

Psychodrama in children and adults with high-functioning pervasive developmental disorders.

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of 2 years' research into the application of psychodrama as a treatment for children and adults with high-functioning pervasive developmental disorders (HFPDD). A total of 36 sessions were performed on Saturdays twice a month over 2 years: year X and year X+1. Varied dramatic themes were employed to explore the subjects' thoughts and feelings about personal relationships in different situations. Through this experience, subjects were encouraged to express and organize a wide range of feelings and were able to cultivate friendships. This study identified 3 similar disorders with characteristic features; high functioning autistic disorder (HFA), Asperger's disorder (AS), and learning disability (LD). The validity of psychodrama as a treatment for young people with HFA was also investigated.

Key words: high-functioning pervasive developmental disorders (HFPDD), high-functioning autistic disorder (HFA), Asperger's disorder (AS), learning disability (LD), psychodrama

I. Purpose

To examine the current status and efficacy of HFPDD and consider how understanding of autism has progressed since Kanner (1943) first reported it. There are a number of accounts (Grandin, 1997, etc.) of people suffering from HFA who suppress childhood memories. Detailing problems in personal relationships, which is a principle symptom of HFA, the focus is on cases that do not, because of lack of critical capability, result in social adaptation. Persons with AS find it difficult to communicate with other and adapt to society (Asperger, 1994). These difficulties often lead to personal problems and truancy during early adolescence, and require assistance through consultation with psychiatrists or psychologists to understand the condition. Without being able to understand how other people react in different situations, a person with AS is unable to respond appropriately. This sense of personal difference is heightened by the high level of capability and sensitivity giving rise to frequent cases of harm and depression (Kurita, 1995, 1999, Kobayashi 1995, Sugiyama et al., 2000). There are also factors that cause

these difficulties, leading to a lack of ability to sympathize with others and other aspects of social poverty (Mawson et al. 1985). Since HFA and AS present difficulties in sociability and misinterpretation of actions it is important to nurture the ability to understand and cope independently in a variety of situations. Through psychological assistance, HFPDD seeks to promote sociality and enhance mental stability.

One technique is described below. Psychodrama is a form of group psychology treatment developed by Moreno, through improvised role-playing. According to Harizuka (1993), psychodrama provides the opportunity to share an emotional sense of togetherness through relating to others, resulting in "everybody with one mind." That is, personal relations are developed through an enhanced sense of togetherness stimulated by structured role performance in a group. Below is explained what is meant by encouraging friendly relationships in cases of HFA. Wing (1981) reported that the formation of friendships is very difficult for people with HFA or AS. According to Sugiyama et al. (1998), although psychological group therapy has been clinically applied in Japan to people with schizophrenia, it has yet to be applied in the treatment of people with HFA. However, language training, SST, etc. have been used in the treatment of people with HFA through an environmental setup in accordance with the cognitive obstacle hypothesis of HFA (Rutter, 1971). If psychotherapy has obscured how the patient was treated in infancy, there is little progress in the period during which psychotherapy is not undertaken. Techniques that foster spontaneity and creativity in people with HFA such as through psychodrama are difficult to implement. Harizuka (1993) reports the benefits of sharing emotions in HFA and discusses the therapeutic value of group-based self-expression that goes beyond dealing with only the main problem. The author applied psychodrama, one of the forms of group psychology therapy, for over 10 years in people with HFPDD aimed at building relationships and promoting self-expression. Takahara (1993) reports the improvements brought about through psychodrama in the previously inappropriate speech and conduct of 3 men with autistic disorders who had been admitted to a facility for the treatment of mentally challenged people. Moreover, social relationships and self-expression in HFA, can be approached through psychodrama (Takahara 1995), which is performed after examining the meaning of self-development through dramatization of the "past", "present", and the "future" (Takahara 1998). Takahara (2000, 2001a, 2001b) considers HFA. Although it seems that some are benefiting from psychodrama suitable for AS sufferers, a number of patients may be suffering from other conditions despite having been introduced to the therapeutic group. Although the implementation of psychodrama has previously been reported in this research as mentioned above, the subjects who participated in a 2-year program of psychodrama were categorized into HFA or HFPDD. The

subjects were able to express and organize many feelings and build social relationships. This report examines the validity of psychodrama in adolescents with HFA.

II. Method

1. Roles in psychodrama

Director (Dir.): Main therapist who designs and supervises the psychodrama.

Hero (Heroine): Main protagonist in the psychodrama

Auxiliary Ego (AE): Sub-therapist who acts as the leading role partner and assists the main protagonist in their role. Six AE therapists participated in this research (AE.A, AE.I, AE.K, AE.T, AE.M, and AE.Y).

2. Procedure of psychodrama

Warm up: Language orientated activities such as discussions and dialogues and other activities such as gymnastics and games.

Dramatization (Drama): Mainly spontaneous role-playing activities where the participant develops a situation and then explores solutions. Warm up progresses smoothly to dramatization without a clear distinction.

Sharing - The main participant shares their experiences with the others in the group. In sharing, each participant considers new perspectives and attempts to describe the thoughts of their partner. Following this, role-release is performed to provide closure.

3. Period

Sessions were conducted twice a month on Saturdays for 2 years: years X and X+1.

4. Case (Participant)

Ten people participated in the sessions with a therapist as AE (only Case 6 participated from X+1 year). Cases are shown in (Participant) Table 1.

Table1 Profile of each case

Case No	Sex	Age	Diagnosis	IQ(FIQ/VIQ/PIQ)	Treatment/Job
Case 1	Female	30	Autistic disorder	83/74/102	A factory worker
Case 2	Male	30	Autistic disorder	61/53/86	Clerk
Case 3	Male	30	Autistic disorder	66/78/55	Residential Institution
Case 4	Male	28	Autistic disorder	61/52/82	Residential Institution
Case 5	Male	27	Autistic disorder	81/72/97	Residential Institution
Case 6	Male	20	Autistic disorder	63/45/76	Day-care Institution
Case 7	Male	19	Asperger's disorder	81/83/85	Day-care Institution
Case 8	Male	16	Asperger's disorder	122/123/118	High-school
Case 9	Male	15	Learning Disability	95/93/106	High-school
Case 10	Female	14	Learning Disability	105/103/110	Junior high-school

III. Results

1. Contents of psychodrama

Thirty-six sessions were conducted over 2 years divided into 4 terms every 6 months as shown in Table 2.

Table2 Contents of Psychodrama

	Session	Session Name (Main Theme)	Hero Heroine	Other main role
The 1st Period	1	To Kagoshima by express bus (Family, Travel)	Case 3	Case/1/5/8/Staff
	2	Chinese Sangokushi (Fantasy)	Case 8	Staff
	3	To Akita by plane (Friend, Travel)	Case 3	Case 2
	4	Jellyfish (Mother)	Case 7	Case 5/Staff
	5	Mosquito (Stress)	Case 8	Case 5/Staff
	6	Guidance of high-school (Guidance)	Case 9	Staff
The 2nd Period	7	Travel to U.S.A (Family, Travel, Hobbies)	Case 1	Case 3
	8	Travel to Toyama (Hobby, Travel)	Case 3	Case 1/2
	9	Baby and Grandmother (Mother, Family)	Case 8	Case 2/Staff
	10	Kindergarten (Friend)	Case 4	Case 8
	11	Primary school (Friend)	Case 5	Case 4/5/7/8/Staff
	12	Kabigon Family (Fantasy, Family)	Case 8	Case 2/Staff
	13	Grasses of Ms.Y (Stress, The opposite sex)	Case 7	Staff
	14	Athletic Meeting (Stress)	Case 4	All
	15	Travel to Hawaii (Hobby, Travel)	Case 4	All
	16	Travel to Korea (Hobby, Travel, Family)	Case 1	All
	17	Meeting Comuke (Hobby, Friend)	Case 8	All
The 3rd Period	18	Present (Friend)	All	All
	19	Wedding Party (The opposite sex, Family, Friend)	Case 1	Case 4/5/7
	20	Under the cherry tree (Friend, The opposite sex)	All	All
	21	An old boy's association (Friend)	Case 6	Case 5/7
	22	Birthday Party at the seaside (Family)	Case 7	Case 4
	23	The cellular phone (Hobby, Stress, Friend)	Case 9	Case 7/8
	24	Incident at Primary school (Incident, Friend, Stress)	Case 7	Case 1/8/9
The 4th Period	25	Football (Friend)	Case 7	Case 2
	26	Turtle (Family)	Case 1	Case 3
	27	Water (Travel, Family)	Case 5	Staff
	28	A summer scene (Travel, Family)	Case 1	Staff
	29	Highway in Fukuoka (Hobby, Friend)	Case 7	Case 8/9
	30	Being injured (Friend, Stress)	Case 6	Staff
	31	Trains (Friend, Travel)	Case 1	Case 2/5
	32	Dream Town (Travel, Hobby, Friend)	Case 5	Case 3/4/8
	33	My office (Friend, Stress)	Case 2	Case 6/Staff
	34	Personal Computer (Hobby, The opposite sex)	Case 7	Case 5/Staff
	35	Travel to Sendai (Travel)	Case 3	All
	36	The adult formula(Friend)	Case 9	All

2. Progress

Case 1

Prior to psychotherapy: After graduating from special education at high school, she works as a packer in a seafood-processing factory called W fishery. Despite teasing from some colleagues, she manages to work. In the same manner as in Case 2, she had problems using the telephone and asked her mother for help. No sexual problems were reported. Although her outward appearance is ordinary, her awkward stammering speech gives her the impression of being mentally challenged. For example, she says "Sorry, bu but (Gomennasaikedo)". She liked writing letters and telephoning, but these were mostly directed to unrelated people, which may give the impression of being a stalker. The psychodrama was experienced about ten years ago, following the psychodrama model of the time.

Summary of Case 1: Although participation was mainly as a spectator in the 1st period, she became more positive in the 2nd period and often talked with the staff. By the 3rd and 4th period, her manner of speaking to her role partner became easier. She said that it was a good challenge on the whole, and role assignment and self-expression in its performance increased.

Case 2

Prior to psychodrama: Although his outward appearance is ordinary, his speech showed the intonation peculiar to HFA. He works as an operative in an electrical appliance factory. Although sometimes teased at work, there is kind superior who is protective thatthat the job is continuing. If he repeatedly tells his mother that he needs her help until old age, she worries about dying when she gets sick. The scene then becomes fixed. This was his first experience of psychodrama.

Summary of Case 2: In the 2nd period, he continued with the role designated 'people' from the 1st period, without dislike, and although he did not understand, he managed. Spontaneity was also observed in the 3rd period. He role-played his stressful expectance of bullying as an operative at work for the first time in session 33 in the 4th period. He wanted to show his feelings fully in this situation to help him cope in that situation in future. As a whole, Case 2 participated without dislike of Psychodrama through his quiet character, and he was frequently chosen as an auxiliary ego, which is connected with his desire to be useful.

Case 3

Prior to psychodrama: His outward appearance gave the impression of his being slightly mentally challenged. Even if he talks it is difficult to understand what he is saying. He became depressive after serious bullying at high school, which

developed into personal fear. His condition has improved gradually during 8 years at the institution. He was introvert, but has developed his own pace now. He liked psychodrama and had experienced it for 8 years at his institution. When he attended psychodrama sessions, he was more positive than usual.

Summary of Case 3: In the 1st period, in a number of sessions, he mostly wanted to dramatize traveling to places he wanted to go to, and he became the leading participant in many sessions when the role suited him. In the 2nd period, he became more willing to play the role of the auxiliary ego to others. In the 3rd and 4th periods, the role of Case 1's father was played by Case 1, and he was happy to take this role. However, its position may not understand making a role. In general, he mostly requested to role-play a travel scenario. Case 3 is another example of playing a different-aged role, the father, but at the same time complying with the wishes of others (especially Case 1). However, although he repeats the role his speech and conduct are improving each time.

Case 4

Prior to psychodrama: Although his outward appearance is ordinary, his speech gave him the impression of being mentally challenged through the intonation peculiar to HFA. His obsession is intense, and he has a tendency to see things in black and white and to become panicked by complexity. His character was cheerful and friendly. Although he experienced 8 years of psychodrama in an institution, he seldom participated for the first 3 years and after that only participated when it suited him. He said that he attending the place where psychodrama was conducted rather than liking psychodrama per se.

Summary of Case 4: Throughout the whole course Case 4, participated in the others' role-playing. Although the meaning was only understood in context he occasionally demonstrated creativity and spontaneity. Moreover, that this obsession grew weaker is an effect of the everyday life of psychodrama after the role-play of the athletic meet set as the first period for Case 4. Moreover, he came to show a liking for Case 10 after the 2nd period.

Case 5

Prior to psychodrama: Although his outward appearance is ordinary, he displayed the faltering talk that is peculiar to HFA. He was very sensitive and violent ticks sometimes occurred when faced with personal relations problems. Anxiety about the opposite sex was high, consisting of sexual utterances and sexual images from television and magazines. He once wrote a letter to a female volunteer, and his speech and conduct resembled the actions of a stalker so he was

admitted to an institution. His character is cheerful and quiet. He experience 8 years of psychodrama at his institution and we knew how to express his emotions through psychodrama.

Summary of Case 5: Case 5 understood the therapeutic value of psychodrama prior to joining the group and was more knowledgeable in this respect than the other group members. For this reason, he participated positively from the first period. He was able to express his social knowledge and was often spontaneous in his movements and speech. However, in the 3rd period, one of the characteristic features of his autistic disorder was apparent, such as suddenly interrupting a general social discussion to talk about the "pink flyers" (his main obsession). As a whole, he was spontaneous.

Case 6

Prior to psychodrama: His outward-appearance was normal, but he was revealed to be mentally challenged by his speech and finds it stressful to keep up the appearance of normality. It is somewhat as young a way of talking as talking. Therefore, he is uneasy in the outside world and tends to be introverted and defensive whereas when he is at home he is unstable and instigates domestic violence. His obsession about train routes and JR train timetables is strong. He heard about this group from Case 7, and since he really wanted to enter he participated from X+ 1. He liked the 6 months experience that he had at his day care institution.

Summary of Case 6: He found it difficult to act the hero in the 3rd period and the strain was noticeable. However, after seeing it done by the others his spontaneity increased in the 4th period. Moreover, he was able to dramatize his stress in his day care institution in session 30, which was effective for him. As a whole, he was pleased to participate in this group, and felt that he had found a place where he could express himself.

Case 7

Prior to psychodrama: On first impression he was ordinary. Even when he spoke, there was nothing particularly strange about his pronunciation etc. He was not satisfied, unless the world around him was 'as it should be' and his obsessive belief became violent sometimes. He is highly anxious about women and has been blamed for using sexual language with women and writing threatening letters. He was cheerful and usually gentlemanly. He experienced psychodrama for 2 years at his institution. He feels that psychodrama provides is a place where he can express himself.

Summary of Case 7: He was positive about having dramatized the episode of himself and his mother in the 1st period. He sometimes spontaneously took on a creative role. Moreover, at sharing, he also gave his opinion. On the whole, he enjoyed these sessions, and wanted to dramatize episodes that he thought caused him anxiety.

Case 8

Prior to psychodrama: His appearance was younger than his chronological age, and conversation was fluent. Although had high intelligence when he was young and was devoted to playing on personal computers. He was defensive and offensive, and he was isolated. He eased his frustration by talking about a character called "Rabirabi," a fantastic imaginary animal. He has enjoyed his 2 years experience of psychodrama because it gives him an opportunity for release.

Summary of Case 8: Case 8 wanted to dramatize his episode, and began to move by the 1st and the 2nd period. In addition, spontaneous exchange with the others increased and by the 3rd and the 4th period that the social exchanges gradually developed with the partner. He was particularly friendly with Case 10. As a whole, he found acceptance in the group as a place where he could be himself and feel easy.

Case 9

Prior to psychodrama: He looked younger than his chronological age and found it difficult to try to respond to people normally. The sound of his speech was normal but he talked incessantly whenever the subject was news, soccer or baseball. He has been out with others to watch soccer games etc. together. Anxiety over the future was strong, and he could not rest easy until he had asked what was on his mind. This was the first time for him to try psychodrama. In addition, Case 10 was the younger sister of Case 9.

Summary of Case 9: In the 1st and the 2nd period, there were also many rests because he was anxious about taking his high school examinations, and he did not participate in role-playing other than when dramatizing his own problem. While performing for the others, although his problem could be seen in many cases and was not completed by the 3rd and 4th periods, he was a spectator of the others and was able to share his comments. On the whole, as he said in the 4th period, the psychodrama restored his feeling of importance.

Case 10

Prior to psychodrama: She looked like an ordinary girl and had normal intelligence when she was young but found it difficult and stressful trying to respond

to people normally, is unstable and reacts self-defensively. Now she is uneasy and maladjusted to outside world, and withdraws defensively. Although there was no bullying, she desperately did her best to not be teased. This was her first experience of psychodrama.

Summary of Case 10: During the whole period, Case 10 did not role-play the heroine or any other role. She was one of a few subjects who sat away from the others down by the AE. A and 2 others. However, even though she had not even participated as a spectator in the 1st period, by the 3rd and 4th periods, she expressed an opinion as a spectator. In session 21, she said she was ready to participate as others had already played empathetic roles in the play. Just as it was beginning, she no longer refused.

IV. Discussion

Research was conducted on a group with HFA and a group with HFPDD who took part in a program of psychodrama for 2 years to examine the therapeutic validity of psychodrama in adolescents with HFA. Each Case had its own results. Four of the main features of the results are considered below. The 2-year program was divided into 4 periods every 6 months. The 1st period was a group period where staff assisted the subjects in dramatizing their obsession. The 2nd period concentrated on recognizing the other members of the group as friends. While the possibility of playing all together increased, it is a feature that assignment of a role is fixed. The 3rd period was spent building friendships with new members. One more members (Case 6) joined the group and the group dynamics changed. A change even occurred in Case 10 who did not participate in the psychodrama. The 4th period was the time of deepening relationships and dramatizing each situation in a positive way. These later dramatizations differed from those of the 1st period in that a friend could now participate together with the Hero/Heroine and the AE in the role-playing. Moreover, incidents and social problems that had occurred became the dramatic theme, and sociodrama was introduced.

The main themes in the 2nd period were as follows: First, a trip, shopping, pleasant recollections and hobbies. In addition, other themes included the stress caused by anxiety about the opposite sex, mother-and-child relations, families, friends and general human relations. Following this, the insecurities that children with learning disabilities or AS, have about the future were raised, then social problems became the next theme. These dramatic themes revealed various thoughts about personal relations in people with high-functioning pervasive developmental disorder. Apparently, they do not seek relations with people, but consider that their dissatisfaction can never change to satisfaction. However, although this is

not quite accurate, people with HFPDD have various attitudes in relation to others, and it cannot be well expressed in an everyday situation. In places which cannot be easily faced, psychodrama expresses a thought on the structure, and maintains mental safety. It is also reflected in the main theme of this research. Furthermore, as the 3rd consideration describes, fantasy themes and such-like are scenarios in which one can express their view, and focus on the obsession peculiar to people with HFPDD. More than is usual, HFPDD sufferers have a rich mental state and it is considered important that they can express this in psychodrama. Although they are alike, the differences in characteristics between high functioning autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder and Learning disability, obstacle classification is considered. Their common features are finding personal relations problematic, obsession and having trouble coping with life. A feature of these three obstacles found in this research on the progress of psychodrama is the characteristic of being scrupulous. First, there is the tendency for the HFA sufferer to obsess about something. This is shown in the obsession with Travel of session 1/3/8 in Case 3 and the obsession with ○ or × in session 14 in Case 4, and in Case 1, who has high-functioning autism, the obsession with the Japanese syllabary. In session 1/16/26 etc. , the same role was assigned to the same people and how to assign a role was seen. Case 5 adheres to characteristic conduct in regard to opposite sex and the adults who are concerned about him (for example, session 19/24). However, since several examples indicate an intellectual obstacle, it is thought that the level of intellectual obstacle relates to the content of these obsessions. On the other hand, people with AS are troubled by always feeling the need to understand the cause of events. This above tendency requires that the world of its fantasy be strongly expressed through language, and a role should be played at a natural speed, such as in session 13 in Case 7 and session 12 in Case 8. Furthermore, in children with learning disabilities , there is a tendency to adhere the safety of a fixed position. Case(s) 9, S19/36, tended to play important roles (the mayor and governor) and show off. Moreover, Case 1 continued non-participation in role-playing but accepted the role of spectator (the critic, in this case) who is a 3rd party to avoid criticism. These tendencies indicate the possibility of finding the origin of the obstacle in personal relations of not only intellectually, but also at the level of self-consciousness and consciousness of others. Although every obstacle was seen obsessively, the point that the obsession peculiar to each individual was reflected in the play is interesting.

A friend relationship was considered in the 4 periods. From the first, each individual participated in the therapeutic activity from which the writer has performed, before encouraging a psychodrama, and the roles played most were mutual acquaintances. However, most speech and conduct indicating anxiety about the others were not seen. However, through practice following this research,

participants spoke to several specific persons spontaneously, (Case 1, Case 2, Case 3, Case 4, Case 5, Case 6, Case 7, Case 8), consideration was shown (Case 1, Case 3, Case 4, Case 8, and Case 9), and there were signs that this was being carried out. Moreover, Case 8 who was only able to talk to the AE was observed talking to Case 10 about their problem. Signs that Case 1 spoke to Case 8 or made the thing of case subject were also observed. As mentioned above, it is possible to generate the group consciousness of people with HFPDD using psychodrama. Psychodrama can function freshly and appropriately for each case reaching beyond everyday life. Psychodrama is symbolized by "being the place in which one can be present with oneself" (As said by Case 8 in the 4th periods). Furthermore, psychodrama plays the role of a peer-counselor by providing the opportunity to discuss and share with their peers in a controlled yet open environment. As other companions mind, the candidate of this research is in the developmental stage, adolescence, from all the members' adolescence, and the problem relevant to the stage has also been thrown into relief in a psychodrama. Finally, a future change of title is described. I want to examine whether it can prevent being un-adapted in the problem of the staff's skill, and the every day of an example by the psychodrama from now on.

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