

Play Therapy as a Counseling Guidance Service for Children Victims of Natural Disasters

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Abstract. Children affected by disasters often experience trauma, anxiety, or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can disrupt their emotional and social development. One method commonly used in Guidance and Counseling (BK) is Play Therapy, a therapy that uses play as a tool to help children express their feelings more easily. This article aims to comprehensively review the results of research published in the last five years (2020–2025) on the effectiveness of Play Therapy for children affected by disasters. The method used literature review using sources from various databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Garuda Kemdikbud. The review results indicate that Play Therapy is very helpful in reducing trauma symptoms, increasing coping skills, and supporting the psychosocial recovery of children affected by disasters. Several types of therapy that have proven effective include sand play therapy, group play therapy, and art-based play therapy. However, several challenges remain, such as a lack of facilities, limited training for counselors, and the ever-changing post-disaster situation. The implication is that schools and humanitarian organizations should provide specialized training for counselors and also encourage the inclusion of Play Therapy in trauma recovery programs after disasters

Keywords: Play therapy; counseling; child disaster victims; trauma healing; mental health.



INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that often faces various types of natural disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and also social problems. Children are the most affected group because they are not yet fully able to deal with this problem. They may experience psychological symptoms that include anxiety, deep sadness, regressive behaviors such as returning to bedwetting or fear of being left behind by their parents, difficulty sleeping, and even stress after experiencing trauma. Although this condition is often not clearly visible, its impact can be long-lasting and affect the development of children's feelings, associations, and education.

A real example can be seen in West Sumatra, especially around Padang and Agam, which are known as places with a high risk of disasters. On May 12, 2024, there was a cold lava flood in Agam Regency, not far from Padang, due to the activity of Mount Marapi. This event causes a lot of damage and has a direct impact on early childhood. Many of them show signs of psychological trauma, such as fear when it rains, excessive anxiety, and difficulty returning to normal activities. A study of community activities found that children who participated in Play Therapy using educational play tools, such as number and letter puzzles, showed good behavioral changes: they seemed happier, socialized, and managed to reduce previously great fear. Of the twelve children who participated, eleven of them were able to return to active play, although one child still chose to be alone until the activity ended (Wahyuni, 2024). These findings clearly show that trauma due to disasters in Padang and its surroundings really needs proper psychological treatment.

This shows that Guidance and Counselling services are essential to support children affected by disasters in risky places such as Padang. Without proper treatment, the trauma experienced by the child can develop into long-term psychological problems that will affect their growth and education. Therefore, it is important to conduct further research on the effectiveness of Play Therapy in Guidance and Counseling after disasters occur in areas such as West Sumatra.

Guidance and Counseling (BK) is a process that provides assistance in an organized, planned, and ongoing manner. The goal is to help a person recognize themselves, understand the world around them, and overcome problems and develop their abilities to the best of their ability. In the world of education, BK services not only focus on learning achievements, but also pay attention to the personal, social, and emotional aspects of students.

After a disaster, BK services can provide support that helps children channel their feelings, reduce anxiety, and recreate a sense of security. For example, counselors at school may conduct counseling individually or in groups to help children express their feelings while providing a way to cope with trauma. In addition, information and training can also be provided to teach how to deal with disasters, simple relaxation techniques, and social skills so that children can be more confident. So, BK not only helps solve problems, but also strengthens the child's psychological resilience.

One of the ways that is often used in BK to help children after disasters is Play Therapy. Play Therapy is a counseling method that uses play as a primary way to help children express their feelings, overcome problems, and develop social and emotional skills. The basis of this therapy is that play is a child's natural way of talking, while toys are their words. By playing, children can release repressed emotions, recount bad experiences, and learn how to adapt to their environment.

According to Wilson and friends (2024), Play Therapy is effective in overcoming various psychological problems in children, such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress, depression, and aggressive behavior. This therapy provides an opportunity for the child to process the traumatic experience in a safe setting, while exercising their ability to control themselves and build confidence.

The results of previous studies show that Play Therapy has been proven to be successful in helping children who experience disasters to overcome emotional trauma. Research conducted by Wetik, et al. (2023) found that Play Therapy that focuses on healing trauma in groups can improve children's socialization skills as well as the way they express their feelings after a disaster. These results show that play therapy is not only a way to distract the mind, but also very important in the psychosocial recovery process of children (Wetik, et al., 2023).

In addition, a study conducted by Dhito Dwi Pramardika, et al. (2020) showed that play therapy was effective in reducing trauma symptoms in children affected by natural disasters in Belengang Village, North Sulawesi. Children who participated in Play Therapy sessions showed a decrease in anxiety, fear, and behavior back to previous stages, so they could adjust more easily after a disaster occurred (Pramardika, et al., 2020).

Similar findings are also supported by research by Zainur Wula, et al. (2021) who used trauma healing methods through play and learning in children after Cyclone Seroja on Kera Island. The results of this study show that by combining games with simple learning activities, children not only recover quickly from trauma, but are also able to increase their enthusiasm and social interaction (Wula, et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses the literature review method, which is a systematic study of previous research relevant to the topic of Play Therapy as a Guidance and Counseling service for children victims of natural disasters (Snyder, 2019). This methodology aims to gain a thorough understanding of how well Play Therapy helps children who are victims of disasters, by looking at various recent research results. The literature review process is carried out through several steps, namely finding, filtering, checking feasibility, and selecting articles.

Steps of the Literature Review Method:

1. Finding Data Sources
 - a. Information sources were obtained from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and GarudaKemdikbud.
 - b. The selection of this source is based on its scientific reputation and relevance to the field of Guidance and Counseling, both domestically and internationally.
2. Defining Keywords
 - a. Keywords used:
 - "Play Therapy"
 - "Children of Disaster Victims"
 - "Trauma Healing"
 - "Counseling Guidance for Children"
 - "Children with PTSD"
 - b. These keyword combinations are adjusted to make the search results broader and relevant to the research topic.
3. Establishing Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
 - a. Criteria included: Articles published in 2020–2025, Research focus on children of disaster victims, The intervention used is Play Therapy (individual, group, or art-

based), and Articles are available in full-text form.

- b. Exclusion criteria: Articles in the form of opinions or essays, Not focusing on the child, and Does not specifically address post-disaster Play Therapy.

4. Article Screening and Analysis

- a. Initial search results: found >22 articles.
- b. After screening (titles, abstracts, and full text), 10 relevant articles were obtained.
- c. Important information recorded from the article includes: Author's name, Year of publication, Types of disasters, Play Therapy model used, Research method, Main results of the study.

5. Data Merger and Analysis

- a. Data from articles were collected and analyzed using narrative analysis methods.
- b. The results of the study are grouped by main focus, such as: Effectiveness of *Play Therapy* in reducing trauma, Play Therapy model used, Implementation challenges, Integration with Guidance and Counseling services.
- c. Narrative analysis was chosen because the majority of articles use qualitative or quantitative methods with various instruments, so it is not possible to carry out quantitative statistical analysis uniformly.

Thus, this Literature Review methodology is expected to provide a complete, in-depth, and critical understanding of how effective Play Therapy is as a way to help children who are victims of disasters in Guidance and Counseling.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research are presented with data / information in table 1 obtained from the results of the review of 10 relevant articles and in accordance with what is sought. The findings of the study can be presented as follows:

Table 1. Matrix Data analysis on articles used in *the review literature*

Author/Country	Research Title	Research Results
Wetik, et al. (2023), Indonesia.	Play Therapy Based on Post-Disaster Trauma Healing in School-Age Children	Play Therapy as Trauma Healing in Indonesia: emphasizes the importance of play therapy in groups to help children affected by disasters improve their social skills.
Dhito Dwi Pramardika, et al (2020), Indonesia	The Effect of Play Therapy on Trauma Healing in Children Victims of Natural Disasters	Effectiveness of Play Therapy in Reducing Trauma: shows that play therapy is effective in reducing trauma symptoms in children victims of natural disasters in Belengang Village.
Zainur Wula, et al. (2021), Indonesia.	Trauma Healing Based on Play While Learning for Children After	Play Therapy as Trauma Healing in Indonesia found that play-while learning therapy can help children who have

	Typhoon Seroja on Monkey Island	experienced trauma after Hurricane Seroja.
Molli Wahyuni, et al. (2025), Indonesia.	Trauma Healing Therapy Using Educational Toys for Children Victims of the "Galodo" Disaster in Agam	Play Therapy as Trauma Healing in Indonesia: using educational games for children affected by "Galodo" in Agam and getting good results.
Endang Pertiwiwati, et al. (2021), Indonesia.	Play therapy as a method of trauma healing in ptsd Children victims of flood disaster in west martapura, south kalimantan	● Effectiveness of Play Therapy in Lowering Trauma: proving that play therapy helps flood-affected children feel calmer and reduces PTSD symptoms. ● Effective Play Therapy Models: - Sand Play Therapy: used for children who have experienced deep trauma due to earthquakes and tsunamis. - Group Play Therapy: helping children get social support, as seen in flood victims in South Kalimantan
Fitri Sulistyo Budi, et al (2024), Indonesia.	Play Therapy as a Media of Emotional Catharsis in Children Victims of the Earthquake on Bawean Island, East Java	explained that the children of earthquake victims experienced trauma in the form of anxiety, fear, and difficulty sleeping. To help recovery, play therapy is carried out through emotion ball activities for children aged 10-12 years and drawing and coloring for children aged 4-8 years. The results showed that children were more open in expressing their feelings, anxiety was reduced, and their moods became more cheerful. Thus, play therapy has proven to be effective as a medium for emotional catharsis and psychological recovery of children after disasters.
Eva Yuliani, et al. (2021), Indonesia.	Overview of Psychological Trauma in Children After Earthquake Disaster Using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)	It shows that trauma is more experienced by 7-year-olds and girls. Children in the border category need adaptation support, while the abnormal category needs special interventions such as play therapy.
Nurhafiza, et al. (2023), Indonesia.	Reality Therapy Approach to Post-Natural Disaster	Reality Therapy helps people affected by natural disasters to cope with trauma by emphasizing current actions and self-

	Traumatic Victims: A Library Research Study	responsibility. Using the WDEP (Wants, Direction, Evaluation, Planning) method, victims are invited to identify what they want, assess the actions they have taken, and plan good improvements. This method has been shown to help reduce psychological effects.
Purnamasari, et al. (2025), Indonesia.	The Implementation of Play Therapy in Reducing PTSD Symptoms in Child Victims After the Fire Disaster in Kebon Kosong Village, Jakarta	Play Therapy has been shown to reduce PTSD symptoms in children affected by fires, from serious to milder. By doing activities such as washing hands, drawing, and playing puzzles, children become happier, more excited, and helped to express their feelings and overcome trauma after a bad event.
Lia Maliadani & Wa Ode Asmawati (2024), Indonesia.	Therapy Play as a Trauma Healing Effort by the Cianjur Chase Dreams Community for Child Survivors of the 2022 Cianjur Earth Disaster	Play Therapy carried out by the Chase Dreams Community in Cianjur helps children who experience the earthquake to feel happy again, be bolder to interact, reduce fear and anxiety, and improve lifestyles such as sleep, concentration, and appetite. In addition, children become more motivated to learn through educational games, singing, and other fun activities that make them forget about trauma after a disaster.

Based on various studies conducted in Indonesia, play therapy has been shown to be effective in helping children affected by disasters overcome trauma. Wetik et al., (2023) emphasized that play therapy that focuses on healing trauma is very useful for improving children's ability to interact socially, especially if done in groups. This finding is supported by research by Dhito Dwi Pramardika et al, (2020) which shows that play therapy has succeeded in reducing trauma symptoms in children affected by natural disasters in Belengang Village.

Another study by Zainur Wula et al., (2021) found that play-while learning therapy methods can help children recover from trauma after Hurricane Seroja on Kera Island. This approach shows that play therapy not only helps reduce trauma, but can also be combined with learning activities to speed up the healing process. In line with that, Molli Wahyuni et al., (2025) used educational games for children affected by the "Galodo" disaster in Agam and obtained positive results, thus adding to the evidence that educational games can be a way to heal trauma.

Endang Pertiwiwati et al., (2021) added a new perspective by examining a more specific play therapy model. They found that Sand Play Therapy was effective for children

with severe trauma, while Group Play Therapy helped flood victims in South Kalimantan gain important social support in their healing process.

Furthermore, Fitri Sulistyo Budi et al., (2024) emphasized the role of play therapy as a means to release emotions. With play activities such as emotional balls, drawing, and coloring, children affected by the earthquake on Bawean Island became better able to express their feelings, reduce anxiety, and return to cheerfulness. This is in line with the findings of Eva Yuliani et al., (2021) who used the Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) and showed that children, especially 7-year-olds and girls, are more susceptible to trauma and need special interventions such as play therapy.

Meanwhile, Purnamasari et al., (2025) emphasized the success of play therapy in reducing PTSD symptoms in children who were victims of fires in Jakarta. Children were seen to experience a change from severe trauma to milder after participating in play activities such as washing hands, drawing, and playing puzzles. These findings are supported by research by Lia Maliadani and Wa Ode Asmawati (2024) who evaluated the play therapy program by the Cianjur Dream Chase Community after the earthquake. As a result, children become more courageous to interact, feel happy, and experience improvements in sleep patterns, concentration, and appetite.

Although many studies emphasize play therapy, there are also other approaches that are compared. Nurhafiza et al. (2023) show that Reality Therapy can help heal trauma by emphasizing self-responsibility and action planning through the WDEP method. This suggests that although play therapy is the primary option, other approaches can still be complementary in post-disaster psychological interventions.

Overall, these studies consistently show that play therapy is an effective and flexible way to help children affected by disasters reduce trauma symptoms, express emotions, feel safe again, and improve social skills. Play therapy can be done in various forms whether it is individual, group, art-based, or educational games and has been proven to be successful in various disaster situations such as earthquakes, floods, storms, fires, and landslides.

From all the research that has been discussed, we can conclude that Play Therapy has a very important role in helping children who experience emotional problems after natural disasters. Many researchers believe that play therapy is not just a fun activity, but also an effective way to reduce signs of trauma, express feelings, and restore a sense of security to the child.

The researchers also argue that Play Therapy is very flexible because it can be combined with various other methods, such as educational games (Molli Wahyuni et al., 2025), learning while playing (Zainur Wula et al., 2021), drawing, and coloring (Fitri Sulistyo Budi et al., 2024), to special methods such as sand play therapy and group play therapy (Endang Pertiwiwati et al., 2021). With these various options, Play Therapy can be adapted to different circumstances, needs, and ages of children.

In addition, almost all studies agree that Play Therapy helps children to interact better with others, reduce fear and anxiety, improve habits such as sleep, eat, and concentration, and restore their enthusiasm for learning. So, Play Therapy is not only useful for healing trauma, but also helps the social and emotional development of children.

Thus, from the summary of these various studies, it can be emphasized that Play Therapy is a very suitable guidance and counseling service method for children who are victims of disasters. This approach is effective and relevant to the way of handling psychosocial problems after disasters in Indonesia, because it can reach the emotional, thinking, and social aspects of children well

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of existing research, it can be concluded that Play Therapy is an effective way to provide guidance and counseling to children affected by natural disasters. This therapy has been shown to reduce trauma problems, anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With the help of this therapy, children can more easily express feelings that are difficult for them to convey in words. In addition, Play Therapy also helps children to re-interact with their friends and environment, increase their sense of security, and restore the spirit of learning after experiencing a scary event.

One of the advantages of Play Therapy is its flexibility, because it can be done in various forms such as sand play therapy, playing in groups, educational games, drawing, coloring, and learning through play. This approach not only helps in healing feelings, but also improves the child's daily routine, such as sleep, focus, and enthusiasm for learning. However, in practice, Play Therapy still faces several challenges, such as a lack of facilities, a lack of training for counselors, and a changing post-disaster situation. Therefore, support from schools, counselors, and humanitarian organizations is essential for Play Therapy to be part of recovery programs for children after disasters. Thus, Play Therapy is not only a fun game, but also an important step to help the emotional and mental recovery of children who experience disasters

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