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Therapeutic Storytelling as a Tool for Drug Addiction—Strengths and Constrains

Monica TURTUREAN¹

Abstract

A substance addiction is one of the most complex areas of mental health. Substance abuse, leading often to addiction, can often be difficult to treat. The problem is even more delicate when we are talking about children and adolescents, in particular, because they are extremely vulnerable to substance use. People who face an addiction to drugs or alcohol can use the services of a mental health professional for help in overcoming addiction. One of the most effective treatment methods is storytelling. The therapeutic story reinforces the idea that our life is not one narrative, but a collection of different stories, both good and bad. G.K. Chesterton said, “Stories are useful, not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragon can be defeated.” Threatening addicted children through therapeutically story and not using other “drugs” is a real “challenge” for all specialists, not only from Romania, but from entire world too. The problem is related to the next 2 questions: 1. Is it therapeutically story an efficient method to heal addicted children; 2. Who can do it? Through an auto-questionnaire survey, we will try to establish if the therapeutic storytelling is an efficient intervention to prevent, to solve the drug abuse and to highlight some ideas about this topic. This study is a part of a bigger study [5], which started in 2016 and its’ purpose is discovering the role of the therapeutically story for different people with different needs in order to use this results in educational activity but not only.

Keywords: *storytelling, drug abuse, therapy, questionnaire, therapeutic story.*

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1. Introduction

Drug abuse is one of the most frightening problems of our life, especially because too many adolescents face this. The causes of this are associated with violence, aggressiveness, trauma, compulsive behaviour and so on. All these consequences will lead, in time, to a low self-esteem, to different problems in personal and professional life, but the subject is more delicate when we are talking about the drug addicted' teenagers (adolescents).

If we want to help them, it is very important to establish some clear and specify objectives:

- to interrupt all the contacts with the drug' world;
- to offer unconditionally support for these adolescents;
- to establish a good cooperation school-family;
- to help them to ask for specialty control such as psychotherapy and psychiatry;
- to motorize them for a period, after intervention in order to see their progresses.

2. Problem Statement

Because of the negative impact of drug abuse on social life, many specialists emphasize the role of prevention, how educators and parents must react in order to help children to be aware of the gravity and the impact of this problem in their life. One of the most important “way” to do this is using stories in order to make the other to realize that there are solutions for every problem, but it is essential to seek for help because “stories set the inner life into motion, and this is particularly important where the inner life is frightened, wedged, or cornered...” [2]. Why stories or fairy tales? Because “fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one’s reach despite adversity – but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity [1].”

Unfortunately, the literature is not very generous on this topic, there are so few writings about it, this is why we are trying, through research, to find some solution to this real problem.

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

The main objective of this study is to identify the perception / opinion of parents and educators regarding the effects of therapeutically stories in children 'life.

The specific objectives of the study:

1. to identify the parents and educators 'opinion regarding therapeutically stories;
2. to find out situations in which a therapeutically story can really help;
3. to discover if the therapeutically story improves or not the adolescents which are drug addicted;
4. to find out if a therapeutically story can be used with teenagers or not.

The hypothesis of the study:

The hypotheses of the study are:

1. The educators believe, more than the parents, in the role of therapeutically story to help children which are drug addicted to solve their major problem.
2. Many educators and parents considers that therapeutically stories can be use in any situations, neglecting if there are some cases in which the therapeutically story cannot be used.

4. Research Methods and the sample structure

4.1. The statistical method used in identifying parents and educators' opinions about the therapeutically stories

The study is based on the data yielded following a sampling survey which investigates the opinion of educators and parents about therapeutically stories. The sample survey was applied to a non-probabilistic sample.

This auto-questionnaire was initially pre-tested on a non-probabilistic sample, consisting in open questions. Using frequencies analysis, we gathered some answers for the questionnaire' items.

The investigative technique used was the auto-questionnaire survey which was adapted, starting from the initial questionnaire used in the previous study, consisting in 5 questions administered in group.

4.2. The sample structure

The sampling survey was applied to a non-probability sampling group. The educators were selected randomly from a group present to a conference and the parents were selected randomly from a group present to an official school' holiday

- *parents: 49*
- *educators: 49*

The educators and the parents were informed about all aspects regarding this study: their identity will remain anonymous, they can leave the group if it is necessary, all information gathered from them will remain confidential and the results of the study will be published only with their approval.

The entire group gave their written consent in order to publish these results of the study.

4.3. Data analysis techniques

The Statistical Package for Social Science Program (SPSS) was used to summarize and run correlations on data obtained from the survey. Frequency distribution was used to mention demographics of the parents and educators. Correlation technique was utilized to discuss relationship between parents, educators and their need of using therapeutically stories in real life.

The favoured surveying technique was the individual filling in of the questionnaire in a group [4]. This surveying technique was chosen because it is the easiest and the less expensive.

The parents and the educators were ensured about the confidentiality of their answers and informed that all the results will be used for scientific purpose only.

5. Findings

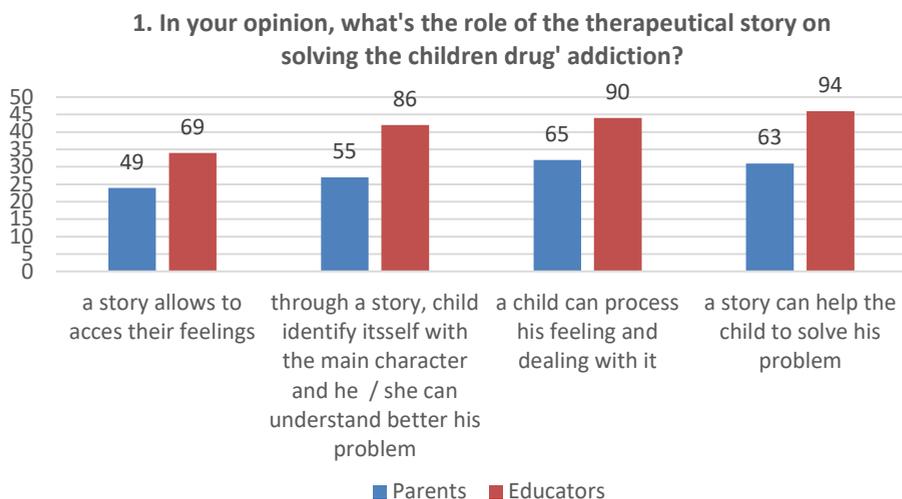


Figure 1: the structure of answers at question Q1

As we can see, 94% of educators consider that the main role of the psychotherapeutically story is: through a story, child identify himself with the main character and he / she can understand better his problem; instead, over 66 % of parents consider that the main role of the therapeutically story is to help the child to solve his problem. There are significance differences between educators and parents regarding the same subject, so, the educators and the parents have different opinions regarding the role of therapeutically stories.

2. Which are the main conditions necessaires to create a therapeutical story?

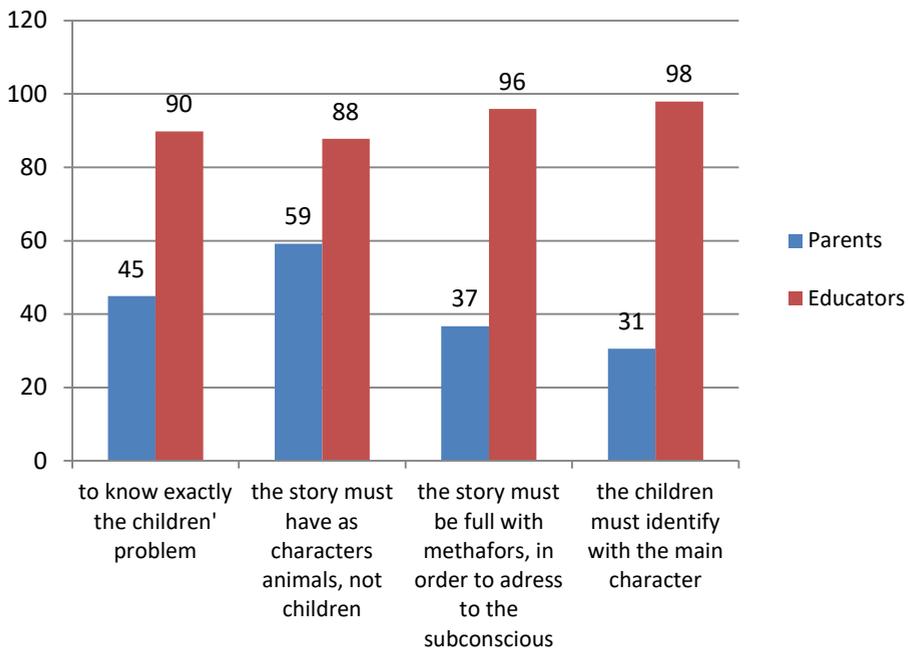


Figure 2: the structure of answers at question Q2

Looking on the numbers, we can see that 98 % from educators considers that the main conditions necessary to create a story are: the child must identify with the main character and to know the child' problems. 59 % of the parents consider that a story must have as characters animals, not children, which means that there are big differences between parents and educators regarding the main conditions necessaires to create a therapeutically story.

3. What skills need an educator or a parent in order to tell a story?

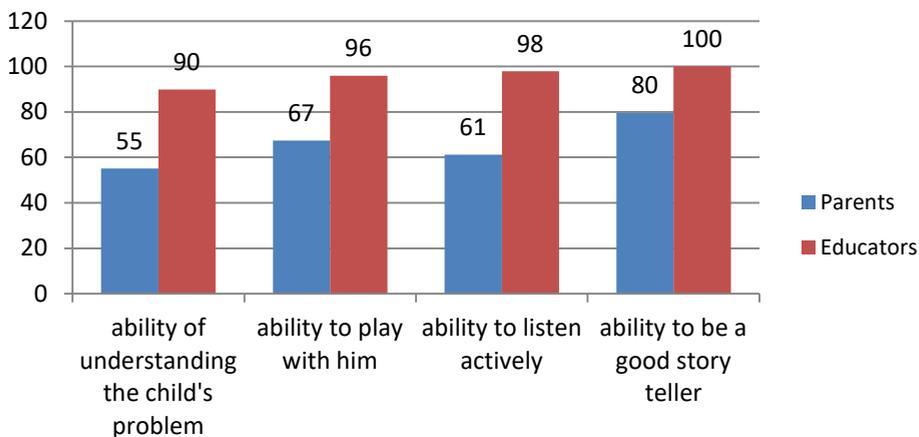


Figure 3: the structure of answers at question Q3

The most important skill for an educator, according to this questionnaire to be a good story teller (100 % choose this answer), the parents have chosen the same skill, and this is an important observation because is the one of the few questions where both parents and educators have the same opinion.

4. Identify some real situations in which a story can really help a parent or an educator

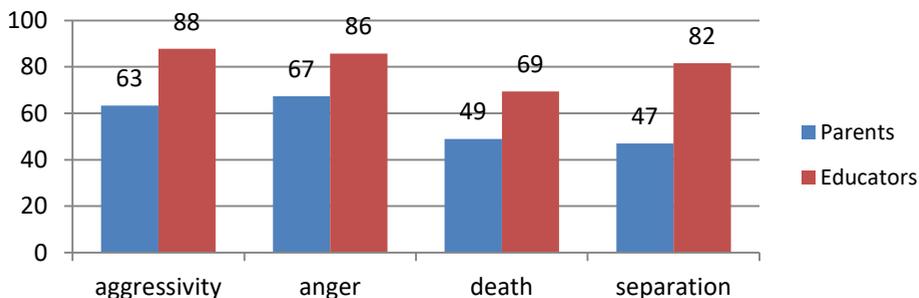


Figure 4: the structure of answers at question Q4

It is interesting to find out that 88 % of educators considers that a story can help in aggressivity problems and 67 % of parents consider that a story can really help in anger situation. We can conclude that a story can help in affective disorder.

5. Identify some real situations in which a story can really help an educator

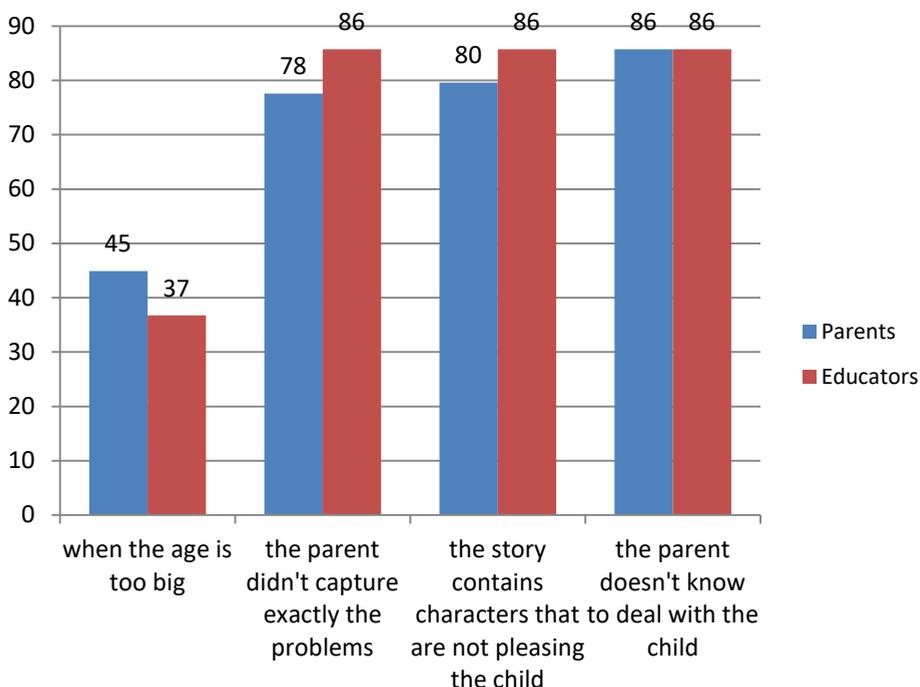


Figure 5: the structure of answers at question Q5

It is quite surprising to discover that there are 3 situations in which a story can help an educator or a parent (according to 86 % of educators): the parent didn't capture exactly the problem; the story contains characters that are not pleasing the child and the parent doesn't know to deal with the child. It is relieving to see that parents (over 80%) recognize their limits regarding a therapeutically story and this is the first step in order to ask for a specialized help.

6. Validation of the hypothesis

We can notice that the first hypothesis „The educators believe, more than the parents, in the role of therapeutically story to help children which are drug addicted to solve their major problem” was validated by the answers offered by educators to the item 1 (94% of them consider that the main role of the psychotherapeutically story is: through a story, child identify himself with the main character and he / she can understand better his

problem; instead, over 66 % of parents consider that the main role of the therapeutically story is to help the child to solve his problem)

It is good to find out that the second hypothesis “Many educators and parents considers that therapeutically stories can be use in any situations, neglecting if there are some cases in which the therapeutically story cannot be used” was invalidated by the answers offered by educator and parents, both thinking on the real situations in which they cannot really help. These situations are: when the age of the child is too big, when the parent didn’t capture exactly the problem, the story contains characters that are not pleasing the child, the parent doesn't know to deal with the child.

7. The main limits of the study

1. sample consists only of parents and educators from Bacau County, so these results cannot be extended to the entire population of Romanian educators or parents.

2. there will be no pre-testing the subjects, which means that we cannot verify the accuracy of the results;

3. there is no control group.

8. Conclusions and suggestions

Taking into account the frequencies of the sample’ answers, we notice that both parts (parents and educators) considers that the therapeutically stories have a positive role in children’ life and it is recommended to be use in many situations, but, taking into account the strengths and the constrains of this topic.

So, it is very important to make some sugesstions:

- the parents must consult an educator or a specialist when they want to create a story; otherwise, they can harm the child;
- a story must be adapted to the real problem: drug addiction, not to „speak” generally;
- both parents and education must know and minimize, as much as they can, the limits of a therapeutically story

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