techniques for their student population (Korkut, 2005). The

findings of current study made an interesting picture that Turkish school counselors know what to do and effectiveness of play therapy but somehow they feel incapable how to do so. This might be mostly because of lack of education about specific intervention techniques such as play therapy in their undergraduate years. Therefore, this study calls for an action to accommodate effective techniques and therapy methods for school children and adolescents in the counselor education curriculum. In order to ensure that counselor candidates understand the role of play techniques in the counseling process, methods and techniques of play therapy might be emphasized in the courses of psychological counseling theories, psychological counseling skills, group counseling, developmental psychology, and practicum.

Children can be extremely sensitive to negative situations occurring in their environment. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of schools and restricted the movement of school children about two years. Due to this prolonged state of isolation from schoolmates, teachers, and activities, most school children experienced psychological and social problems that affected their adaptation after school openings (Xie et al., 2020). Thus, school counselors have to focus on adaptation of children in their schools in the first place. As aforementioned, play therapy interventions have positive impacts on school children's problems. School counselors who are currently in practice might use play therapy techniques to help children easily compensate the negative effects of school closure. Turkish Ministry of Education and school administrators can provide short term workshops and educational programs about play therapy in order to deliver effective counseling services to their students.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that also provide directions for future research. First, online self-report survey can be problematic as there is no way to ensure respondents' beliefs and attitudes about play therapy. Thus, mixed method research design might be conducted to eliminate this limitation. Second, the generalizability of the current study could be prevented by a small number of sample considering the number of school counselors working in Turkey. Further studies could include more school counselors to improve generalizability. It is important for the counseling programs to better understand how play therapy education and trainings may increase school counselors' competencies. Longitudinal studies may be conducted about the relationship between self-efficacy, problem solving strategies, confidence, and use of play therapy. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct comparative studies about the usefulness of play therapy and other techniques among school children. As play therapy continues to gain more attention in the counseling field, it will be also important to investigate whether knowledge of play therapy fulfills the expectations of school counselors in their sessions with students.

The findings of the present study describe the perceptions, attitudes, opinions, and knowledge of school counselors about play therapy. Although school counselors believe utilizing play therapy is an effective intervention technique for their students, they do not use play therapy due to lack of education and training. Use and non-use of play therapy did not change regarding the school type, years of employment, and work setting. Therefore, this study proposes the need to provide education and training for both future and current school counselors. Considering the importance of counselors' skills and continuous development in the success of counseling process, it is thought that institutional and national support of play therapy education and training

would be beneficial for school counselors who have positive perceptions and attitudes about play therapy.

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