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## Improving Social Aspects Through Play Therapy in Children with Autism Disorder

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**Abstract:** Autism is one of the pervasive developmental disorders in which children express behavior that is unable to hold social interactions and as if they live in their world. The prevalence of children with Autism is increasing, and so therapy is needed to return the child to normal. Several studies say that play therapy can improve social aspects in children with Autism. This research is a literature review of 20 articles. Articles were searched through Google Scholar with the keywords play therapy, social elements, and Autism, and 20 articles that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected. The results of a review of 20 articles stated an increase in social aspects in children with Autism through play therapy. There was a correlation from various studies related to the effect of increasing social elements in children with autism disorders through play therapy. There was an increase in social aspects in children with Autism through play therapy.

**Keyword:** Play therapy, Social aspect, Autism.

### INTRODUCTION

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder that is included in the *spectrum of ASD* (*Autistic spectrum disorder* (ASD)), which occurs from the beginning of a child's life and always expresses behavior that is incapable of social interaction with their environment and seems to live in their world (Iskandar and Indaryani, 2020). Developmental disorders in autism are diagnosed in children aged 18-30 months, where children experience obstacles in aspects of behavior, social interaction, communication, and language, as well as emotional and sensory perception disorders, and even motoric aspects (Sutinah, 2017).

According to *the World Health Organization* (WHO), the prevalence of autism in children is 160. The prevalence of autism always increases from year to year; it has been reported that the prevalence of autism worldwide is approximately 1-3%. The prevalence of Autism in Asian countries shows variability: Bangladesh in 2018 (0.76 per 1,000), India in 2017 (1.53-2.19 per 1,000), Nepal in 2018 (3.42 per 1,000), and reported that 1 in 270 people was diagnosed with

Autism. WHO estimates that the international prevalence of Autism reaches 0.76%; this represents 16% of the child population worldwide (UNICEF, 2021)

Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KIPA) explains that in Indonesia, the prevalence of ASD shows that there are two new cases per 1000 population every year, with Indonesia's population being 237.5 million people with a growth rate of 1.14%, so it is estimated that the number of people with autism spectrum disorders in Indonesia is 2.4 million people with the addition of around 500 children with Autism every year (Tahsa & Ekawati, 2022).

Along with the increase in the number of people living with autism, efforts are needed so that children with autism can have relationships or socialize with other people. Hence, they must be trained to improve their social skills including playing (Rapmauli, 2015). According to Aisyah (2021), play therapy for children with autism is one of the first ways to help children enter a broader environment to develop their social skills (Aisyah et al., 2021). One of the characteristics of autistic children, when they have difficulty interacting socially, is that they don't want to look in the eye, are called, don't want to turn around, don't want to play with their peers, are busy or playing with themselves and have no empathy in a social environment which is significantly lacking (Rahmah et al., 2021)

This play therapy intervention for children with autism aims to foster dynamic interpersonal relationships between children and therapists. Play therapy procedures provide selected play materials and facilitate the development of a safe relationship for the child to fully express and explore himself or herself (his feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behavior) through play. For this reason, play therapy is an effort to help children in certain conditions; in this case, children with autism will be given interventions through play procedures that will be applied to children with autism by providing play tools to help improve their social skills.

Play therapy for children with autism has various modifications to other therapies that have the same goal, namely to reduce autism symptoms. Play therapy is modified to adapt to the child's wishes, environment, and even technological advances to improve the social aspects of children with autism.

Based on this background, the author is interested in reviewing this *literature* about "increasing aspects of socialization through play therapy in children with autism." This study aimed to determine the improvement in social aspects in children with autism through play therapy.

**METHODS**

The research method used was a literature review by collecting and analyzing previous journals to identify research on Improving Social Aspects Through Play Therapy in Children with Autism Disorder. The selected articles were published between 2018 and 2022 and can be accessed in full text. Search using Google Scholar. Articles with keywords and the inclusion and exclusion criteria were as follows:

**Table 1. Keyword Literature Review**

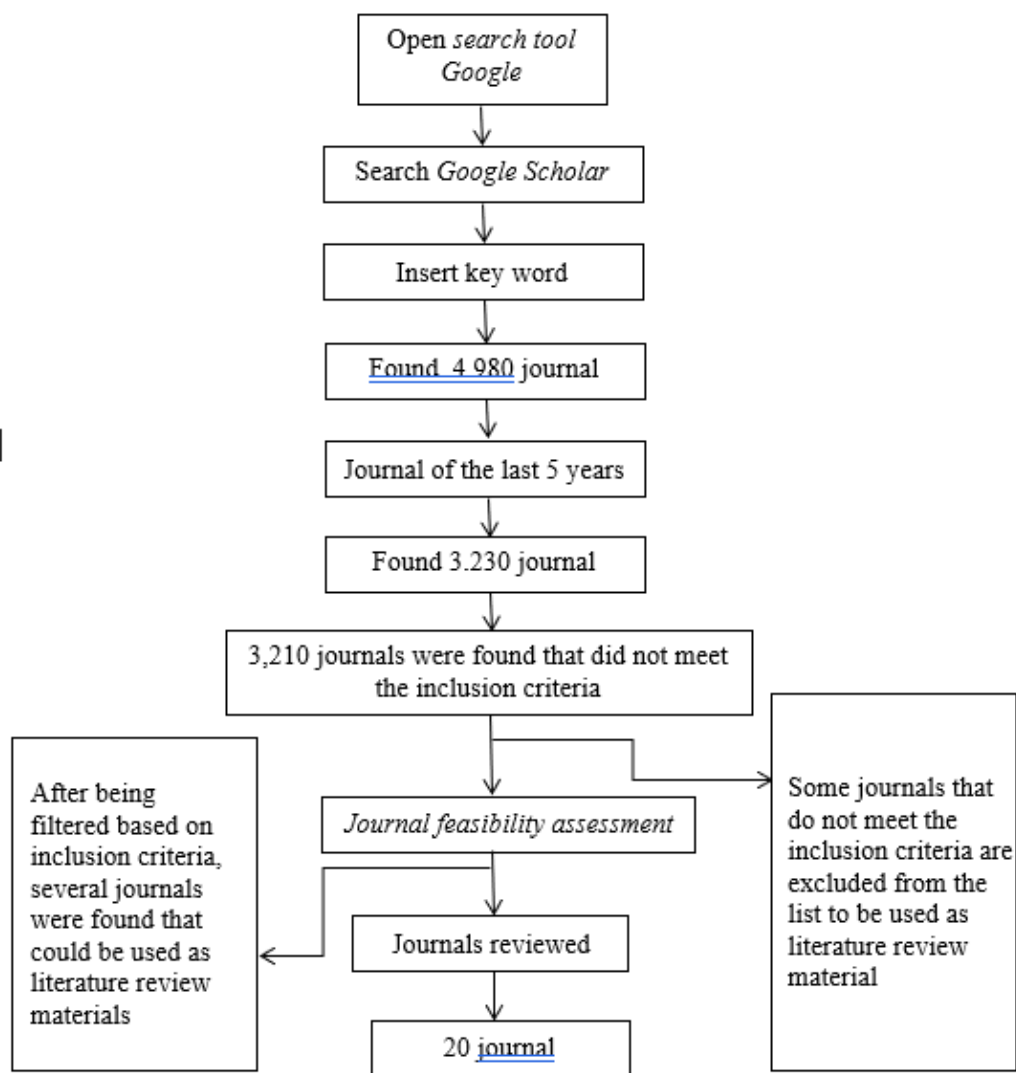
Play therapy	Social Aspects	Autism
<i>Play Therapy</i>	<i>Social Aspect</i>	<i>Autism</i>
OR	OR	OR
<i>Effect of Play Therapy</i>	<i>Social Interaction</i>	<i>Autism Spectrum Disorder</i>

**Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Used Literature Review**

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Improving Social Aspects Through Play Therapy	There is not any
Intervention	Play Therapy	There is not any

Comparison	No comparator	There are not any
Results	Improved Social Aspects	Does not explain the Effect of Music Therapy
Study Design and Publication Type	Cross-Sectional	There is not any
Publication Year	After 2018	Before 2023
Language	Indonesia	Apart from Indonesian

Number of articles from searches on Google Scholar after filtering from 2018-2023 (3,230). Researchers obtained data sources suitable for use *in reviews* based on previously established inclusion and exclusion criteria.



Picture 1. Conceptual Framework

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

No.	Writer	Title	Design and sampling	Nursing Plan	Results
1.	Surinah (Sutinah, 2017)	Play therapy quantitatively influences social interaction abilities in autistic children	, pre-experiment with one group posttest posttest design. Respondents in this study: 18 respondents	Playing is carried out every day according to a predetermined schedule. Before the intervention, a pretest is given, and after three weeks, a measurement (posttest posttest) of social interaction abilities is carried out.	The research results showed that after the intervention was given to 18 respondents, it was discovered that there was a difference in the mean value of social interaction abilities for autistic children of 2.77 with a standard deviation of 1,500. The statistical test results obtained a p-value of 0.000 (p-value < 0.05).
2.	Dewi Tiansa Barus, Citra Anggrain, Friska Sembiring (Barus et al., 2020)	The Effect of Lego Play Therapy on the Social Interaction of Autistic Children at SDLB Kisaran Naga, Kisaran Timur District, Asahan Regency, 2019	Quantitative research with a pre-experimental design with one group pretest-posttest. Respondents in this study were 13 respondents.	The process of implementing Lego play therapy was carried out for two weeks; before the treatment, the respondents were given a pretest, and after the treatment, the respondents were given a posttest posttest.	The research results on 13 respondents showed that Lego play therapy effectively increased social interaction, as evidenced by the ten respondents (76.9%). Three people did not show an increase in social interaction—statistical test results in research-value 0,005 (p-value < 0,05).
3.	Umi Aisyah, Siti Aminah, Fitri Aulia (Aisyah, et al. 2021)	Play to Develop Skills Social Affairs for Autistic Children at Mentari Pringsewu Home, Lampung	Data analysis uses the qualitative data analysis model of Miles and Huberman (1992:16); in this case, the researcher uses triangulation from the same subject. Respondents in this study were three respondents.	In implementing therapy, researchers were directly involved with students' daily activities and analyzed the actual conditions that occurred during the implementation of play therapy. Therapy is carried out three days a week; each meeting lasts 1 hour.	The results of the research show that play therapy helps the process of developing the social skills of children with Autism from before being given eye contact therapy to children having less interaction, slow responses, not carrying out instructions, being alone and unable to socialize with peers and after being given intervention to the child, the child can interact with peers, is responsive, has visible eye contact and is willing to carry out instructions.
4.	Dinar Rapmauli T, Andik Matulessy (Rapmauli, 2015)	The Effect of Flashcard Play Therapy to Increase Social	The research uses quantitative methods, allowing accurate data to be recorded as numbers.	The process of implementing therapy in this research is the play therapy provided, namely flashcard play	The research results show that there are several dimensions. The dimension of eye contact compliance before therapy was

		Interaction in Autistic Children at Miracle Center Surabaya	Respondents in this study were six respondents.	therapy; this method is a learning method in the form of cards that can display images from photos— implementation for 4 hours with meetings five times a week.	0.333; after it was given, it was 0.75. In the receptive and expressive language dimensions before therapy, 0.288 and 0.250 increased to 0.689 and 0.583, respectively.
5.	Abdul Aziz (Aziz, 2020)	The Effect of Pretend Play in Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders on Socialization Abilities	Quantitative research method with correlational research design Respondents in this study were 20 respondents.	Researchers carried out an intervention to improve social aspects in children with Autism by carrying out the ToM test for 10 minutes, measuring pretend play for all samples for 30 minutes, and CARS for 15 minutes.	The regression analysis results confirmed that ToM significantly predicted the pretend play variable, namely the number of object substitutions ( $R^2 = 0.158, p = 0.002$ ). This illustrates that pretend play in children with ASD has a very significant influence on the child's ToM abilities.
6.	Iskandar and Siska Indaryani. (Iskandar & Indaryani, 2020)	Increasing Social Interaction Abilities in Autistic Children Through Associative Play Therapy	Analytical survey research method with a quasi-experimental approach.	Implement associative play therapy for one month with 12 implementations of play therapy. Observe the child's behavior during therapy and assess the child's progress in interaction.	The average before-play therapy was 2.00, with a standard deviation of 0.00. After therapy The average social interaction ability was 4.78, with a standard deviation of 0.97. The results of statistical tests obtained values-value 0,000 ( $p\text{-value} < 0,05$ ).
7.	Aged Matilda Martha, Yunita Gabriela Madu. (Paseno et al., 2022)	The Effect of Associative Play Therapy on Social Interaction Abilities in Autistic Children.	Design <i>pre-experiment</i> with a one-group approach <i>pretest–posttest</i> design. Sampling in this research was carried out using the method of <i>non-probability sampling</i> . Respondents in this study were 30 respondents.	Intervention before and after providing associative play therapy using plasticine media games for autistic children at SLBN 1 Bantaeng to help improve their social interaction skills.	The research results show that before the intervention was carried out, the mean result was 1.67; after the intervention, it was 2.97. From the result, the paired sample had a significance value of $\alpha = 0.05$ . value results are obtained $p\text{-value} 0,000$ ( $p\text{-value} < 0,05$ ).
8.	M A Muazar Habib. (Habibi, 2022)	Effectiveness of Social Play Therapy to Improve Social Abilities and Skills for Children	Quantitative research research with a quasi-experimental approach Respondents in this study were 11 respondents.	Researchers provide social play therapy to children with Autism for approximately 3 hours a day and carry it out continuously and intensively every day for 6 (6) weeks, and in one week, it is	The results show that social play therapy can improve social skills in children with significant autism disorders and can provide effective results if carried out continuously and sustainably. This social

		with Autism( <i>Experiment at PAUD-SD Lenterahati Islamic Boarding School</i> )		carried out for 5 (5) days.	play therapy can also be done at home; of course, there needs to be an essential role for parents in providing this social play therapy so that children's social skills can improve more quickly.
9.	Mochamad Heri, Komang Gde Trisna Purwantara, Putu Agus Ariana (Heri et al., 2021)	Applied Behavior Analysis Therapy Improves Social Interaction Abilities in Children with Autism Aged 7-12 Years	Pre-experimental research with a one group pre-post test design.  The respondents in this study were all children aged 7-12 years who met the inclusion criteria, namely 62 children.	Therapy <i>applied behavior analysis</i> . This is done by providing exceptional attention, training, and education for autistic children. So that children with autistic disorders can develop themselves in communicating and interacting with their peers.	Before applied behavior analysis therapy is carried out, the child's social interaction skills can be assessed from eye contact, facial expressions, repetitive unfocused or strange movements, ability to play with friends, and the child's emotional state, such as sudden crying or anger, after being given therapy <i>applied behavior analysis</i> . This has an influence on children with autistic disorders and their social interactions.
10.	Nunik Martati, Anita Chandra Dewi Sagala, Mila Karmila (Nunik et al., 2022)	The Influence of the Traditional Game Jamuran on the Social Interaction of Children with Down Syndrome	This research uses descriptive research with a qualitative approach using observation and interviews. This research used six respondents.	The application of the traditional mushroom game is a game that is played by selecting one child and being surrounded by his friends called "jadi" while singing. For example, with the one "jadi" holding his ear, the others hold each other's ears. The "so" player will chase one of them to replace his position as the "so."	The research results show that abilities before learning the mushroom game were implemented had yet to develop optimally. Children still do not want to hang out with other friends and still choose friends when playing; some children like to play alone, do not want to share, and want to communicate with each other. After being given the application of the traditional game mushroom and diligently inviting them to play, it can improve the development of their social interactions.
11.	Utari Christya Wardhani, Sri Muharni, Rizki Sari Utami Muchtar (Wardhani et al., 2020)	Increasing Social Interaction Through Puppet Show Theater for Children with Autism	This research is quantitative research using the Quasy Experiment method. With a Pre and Post Without Control research design,	Application of the Puppet Show Theater game to Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Batam City	The research results showed differences in children's communication skills <i>Spectrum Disorders</i> (ASD) at the Batam City Autism Service Center before and after the Puppet Show Theater

		Spectrum Disorders in Batam City	This research used 50 respondents.		playing therapy, which was proven based on statistical tests, namely that a significant value of 0.000 was obtained ( $p < 0.05$ ).
12.	Sulayakin, Rahadian Kurniawan (Sulayakin & Kurniawan, 2019)	Multiplayer-Based Social Interaction Educational Game to Improve the Interaction Abilities of Autistic Children	Qualitative research using interview and observation data collection methods. In research. This research used five respondents.	Implement play therapy with multiplayer-based social interaction educational games by displaying pre-designed applications such as buttons, backgrounds, cards, sounds, and challenge material, which will be displayed as attractively as possible to attract attention.	The research results increase children's knowledge about interactions and the surrounding environment, and there is interaction between players and mentors and players with players. Interactions in responding to interlocutors, initiation, and participation in certain activities tend to increase. Meanwhile, eye interaction, speaking ability, and controlling emotions do not change.
13.	Asep Supena, Nuryanti, Karnadi (Supena et al., 2022)	Effectiveness of the Son-Rise Program in Improving Language and Social Communication Skills in Autistic Children	Qualitative method Experimental research design Subject Research (SSR) data collection using interviews and observation	We are implementing Son-Rise (SRP) by preparing a study room, media, and other needs, as well as an assessment format for SRP activities assisted by a therapist as a collaborator and daily implementer.	The results show language and social communication skills in autistic children. Children have better environmental awareness, have the initiative to build interactions with the environment, are more active and participative in learning, and show joy in every activity.
14.	Mira Ismaya (Ismaya, 2019)	Video-Assisted Role Playing to Improve Adaptive Behavior in Communication in Autistic Children	pre-experimental research. There were four respondents to this research.	The treatment provided using the role-playing method was carried out over eight meetings. In this stage, the researcher assesses each meeting with an observation sheet, which is an instrument used as a measuring tool to measure children's abilities.	The study showed a significant increase in communication skills, with an average score before treatment of 45.83 and an average score of 71.87 after treatment. Apart from that, the research results also show that $T=0$ is the same as the crisis value $T$ (table) 5%
15.	Sudarman, Roy Romey Daulas M (Sudarman & M, 2019)	The Influence of Parenting Patterns and Play Patterns on Social Communication Skills in Children	Study quantitative with observational analytical design through a Cross-Sectional approach, The number of respondents to	Applying parenting and play patterns to social communication skills in children with Autism	The research results show that there is a relationship between playing patterns with children's social communication abilities with a p-value (sig.) $0.011 < 0.05$ , the

		with Autism in Surakarta	this research was 48 respondents		Nagelkerke R Square value is 0.057
16.	Astri Widiart, Angelina Novia Toemon, Dian Mutiasari, Dedy Baboe (Widiarti et al., 2021)	Communication Skills of Children with Autism After Giving Squishy Toys	The research design used in this research is a quasi-experiment with a group posttest design approach. There were 31 respondents to this research.	Learning squishy toys can be a means to train sensory movements, and through their soft texture, squishies can train a child's sense of touch. Children can communicate independently and create imaginary friends or invite parents to join in role-playing.	The research results show a significant relationship between giving the Squisy game to children with Autism and the development of their social interactions. Not only communication skills but also abilities in terms of social interactions. The research test results showed P Value < Alpha (0.001 < 0.05). It can be interpreted that
17.	Sumirat Putri Wibawanti, Ignasia Yunita Sari (I. Y. Sari & Wibawanti, 2019)	The Influence of Story-Telling Using Image Media on the Social Interaction Abilities of Autistic Children at the Bina Anggita Autism Special Elementary School	I am using the pre-experimental design method with a one-group pretest-posttest-posttest design. There were 15 respondents in this research.	Application of story-telling with image media on social interaction abilities in autistic children	The research showed that the average increase after and before being given story-telling and image media was 2.33 points. The results of statistical tests using the Wilcoxon test at a significance level of 95% ( $\alpha$ 0.05) obtained a calculated value (p value=0.000)
18.	Raudhah Shidqi Amirah (Amirah, 2022)	Effectiveness of Media Use "Talking Tom" Game Regarding the Communication Abilities of Autistic Toddlers in Special Schools Autism A-Ihsan, North Serpong, South Tangerang	This research method uses Single Subject Research (SSR). There were four respondents to this research.	Game implementation "Talking Tom" on learning to improve communication skills for autistic students under five at the Al Ihsan Special School for Autism in North Serpong, South Tangerang	The research results show that this therapy can improve communication skills. This is proven by the increase in communication ability scores before and after being given intervention using tests, namely an average achievement score of 57.14% in <i>baseline</i> one to 79.76% in phase <i>baseline</i> two.
19.	Erliya Nur Afnina Sari, Agus Pratomo Andi Widodo, Sihad(E. N.	The Influence of the Congklak Game on the Social Interaction	The approach method used in this research is experimentation with Single Subject Research (SSR).	Application of the Congklak Game on the Social Interaction Abilities of ADHD Children at SDN Teluk Dalam 1 Banjarmasin.	The results show that the congklak game can increase the social interaction of ADHD children. This is proven by the mean level of increasing children's



	A. Sari & Widodo, 2021)	Abilities of ADHD Children at SDN Teluk Dalam 1 Banjarmasin			social interactions; in baseline phase 1 (A1), it was 35%, and after being given treatment, it increased to 54.2%.
20.	Afdhol Choliquil Ma'ruf and Pamuji (MARUF, 2019)	Social Interaction in Playing Modified Football for Autistic Children	The research design uses a pre-experimental one-group pretest, posttest, and posttest design. This research used six respondents.	Treatment or intervention with modified soccer games. The test that will be carried out is in the form of an action test to improve the social interaction of autistic children.	The research results show the influence of modified soccer games on the social interactions of autistic children. The statistical test results show that calculated Z (Zh) = 2.20 is more significant than table Z (Zt) = 1.96 with a critical value = 5%.

After collecting and analyzing several research results from the source data *literature review* in the form of journals or other references that have been previously reviewed, the results obtained were as follows:

Several studies have shown that there are significant changes in children with autistic disorders before and after therapy, especially in play therapy using various game media. This can be proven from research that has been conducted to help improve social skills or interactions in children with autism.

Play therapy, one of which is associative play therapy, has proven to be very effective in improving the social skills of children with autism. Associative play therapy is a play activity in which the actions or activities are the same but still not organized, there is no division of tasks, and the child will play according to his wishes; autistic children can participate in therapy happily without any binding rules. Associative play is also characterized by a child's social interaction when playing a game (Paseno et al., 2022). However, play therapy can also improve social interactions. Playing can also give children with autism the opportunity to be introduced to new environments, develop their social skills, develop awareness of the existence of other people around them, and help children communicate. By its primary function, games can stimulate sensory-motor development, social development, creativity development, as well as the development of self-awareness and moral development (Paseno et al., 2022)

When providing play therapy, several studies explain that there are things that must be paid attention to, namely, that we must observe the child's behavior during therapy and assess the child's progress in interaction, which helps us find out what deficiencies the child has. Social interaction skills were also assessed before and after each therapy session. Observations must also be conducted during play therapy.

In line with the opinion of Handojo (2009) in research by Iskandar and Indryani (2020), autistic children have symptoms of difficulty using eye sense, namely understanding eye contact with other people, including eye contact with therapists and peers. In children with autism, social interaction disorders are characterized by failure to build social relationships with their peers, where they are unable to share emotions, activities, and interests. Before play therapy, the child's social interaction skills can be assessed based on eye contact, facial expressions, repeated unfocused or strange movements, ability to play with different friends, and the child's emotional state, such as sudden crying or anger. (Iskandar and Indaryani, 2020).

Apart from providing play therapy, researchers have also provided other therapies, such as *applied behavior analysis*. This therapy is carried out by providing exceptional attention, training, and education to children with autism. Thus, children with autism can develop themselves in communicating and interacting with their peers (Heri et al., 2021).

By repeatedly performing the ABC theory in ABA, children with autism will eventually understand that when they carry out a task according to instructions, they will receive a reward or reward. *Reward*. Thus, the tasks given will also give children with autism an understanding of ways to express their desires. When applied continuously, ABA can improve the level of language, cognition, communication, and social interactions (Heri et al., 2021).

Children with autism do not learn in the same way as other children. Children with autism show incompetence in interpersonal relationships, characterized by a lack of response to the surrounding environment or interest in people or children around them. In particular, autistic children have difficulty concentrating and have their own world, which causes them to have difficulty interacting socially (Pamuji, 2019).

Therefore, researchers have tried their best to improve the social aspects of children with autism. Researchers have also observed and studied before and after being given various tests before therapy. Even in several published journals, several researchers have proven that modifying the game increases social interaction and obtains significant change results. The primary key to implementing play therapy to obtain maximum results must be carried out routinely and repeatedly because it can be comparable over a long period, and children can perform activities well with their peers.

## CONCLUSION

Play therapy interventions carried out in a programmed, routine, and ongoing manner can gradually improve the social aspects of children with Autism so that the child can return to normal.

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