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# Effectiveness of Art-Based Interventions for Reducing Stress among Caregivers of Cancer Patients

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# Effectiveness of Art-Based Interventions for Reducing Stress Among Caregivers of Cancer Patients

Emily Kocjan and Sarah Powell

## Background

Occupational therapists (OT) frequently work with patients with a cancer diagnosis along with their caregivers. Approximately 50% of family caregivers report decreased time for social activities, decreased energy, emotional well-being, physical functioning, and ability to cope with stress (Lang & Lim, 2013). One approach for reducing caregiver stress may be art-based therapy. Art-based therapy has been effective for promoting health in a variety of populations although the impact of on cancer caregivers is less understood.



## 1 Ask: Research Question

Are art-based interventions effective in decreasing stress in caregivers of cancer patients?

## 2a Acquire: Search Terms

Search Terms: Arts, Art Therapy, Therapeutic, Caregiver, Parent, Cancer, Oncology, Coping, Stress

Databases: CINAHL, Cochrane Review, PubMed

## 2b Acquire: Selected Articles

**Mccarthy & Sebaugh (2011):** A qualitative study that examined the efficiency of a therapeutic scrapbooking group for caregivers of pediatric cancer patients to promote hopefulness, increase emotional strength, reduce stress, and enhanced coping skills.

**Walsh et al. (2007):** A pre-post test quasi-experimental design that assessed the effects of an art-making class (AMC) which consisted of decorated jewelry boxes, monoprints, watercolor paintings, silk scarfs or wall hangings, mandala creations, mosaic tile trays, and ribbon gems on reducing anxiety and stress among family caregivers of patients with cancer. Intervention was implemented over a 10 month period that was held for 2 hours twice a week at a residential care facility.

**Martin, & Schmidt (2004):** A pre-post test quasi-experimental design that examined the efficiency of a creative arts intervention (CAI) which consisted of healthy image posters, monoprint art activity, mandala, silk wall hanging, and a silk rubbing with family caregivers of patients with cancer. Intervention was implemented during an inpatient and outpatient cancer treatment center over a span of 6 months.

## 3a Appraise: Study Quality

**Mccarthy & Sebaugh (2011):** Large n-size (n=122). Limited internal validity related to lack of standardized methods, self-reported caregiver tool, and potential bias due to multiple facilitators leading groups.

**Walsh et al. (2007):** Level III, small n-size (n=69), Used standardized instruments such as, BAI and salivary cortisol. Not generalizable to population because the small sample size was only taken from one residential care facility for family members of patients. Multiple art-making interventions weakened the internal validity.

**Walsh et al. (2004):** Level III, small n-size (n=40). Strength included use of standardized instruments such as, Mini Profile of Mood States (Mini-POMS) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI.) External validity limited due to the study only involving one site. The use of multiple creative art interventions methods weakened the internal validity.

## 3b Appraise: Study Results

**Mccarthy & Sebaugh (2011):** This qualitative study supports scrapbooking as a technique to decrease stress. Provided participants an activity that was a distraction that helped them to relax and cope with stress, as well as have a time to do something for themselves. Also improved a sense of family bonding.

**Walsh et al. (2007):** Findings indicated lowered anxiety but not stress for AMC participants. Anxiety scores declined significantly through participation in AMC from M=7.28 (SD=6.80) to M=2.49 (SD=4.50),  $t(68)=7.89, p<0.01$ . Chi-square analysis also showed a trend towards lowered cortisol as a stress marker.

**Walsh et al. (2004):** This study support the use of art-based interventions to decrease stress and anxiety among caregivers of cancer patients. Use of CAI scores significantly lowered stress among participants from M=13.27, (SD=6.00) to M=9.85 (SD= 5.85),  $t(40)=-3.42, p=0.001$ . Results were also significant for reduced anxiety scores from M=32.8 (SD=9.38) to M=27.8 (SD=7.74),  $t(40)=-5.00, p<0.001$  during the study period.

**4 Apply: Conclusions for Practice** Art-based interventions, including scrapbooking, generally appear to have the potential for improving the lives of cancer caregivers. However, the lack of rigorous methodology for art-based interventions limits the internal validity. Due to having too few caregivers participating in each art-making activity and the multidimensionality of the interventions, it is unknown whether specific activities produce more effective results than others. Thereby these findings suggest that OTs may consider using art-based interventions in conjunction with other approaches until further evidence available.

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Limited research supports the use of art-based interventions for caregivers of cancer patients and should be used in conjunction with other therapeutic efforts.

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