

Decreasing Fingernail and Skin Picking During Academic Activities Through Replacement Behaviors

Reagan Hodges – Florida State University, Panama City

Target Behaviors

Picking: any instance of the student using one or two fingers to pick or tear at fingernails or skin surrounding the fingernail.

Biting: any instance of the student using her teeth to tear at fingernails or skin surrounding the fingernail.

Rationale

The student reported that previous engagement in the target behaviors has resulted in under layers of nails and skin being exposed causing pain and bleeding. If unaddressed, these behaviors could lead to sickness, infections, and dental problems.

Measurement

Data were taken during academic activities. This included all class meetings and any work done for class (e.g., studying, reading for class, working on assignments, etc.). Frequency data were taken through a tally counter website or tallied by hand. Data from both modalities were totaled and entered into a spreadsheet at the end of each day. Data were not collected during examinations to allow for undivided attention to be given to the exam.

Hypothesized Function

Antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) data were taken on the target behaviors. The data suggests that the hypothesized function of the target behaviors is automatic reinforcement. The target behaviors occurred across multiple environments when the student was engaging in various activities. The data also suggest that behaviors occurred when the student wasn't actively engaging in an activity using her hands.

Graphs

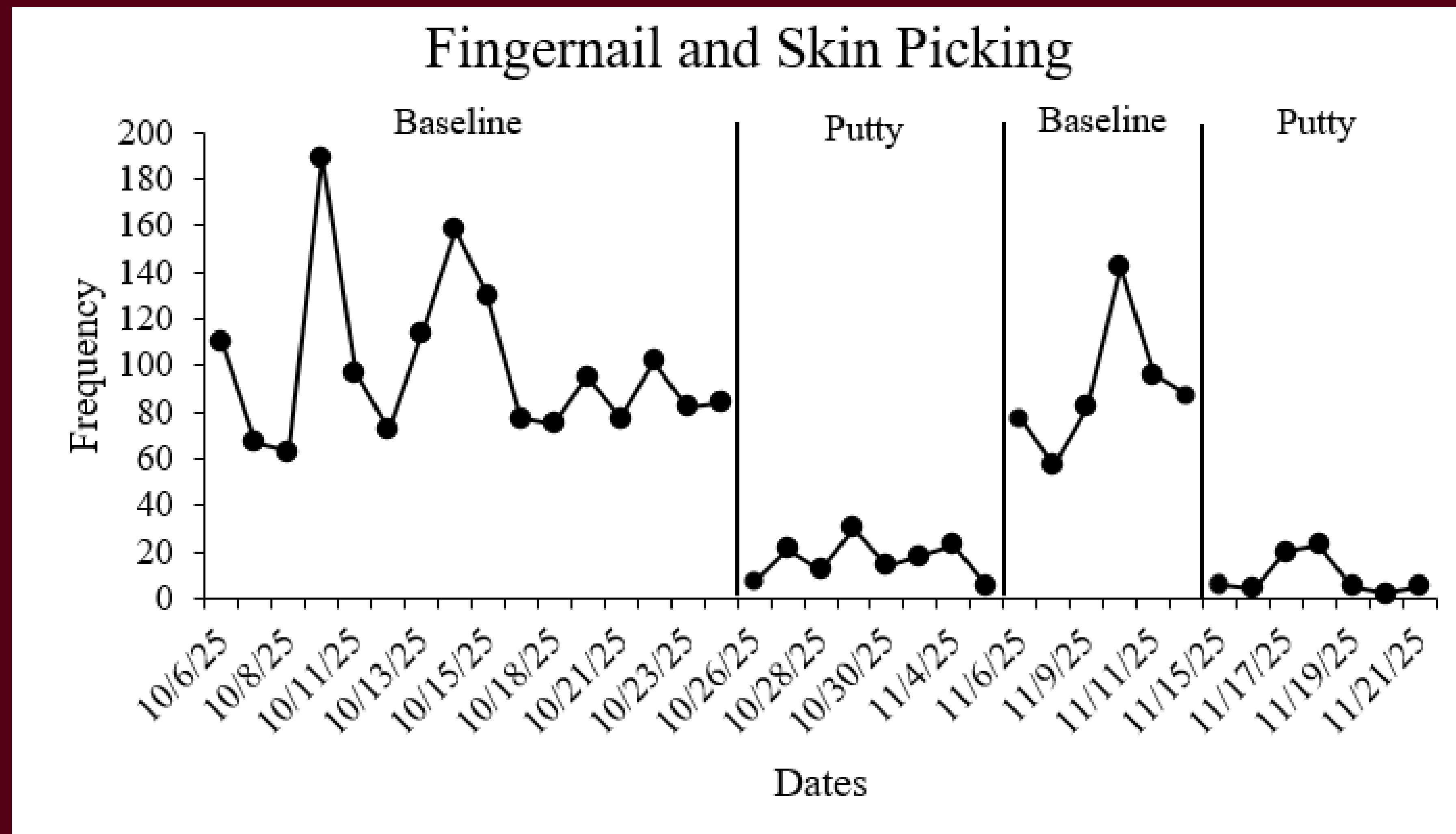


Figure 1: The graph above displays the frequency of fingernail and skin picking.

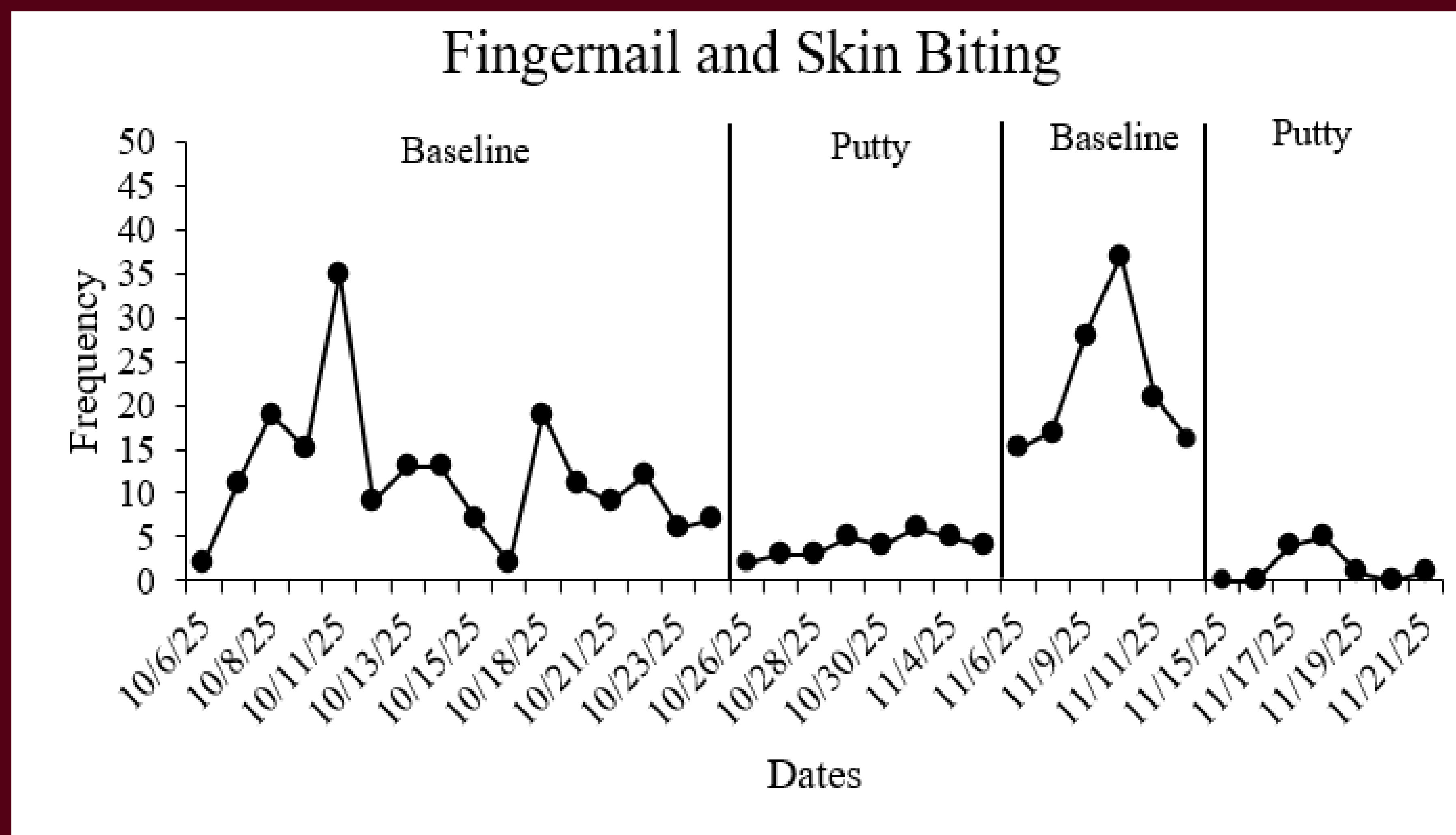


Figure 2: The graph above displays the frequency of fingernail and skin biting.

Antecedent Manipulation

During intervention, a container of putty was kept in the student's backpack to ensure it was available during all academic activities. Before beginning an academic activity, the student placed the putty in visible sight. The putty served as an alternative to the target behaviors as the student could pull and tear the putty instead of her nails and skin.

Results

The results suggest that the replacement behavior of engaging with the putty served as an effective alternative behavior to the fingernail and skin picking. In baseline, there were high and variable rates of picking, with an average of 99.5 picks per day. Upon introduction of the putty, the frequency of picking decreased to an average of 16.25 picks per day. The fingernail and skin biting showed a similar trend.

Limitations

- Self-recording can be unreliable.
- Absence of IOA procedures.
- Variation in duration of data collection could be responsible for responding recorded in the graph.

References

- Lane, K. L., Thompson, A., Reske, C. L., Gable, L. M., & Barton-Arwood, S. (2006). Reducing skin picking via competing activities. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 39*(4), 459–462.
- Twohig, M. P., & Woods, D. W. (2001). Habit reversal as a treatment for chronic skin picking in typically developing adult male siblings. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 34*(2), 217–220.