

Play Therapy For Children Victims Of The Aceh Tamiang Flood

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ABSTRACT

The main problem in this context is that the psychosocial impact on flood victims has not been optimally handled, even though the number affected is quite large. Interventions still focus on physical needs, while children's emotional disorders, such as fear, anxiety, and withdrawal, have not been systematically and sustainably addressed. This study aims to analyze the implementation of clown-based play therapy and drawing activities as a recovery approach for children affected by the Aceh Tamiang flood in 2025 and analyze what obstacles occur during the implementation process. The research used a qualitative method with a case study design involving 30 children, supported by one clown as the main facilitator, one field coordinator, and three drawing activity facilitators. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and documentation, then analyzed using an interactive model that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The validity of the data is strengthened through source triangulation. The results of the study show that the implementation of clown-based *play therapy* and drawing for children affected by the Aceh Tamiang flood in 2025 is carried out in a structured manner through the preparation, implementation, and evaluation stages. The intervention was designed contextually by utilizing simple media that was appropriate to the conditions of the evacuation. However, the implementation faced the main obstacles in the form of differences in the readiness of participants, limited time of 1-2 hours, a less conducive environment, and limited facilitators and media. In conclusion, the success of *play therapy* in the context of a disaster depends not only on the methods used, but also on the preparedness of the participants, environmental conditions, and the availability of resources. Therefore, these kinds of interventions require adaptive planning and ongoing support in order to be implemented more effectively.

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Introduction

The floods that occurred in Aceh Tamiang Regency at the end of 2025 show a re-increase in the risk of hydrometeorological disasters in Indonesia with a wide impact on people's lives. Data from the Aceh Disaster Management Agency recorded that around 4,850 families were affected and 1,260 children had to be displaced due to damage to houses and waterlogging in residential areas (Aceh Disaster Management Agency, 2025). In addition to physical losses, this disaster also caused significant psychosocial impacts, characterized by around 320 children experiencing adjustment disorders, such as excessive fear, difficulty sleeping, and withdrawal from social activities. These findings confirm that disasters not only have a material impact, but also affect emotional well-being, especially in vulnerable groups such as children (Shackelford et al., 2017). However, disaster management is still dominated by the fulfillment of basic needs, while the psychosocial recovery aspect has not been handled systematically and sustainably (Vanderzee, 2019).

Various approaches have been taken by governments, humanitarian institutions, and researchers. (D. Wang & You, 2022) Common interventions implemented include Psychological First Aid services, (L. Wang et al., 2024), community-based counseling, group therapy, (Purvis et al., 2023), and creative activity-based recovery activities such as art and games. (Widyastuti et al., 2019) Other research also states that in some disaster-affected areas in Indonesia and other countries, approaches that have been proven to provide stabilization begin in the emergency phase. (Akmal et al., 2021) For example, structured play activities at evacuation sites are often used to help affected individuals return to simple routines, while group counseling is used to re-establish a sense of community within the community. (Putra & Rahmat, 2025) Not only that, the implementation of trauma healing and environmental education for children after the flood disaster has also been carried out. (Wurdianto et al., 2022) However, several major approaches are still running separately and have not been integrated into systematic intervention models, particularly those specifically designed for the context of flood disasters in areas with socio-cultural characteristics such as Aceh Tamiang. In addition, the implementation of interventions often relies on the availability of volunteers and is not yet part of a structured medium- and long-term recovery system. However, these approaches are generally still partial, have not been integrated within a systematic intervention framework, and tend to focus on the short term without continuity in the social rehabilitation phase.

These limitations indicate an important research gap. First, there is no intervention model that explicitly integrates play therapy with trauma healing approaches in one sustainable framework. Second, most research still focuses on the emergency response phase, so it pays less attention to the sustainability of psychosocial recovery in the medium and long term (Kar, 2021). Third, integration across actors such as social workers, volunteers, educators, and families is still limited, so interventions are less coordinated and difficult to replicate (Cohen et al., 2016; Woollett et al., 2020). As a result, the recovery process often takes place suboptimal and is not measurable.

Based on the problems mentioned, this study offers a design for the implementation of trauma-healing-based play therapy as an intervention approach that is systematically designed in the post-flood recovery process in Aceh Tamiang 2025. Play therapy in this context is positioned as a medium of structured activity that allows affected individuals to express experiences and emotions through directed play activities (Moody-Pugh et al., 2025). This approach is directed to create an intervention model that is not only recreational, but also has a clear stage structure, starting from the identification of initial conditions, the implementation of directed play activities, to the evaluation of the recovery process (Macedo et al., 2024). The model also emphasizes the importance of the involvement of various parties, including volunteers, as well as families in creating a consistent recovery environment at the evacuation site and the social environment of origin (Le & Vanessa, 2022).

The urgency of this research can be seen from the magnitude of the impact of the 2025 Aceh Tamiang flood on the sustainability of people's lives. Of the total 1,260 children affected by the evacuation, it was recorded that around 180 children had difficulty adapting to the new refugee camp environment, 140 children showed a decrease in participation in social activities in the refugee camps, and another 120 children experienced disruptions in daily activity patterns such as irregular rest periods. This condition shows that without appropriate interventions, the post-disaster recovery process can take place more slowly and potentially hinder the process of social

reintegration in society. Therefore, an impartial approach is needed, not only responsive to emergency conditions, but also able to provide a sustainable and measurable recovery direction (Quinn et al., 2022).

The purpose of this study is to formulate and review the implementation of trauma-healing-based play therapy as an intervention model in the post-flood recovery process in Aceh Tamiang 2025 by applying drawing and clown play therapy, as well as analyzing the obstacles that occur after play therapy is carried out. The novelty of this research lies in the systematic integration between play therapy and deep trauma healing as a model of local disaster-based intervention that has not been widely developed in previous research. In addition, this study also emphasizes a cross-sectoral collaborative approach that combines the roles of social workers, volunteers, educational institutions, and families in one structured recovery system (Widyastuti et al., 2019). Thus, this research is expected to make an important contribution to the development of a more targeted, applicative, and contextual post-disaster intervention model in Indonesia (Harahap, 2026). The approach offered is not only oriented towards short-term management, but also on strengthening sustainable social recovery systems, so that it can be a reference in the development of disaster management policies and practices in the future (Humble et al., 2019).

In the context of this study, the application of Virginia Axline's theory is seen through the use of clowns and drawing activities as non-directive mediums that allow children to express traumatic experiences safely and naturally (Koch et al., 2025). This approach is effective in disaster situations because children tend to have difficulty expressing emotions verbally, so play and symbolic media are a more appropriate means to process trauma (Sun et al., 2024). The role of facilitators as non-judgmental companions also strengthens children's psychological security (Gupta et al., 2023). However, its effectiveness is highly dependent on the facilitator's ability to maintain the principles of empathy and consistency, so this approach is not only theoretically relevant, but also contextually appropriate in post-disaster psychosocial recovery (Makwana, 2022).

Research Methods

This study uses a case study approach to explore in depth the implementation of trauma-healing-based play therapy for flood victims in Aceh Tamiang by 2025. The case study approach was chosen because it allows researchers to comprehensively understand a phenomenon in a real context, especially in complex and dynamic post-disaster situations. This approach is relevant for examining psychosocial interventions involving various actors as well as interactions that take place naturally in the field.

The research participants consisted of six people who had different roles in the implementation of the intervention, namely one clown as the main media of interactive therapy, one head of the AVI Humanitarian community as the person in charge of the program, one head of the field section as the technical coordinator, and three facilitators who accompanied the children's drawing activities. The selection of participants was carried out purposively based on their direct involvement in the intervention activities. The use of clowns as a therapeutic medium is based on a play therapy approach and expressive therapy that emphasizes the importance of humor, imagination, and emotional expression in helping children cope with traumatic experiences (Creswell, 2025).

Data collection techniques were carried out through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with all six research participants, with a duration of about 45-60 minutes each, which was carried out at the evacuation site considering the comfort and safety of the participants. The interview uses a guide that focuses on three main aspects, namely the process of implementing play therapy, as well as the obstacles faced during the intervention, participant observation is carried out by directly involving the researcher in activities in the field during the intervention process. The researchers used observation guidelines to record children's responses, patterns of interaction with clowns and facilitators, emotional expressions, and

children's level of involvement in play and drawing activities. This method allows researchers to obtain data that is natural without engineering. The documentation used includes photos of play therapy activities, field notes about obstacles that occur, as well as the results of children's drawings and the implementation of play therapy when it is carried out.

Data analysis techniques are carried out qualitatively descriptive with an interactive model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, triangulation methods are also applied to improve the consistency and accuracy of the data. Cross-checking is carried out between information from community leaders, facilitators, and the results of field observations so that research findings can be scientifically accounted for (Moleong, 2021).

The ethical aspect of research is also a major concern, especially because it involves children in the context of post-disaster trauma. The researcher obtained informed consent from the child's guardian and related parties before the research was carried out. All activities are carried out in a safe, comfortable, and non-stressful atmosphere. The child's identity is kept confidential, and participation is voluntary with the right to terminate involvement at any time. In addition, interventions are designed to prioritize the child's psychological well-being and avoid potential retraumatization.

Results and Discussion

The Implementation Process of Clown Therapy and Drawing

Based on the results of field observations and interviews with facilitators, the implementation of play therapy activities for children victims of the 2025 Aceh Tamiang flood will be carried out in a planned, systematic, and gradual manner, starting from the preparation process to the end of evaluation. In the initial stage, the facilitator first carried out planning by identifying the condition of the children at the evacuation site, both in terms of social involvement and readiness to participate in activities. In addition, the facilitator also coordinates with other volunteers and local parties to ensure that the activity can run smoothly and does not interfere with other activities at the location. Planning also includes the creation of a simple but engaging activity channel, so that it is easy for children with different conditions to follow. In addition, the facilitator prepares the media to be used such as clown costumes, drawing tools in the form of paper, colored pencils, crayons, and simple game tools such as balloons. All of these preparations are carried out to ensure that the activities run in a directional, safe, and in accordance with the needs of the children in the field.

The main goal of this activity is to help children feel more comfortable after experiencing flooding, restore a happier mood, and provide space for children to express what they feel and expect. In addition, this activity also aims to rebuild the spirit of children to want to play, interact, and be involved in activities with peers.

The implementation activities began by presenting clowns as an opener. Clowns are used as a medium to attract children's attention and create a relaxed and fun atmosphere. Based on the results of observations, out of a total of 30 children who participated in the activity, there were about 18 children who initially seemed silent, kept their distance, and did not want to be directly involved. Meanwhile, about 12 other children began to show interest by paying attention to the movements and interactions made by the clowns. The facilitator does not directly invite all children to participate, but gives time for the child to feel comfortable and closer to the existing atmosphere. Within about 10-15 minutes, there was a change in some of the children, where about 15 children began to smile, pay more attention, and slowly approach the activity area.

After the atmosphere began to melt, the activity continued with simple interactive games such as applause, body movements, and clown-guided interactions. At this stage, the child's involvement increases gradually. Based on observations, about 22 to 24 children began to actively play, laugh, and interact with their friends. Children who previously only observed began to dare to join, although there were still about 6 to 8 children who chose to stay on the sidelines and needed

further approaches. In this condition, the facilitator plays an active role in approaching the child slowly without coercion, so that the child still feels safe and not stressed.

The next stage is the core activity, which is drawing. Children are asked to draw what they feel that day as well as the hopes they want to realize. The facilitator gives complete freedom to the child without giving an assessment of the results of the drawing. This is so that children can express themselves freely according to their experiences and feelings. In the early stages of drawing, about 19 children described conditions related to flooding, such as high water, damaged houses, and using colors that tend to be dark. The picture shows that the experience they are experiencing is still vivid in their minds. However, after being accompanied and given the opportunity to continue or create new drawings, there is a change in some of the older children. About 23 to 25 children start drawing more positive things, such as a tidy house, gathering with family, and using more bright colors. This change suggests that the child is starting to shift the focus from a less pleasant experience to a better one.

During the activity, the facilitator has a very important role as a companion, director, and at the same time an observer. The facilitator not only guides the course of the activity, but also actively pays attention to each child individually. Children who are seen to be still silent or not yet involved are approached slowly, talked to, and given support to want to participate in activities. In dealing with different conditions of children, facilitators use different approaches. Children who are easily adaptable are immediately invited to play, while children who are still hesitant are given longer time and are not forced to follow.

Evaluation activities are carried out directly during the process by looking at the level of child involvement, behavioral changes, and the results of the drawings made. The facilitator pays attention to whether the child begins to show changes such as smiling, laughing, daring to approach and interact with others. In addition, the results of children's drawings are also one of the indicators to see the changes that have occurred. At this stage, the activity ended by the facilitator by giving appreciation and enthusiasm to all children. Some children were also invited to show and tell their drawings. Based on the observations, about 18 children have dared to show and tell their pictures in front of their friends, while other children are still in the adjustment stage but still show changes in expression and engagement.

Obstacles in the process of implementing clown playing and drawing therapy

The findings of the study show that the implementation of play therapy interventions in refugee sites is not only influenced by the methods used, but also by the psychological condition of the child and the limitations of the field situation. The main obstacle lies in the difference in the level of children's readiness to participate in activities. Of the 30 children, only 9 children were directly actively involved, while 15 children needed time to adapt, and 6 children showed initial rejection through silence, withdrawal, or non-response. This pattern confirms that the child is at a different level of traumatic experience and sense of security. Children who do not respond tend to be still in an unstable emotional state, so even simple interactions are not acceptable. As a result, facilitators cannot use a uniform approach, but must adjust strategies individually. This condition is an obstacle because it slows down the intervention process and limits the reach of assistance.

Time constraints are a significant structural constraint. The duration of activities that is only 1 to 2 hours does not allow the facilitator to provide in-depth assistance, especially for children who need a more intensive approach. The available time is largely absorbed to establish an initial atmosphere and maintain group involvement, so individual interactions cannot be carried out optimally. In the context of trauma, the recovery process requires repeated and continuous time. Therefore, the limitation of duration makes the interventions carried out tend to only reach the initial stage, without being able to touch the deeper recovery process. In addition, the environmental conditions of the evacuation are an inhibiting factor that cannot be ignored. An environment that is not conducive is characterized by disturbances in surrounding activities, limited space, and minimal facilities, causing children to easily lose focus. This situation hinders the stability of activities and reduces the effectiveness of interactions between facilitators and children. In psychosocial interventions, a sense of security is the main prerequisite, but unstable environmental conditions actually weaken these efforts. The constraints are also strengthened by limited resources. The number of facilitators that is not proportional to the number of children causes individual assistance

to not be carried out intensively. Children who need more attention are not fully reached, so the intervention process becomes uneven. In addition, the limitations of media and game tools limit the variety of activities, so facilitators are less flexible in adapting to the diverse needs of children.

Conclusion

This study shows that the implementation of clown-based play therapy and drawing for children affected by the Aceh Tamiang flood in 2025 is carried out in a structured manner through the stages of preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The intervention design was structured contextually using clowns as a symbolic medium to build an initial atmosphere, as well as interactive games and drawing activities as the main forms of activity that are easy to follow in refugee conditions. The implementation of activities faces several main obstacles that affect the effectiveness of interventions. First, the difference in the level of readiness of participants requires a flexible approach, so interventions cannot be carried out uniformly. Second, the limitation of implementation time, which is around 1 to 2 hours, limits the intensity and depth of mentoring. Third, the conditions of the refugee environment that are not conducive and the limited facilities make it difficult for activities to take place stably. Fourth, the limited number of facilitators hinders optimal individual assistance.

The main contribution of this study is to show that clown-based play therapy and drawing are effective as contextual, flexible, and responsive psychosocial interventions to the diverse conditions of children affected by disasters. The practical implications emphasize the importance of designing programs that are adaptive, non-uniform, taking into account individual readiness, adequate duration, limited facilities, and supported by a sufficient number of facilitators so that assistance is more optimal. The recommendation is that future interventions need to use a flexible multi-method approach, extend the duration of mentoring, strengthen cross-sector collaboration, and be supported by systematic policies through operational standards and special training, so that children's recovery takes place more effectively and sustainably.

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