



EFFECTIVENESS OF A LABOUR THERAPY PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN USING SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE CONDITIONS OF A PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

THE PURPOSE of the present study is to establish the impact of occupational therapy activities on the organization of the spare time in children raised and educated in social services in a pandemic. **METHODS:** the study includes 31 children aged 7 to 12 years. Users of social services in Pleven, Bulgaria were studied. The tools of the research are: functional research, which includes the Leisure Time Management Test on a 3-point scale;; statistical methods – the obtained results are processed with statistical program SPSS, Wilcoxon rank test, t-test of Student; Sociological methods (survey) in order to assess the applied activities of the occupational therapy program in the spare time of children. **RESULTS:** Wilcoxon curve of the test shifts to the right and shows improvement. The values from the questionnaire are on the positive side of the scale. The acquisition and improvement of new knowledge and skills during the epidemic situation create conditions for purposeful, organized and filled with diverse content spare time. **CONCLUSION:** The proposed and tested appropriate occupational therapy program and supports their transition to the challenge of „lockdown“. The various and meaningful activities provided to disadvantaged children gives meaning to their free time and creates conditions for it to be purposefully organized.

Key words: children at risk, free time, social isolation

INTRODUCTION

Within the work on the research project Research the effect of inclusion of occupational therapy activities in the medical and social rehabilitation of children using social services „Six family-type accommodation centers – Pleven“, funded by Medical University – Pleven examined the need for implementation of occupational and labour therapy activities for the formation of skills for independent living in socially disadvantaged children. In a survey conducted among the employees of the social service „Family-type accommodation center“ the needs for inclusion of

labour therapy activities while working with children were identified. Purposeful activities with a variety of labour tasks will have a positive effect on building a desire for personal expression and the formation of independence in the implementation of activities related to self-care and daily life (1).

All surveyed employees unanimously point out that it is necessary to organize activities to stimulate physical activity and develop the creative potential of children.

During the free time the activities of the program are divided into two groups:

- for girls are offered activities such as: sewing, knitting and making decorations; household activities, including food preparation; flower care (2);

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- for boys – constructive activities; work with different materials; work with various tools, sports activities (3).

The results give reason to summarize that the children raised in the „Family-type accommodation center” have enough free time, which is organized in advance according to a daily schedule. The planning and implementation of activities is associated with the available materials, tools and consumables, which are often insufficient and inappropriate or there are limited competencies on the part of the staff of the Centers (4). In the created pandemic situation and as a result of the observance of the imposed anti-epidemic measures, the children from the social services are placed in the conditions not only of physical distance but also of social isolation (5). In this situation, the question of the organization of their free time requires the application of appropriate labour therapy activities to stimulate the process of their personal development (6, 7).

The aim of the present study is to establish the impact of the labour therapy activities on the organization of leisure time in children raised and educated in social services in a pandemic.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Scope of the study

The research included children using the social service „Family-type accommodation center” in the Municipality of Pleven – 31 users aged 7 to 12 years were studied, of which 18 were male and 13 female (gender is important in the selection of appropriate work and household activities).

Research methods and tools

- Functional research (according to the age characteristics of the children), which includes: test „Skills for independent living”; „Health Care” test and „Leisure Time Management” test, taking into account the results from the end and beginning of the observed period on a 3-point scale: 1 – low level, 2 – medium level, 3 – high level. The signs (+) and (-) are placed with an incomplete integer.

- Sociological methods – (survey): a face-to-face survey was conducted on a voluntary basis among children – users of social services „Family-type accommodation center – Pleven” to assess the activities of the labour therapy program

within their free time. A semi-standardized questionnaire has been developed with 7 questions. The grades of the closed questions are determined on a 3-point scale: 1– no; 2 – I can't answer; 3 – yes.

- Statistical methods - the obtained results are processed with statistical program SPSS, Wilcoxon rank test, t-test of Student. The significance of the results for conclusions was determined at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The developed and tested labour therapy program is in accordance with the age and individual characteristics of the users of the social service (8). For the purpose of this Communication, only the results of the “Leisure Management” Test are reported and analyzed, which shows the interest in working with various materials and tools in the field of applied arts and crafts and has 3 sections:

- ✓ interest in working with various materials in the field of applied arts;
- ✓ showing interest in working with certain tools;
- ✓ showing interest in working on various techniques and artistic crafts.

The obtained data from the beginning and the end (before and after the application of the labour therapy program) and the difference from the end and the beginning of the studied period (improvement) are subjected to statistical processing. It's used the arithmetic mean (\bar{X}) of the numerical image from the corresponding test scale.

The working hypothesis of the study is: the applied labour therapy program will have a positive effect on the organization of leisure time in children raised and educated in social services in a pandemic.

Figure 1 presents the Wilcoxon curve and the results of all test sections and subjects at the beginning and end of the study, which shows that it shifts to the right. This shows an improvement in the organization of free time of social service users. There was a significant impact on the creative activity of children and their desire to learn unfamiliar techniques for working with a variety of materials and tools.

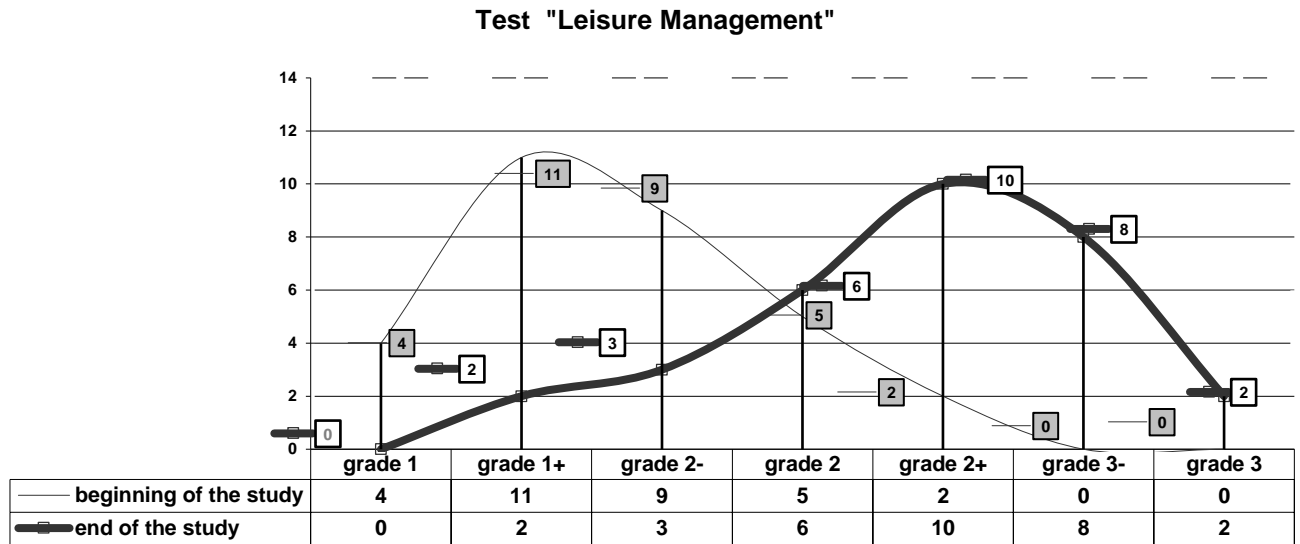


Figure 1. Wilcoxon curve of the results of the test for „Leisure Management” before and after the conducted labour therapy program of all subjects

Figure 2 presents the results of the test for „Leisure Management” by sections. The graph demonstrates the identity of the interest and opportunities for performing various activities of

applied arts at the beginning of the observed period and at its end, and the improvement in all three sections is significant at $p < 0.05$.

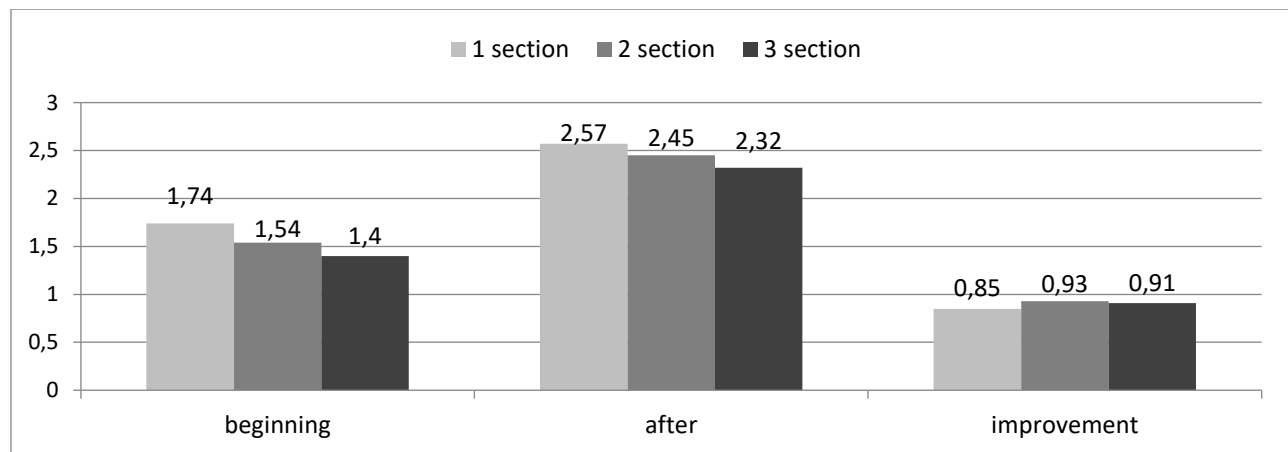


Figure 2. Results of the test for „Leisure Management” by sections before and after the program of all subjects

The improvement (the difference from the end and the beginning of the observed period) in the organization of the free time of the examined subjects is presented in **Figure 3**, which demonstrates that it is essential in all sections of the test and proves the effectiveness of the

applied labour therapy program in the Family-type Accommodation Centers. The acquisition and improvement of new knowledge and skills during the epidemic situation create conditions for purposeful, organized and filled with diverse content free time.

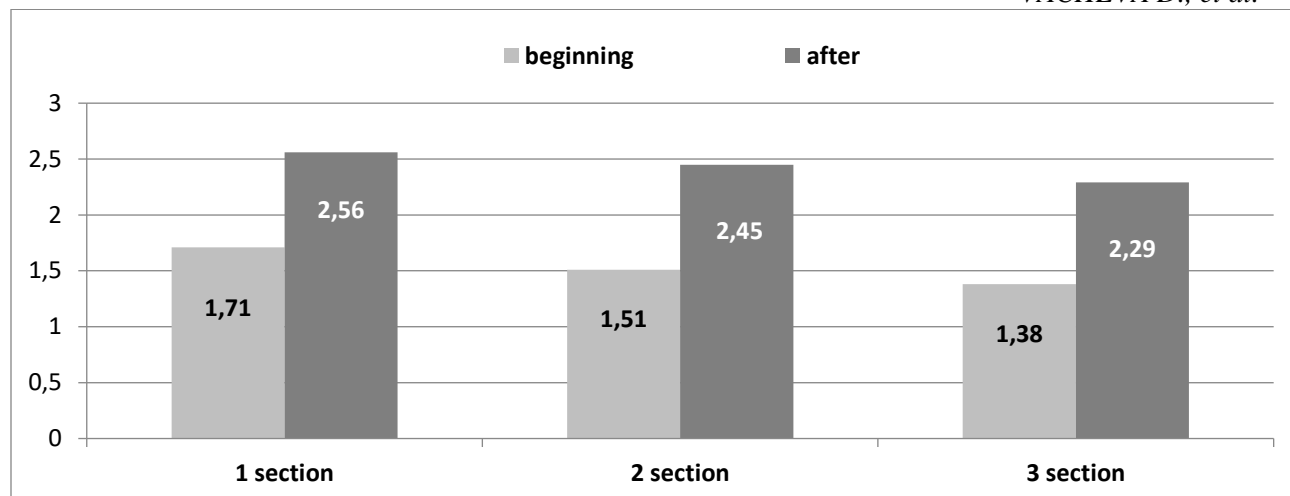


Figure 3. Results of the test for „Leisure management” by sections at the beginning and end of the observed period (improvement)

Table 1 presents the data from the statistical processing of the results obtained from the test for „Leisure Management” from the beginning, the

end and the difference (improvement) from the conducted observation.

Table 1. Results of the test for „Leisure time management” from the beginning, the end and the difference (improvement) of the subjects

Sections of the test	n	Beginning of the study			End of the study			Difference			t-test
		\bar{X}	S	CI	\bar{X}	S	CI	\bar{X}	S	CI	
1 section	31	1,71	0,37	±0,13	2,56	0,4	±0,14	0,84	0,34	±0,04	6,93
2 section	31	1,52	0,35	±0,12	2,45	0,43	±0,15	0,94	0,42	±0,14	1,94
3 section	31	1,38	0,4	±0,14	2,29	0,45	±0,16	0,91	0,39	±0,14	7,54
Total for the test	31	1,68	0,39	±0,14	2,36	0,43	±0,15	0,69	0,27	±0,10	1,85

Table 2 presents the answers received from the survey conducted among children – users of social services.

Table 2. Results of a survey conducted among the employees of the social service „Family-type accommodation center” in %

Questions	Degree		
	1	2	3
1. Do you have a variety of materials for individual activities?	3,23	9,69	87,08
2. Do you have enough amount of materials for independent work?	6,45	12,91	80,64
3. Do you have a variety of tools for self-study?	6,45	9,69	83,86
4. Do you have enough amount of tools for independent work?	9,68	9,68	80,64
5. Do you know different techniques for working with particular materials?	9,68	12,91	77,41
6. Do managers offer you interesting topics and ideas?	12,91	16,15	70,94

To the open question „What activities do you prefer to do”, the surveyed children give free answers. They are divided into two separate groups depending on the gender of the children:

✓ for girls – work with yarn and textiles (84.62%), work with plastic materials (53.85%), care for flowers (69.23%) and other plants (38.46%);

✓ for boys – work with wood (72.22%), work with metal (38.89%), work with construction materials (38.89%) and work with graphic material (55.56%);

✓ In total for both groups are indicated work with natural materials (74.19%) and work with paper and cardboard (61.29%).

DISCUSSION

The pandemic announced by the WHO in the spring of 2020 caused by COVID-19 puts humanity in front of the unknown, radically different way of life. It is necessary to observe anti-epidemic measures, which are expressed primarily in the physical distance between the individual members of a community. Concepts such as „full” and „partial” lockdown are emerging in modern society. This means full or partial restriction of the free movement of people in settlements, schools and cultural institutions. For a long period of time, family members have to live together in the limited space of the home, also study and work remotely. The imposed physical isolation inevitably affects the social communication between people. The created circumstances adversely affect the psycho-emotional state of the person. This „lockdown” has even more negative effect on the psyche of children raised and educated in a social service, where complete isolation from the social environment is required. Children's free time turns out to be much more than that in ordinary everyday life. Apart from their participation in e-distance learning, they have no other activities, which requires full organization of various, interesting and preferred activities within the daily routine. The proposed and tested appropriate labour therapy program, adjusted to the age, gender, individual characteristics, abilities and preferences of children facilitates and supports their transition to the challenge of „lockdown”. In the first place in social institutions there is a need to perform a certain physical activity as a counterbalance to

hypodynamics. Secondly, it is necessary to carry out entertaining activities in the free time from school activities, which are expressed in working with various materials, tools and techniques from the applied arts and crafts.

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CONCLUSION

The inclusion of an appropriate labour therapy program in the upbringing and education of children in the „Family-type accommodation center” has a beneficial effect on overcoming the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The various and meaningful activities provided to children in disadvantaged social situations give meaning to their free time and create conditions for it to be organized and purposeful.

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