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A Systematic Literature Review of Studies Assessing the Psychological and Therapeutic Impact of the Presence of Children's Imaginary Companions

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ABSTRACT

"Up to 65% of children use their imagination to create an imaginary companion (IC). Children who engage with ICs have more advanced social, emotional and communication skills and a better understanding of theory of mind. Children are reported to use their ICs for comfort, motivation, self-regulation, self-esteem enhancement, personality exploration and to enhance their life experiences.

What we don't know is what therapeutic benefits an IC can bring, which is why my novel research is aiming to identify them. If a child uses their IC naturally to process events and to overcome hurdles, could the use of ICs be used to aid mental health and wellbeing in children?

5 in 30 children are likely to have a mental health problem and at least a third of those children are not getting the help they need.

To identify potential benefits an ethnographic inspired study, using semi structured drawing elicitation interviews assessed the therapeutic relationships between children and their ICs. Alongside this, parents/ carer's were interviewed with semi-structured questions, to elaborate on a series of questions that follow the emergence of the themes developed from a SLR (poster attached).

If the therapeutic benefits of ICs are more understood in children, including them within children's therapies could boost patient clinician communication and the mental health and wellbeing of the child. If we could harness this natural phenomenon, it could be used as a low-cost global solution within children's mental health services."

Keywords: imaginary companions; developmental; drawing elicitation interview; mental health;