

Padala Olga, Krupa Adrianna, Putowski Maciej, Konopelko Michał, Piasek Ewa. The efficacy of art therapy in psychiatric patients. *Journal of Education, Health and Sport*. 2019;9(8):377-383. eISSN 2391-8306. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3376782>
<http://ojs.ukw.edu.pl/index.php/johs/article/view/7324>

The journal has had 7 points in Ministry of Science and Higher Education parametric evaluation. Part B item 1223 (26/01/2017).
1223 Journal of Education, Health and Sport eISSN 2391-8306 7

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

Received: 05.08.2019. Revised: 15.08.2019. Accepted: 23.08.2019.

The efficacy of art therapy in psychiatric patients

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Abstract:

Introduction: Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of expression and communication and enables individuals to use art to creatively express themselves. Art therapy is used to improve cognitive and sensorimotor functions, foster self-esteem and self-awareness, cultivate emotional resilience, promote insight, enhance social skills, reduce and resolve conflicts and distress.

Purpose: The purpose of the review is to present the different uses of art therapy in psychiatric patients.

State of knowledge: National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence identifies that arts therapies, including art therapy or art psychotherapy, dance movement therapy, body psychotherapy, drama therapy and music therapy, are considered to improve negative symptoms of psychosis. Improved social skills are likely to be associated with increases in prosocial behaviours. Art therapy interventions are effective in reducing trauma symptom severity and anxiety in traumatized adults. Art and music therapy programs were effective in reducing the degree of depression.

Summary: Art therapy is a part of therapy in many psychiatric diseases, including depressive disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychotic disorders. Although the effectiveness of art therapy has been confirmed by some studies, this topic should still be investigated so that art therapy can become more effective and available for bigger group of patients.

Key words: art therapy, PTSD, depression, psychotic disorder, schizophrenia

Introduction:

According to The British Association of Art Therapists art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of expression and communication. Within this context, art is not used as diagnostic tool but as a medium to address emotional issues which may be confusing and distressing. [1] Art therapy enables individuals to use art to creatively express themselves and communicate differently with themselves, others, and their reality. [2] The American Art Therapy Association defines art therapy as an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individual clients or patients, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship. Art therapy, facilitated by a professional art therapist, effectively supports personal and relational treatment goals as well as community concerns. Art therapy is used to improve cognitive and sensorimotor functions, foster

self-esteem and self-awareness, cultivate emotional resilience, promote insight, enhance social skills, reduce and resolve conflicts and distress, and advance societal and ecological change. [3] Art therapy is useful in anxiety disorders, depression and other affective disorders, addictions, cases of sexual abuse and domestic violence, in social and emotional difficulties related to disability and illness, traumas and loss experiences, cognitive and neurological disorders, psychosocial difficulties associated with somatic diseases. It is also used in social prevention, including working with people at risk of social exclusion. [4]

Purpose: The purpose of the review is to present the different uses of art therapy in psychiatric patients.

State of knowledge:

Art therapy in psychosis

Psychosis and schizophrenia have a debilitating impact on patients' lives and mortality. Pharmacotherapy is a common treatment for schizophrenia; however, the long-term use of neuroleptics often has severe side-effects. Patients might become treatment resistant and continue to experience symptoms together with psychological, social, and functional difficulties. [2] The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) highlighted the need for psychological therapies to be offered in conjunction with medication to support individuals with psychosis and schizophrenia through their recovery. NICE identifies that arts therapies, including art therapy or art psychotherapy, dance movement therapy, body psychotherapy, drama therapy and music therapy, are considered to improve negative symptoms of psychosis. [5] A review by Attard and Larkin indicated that art therapy was experienced as meaningful and acceptable by clients and therapists. Most commonly, art therapy strengthened the clients' emotional expression, self-awareness, self-esteem, and connection with themselves, their reality, and social networks. [2] Meta-analysis and systematic review by Lutgens et al revealed evidence that negative symptoms can be improved with psychosocial and psychological interventions. Although guidelines have traditionally supported the use of cognitive-behavioral therapy, findings from skills-based interventions suggest that the latter are likely to have comparative, if not enhanced utility, as long as the treatment is continued. Across study domains, effect sizes of decrease in negative symptoms over time tended to be small. skills-based interventions, music

therapy, exercise and body psychotherapy demonstrated overall moderate effect sizes. Authors found that skill enhancement and behavioral activation were more successful than Treatment-As-Usual in targeting negative symptoms in psychosis. This finding has face validity in that improved skills, and particularly social skills, are likely to be associated with increases in prosocial behaviors (and vice versa), that are key indicators of negative symptom improvement. Across all experimental interventions, treatment intensity of at least more than 45 minutes per week was associated with a better outcome. It was found that group format was as effective as individual format, suggesting some advantages in terms of cost-effectiveness. [6]

Art therapy in the treatment of traumatized adults

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is characterized by severe symptoms of reexperiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal as consequence of one or more traumatizing experiences. PTSD is diagnosed when the duration of the symptoms is more than 1 month and the disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The results of systematic review published by Schouten et al, based on six relatively small studies, show that there is some evidence that art therapy interventions are effective in reducing trauma symptom severity and anxiety in traumatized adults. In half of the included studies, a significant decrease in psychological trauma symptoms was found in the treatment groups, and one study reported a significant decrease in depression. Although there were limitations in the number and heterogeneity of included studies, the number of participants, and their methodological quality, the results contribute to insight into the effectiveness of art therapy in trauma treatment and form an evidence base for the urgent need for further research on art therapy and trauma treatment. [7] In the review by Baker et al seven studies were included, with four studies investigating art therapy, two studies investigating music therapy, and a final study investigating drama therapy. The evidence for music therapy, art therapy, and drama therapy was ranked as low to very low, with no studies found for dance or movement therapy. Generally, the quality of the trials was very poor. Future directions for this field of research are to improve the scientific quality of the research trials in this area. [8]

Art therapy in depression

In the study published by Nan and Ho effects of clay art therapy on adults outpatients with major depressive disorder were evaluated. Authors declare that clay art therapy can aid emotion regulation and benefit various aspects of mental health in adults. The short duration of the intervention suggests additional application value in treating depression. Further investigation is warranted regarding the potential effect of clay art therapy on alleviating physical symptoms and improving social function. [9] The study by Im and Lee was conducted for the goal of determining the effects of art and music therapy on depression and cognitive abilities in the elderly. The results confirmed that the art and music therapy programs were effective in reducing the degree of depression. [10]

Art therapy in different psychiatric conditions

In the quantitative review by Uttley et al, 15 randomized controlled trials were included. A narrative synthesis reports that art therapy was associated with significant positive changes relative to the control group in mental health symptoms in 10 out of the 15 studies. In the qualitative review, 12 cohort studies were included. Themes relating to benefits of art therapy for service users included the relationship with the therapist, personal achievement and distraction. Areas of potential harms were related to the activation of emotions that were then unresolved, lack of skill of the art therapist and sudden termination of art therapy. From the limited available evidence, art therapy was associated with positive effects when compared with a control in a number of studies in patients with different clinical profiles, and it was reported to be an acceptable treatment and was associated with a number of benefits. Art therapy appeared to be cost-effective compared with wait-list but further studies are needed to confirm this finding as well as evidence to inform future cost-effective analyses of art therapy versus other treatments. [11]

Summary: Art therapy is a part of therapy in many psychiatric diseases, including depressive disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychotic disorders. Unlike pharmacotherapy, it doesn't cause any severe side effects. Moreover, art therapy does not require large financial outlays and can be carried out for many patients at the same time. Although the effectiveness of

art therapy has been confirmed by some studies, this topic should still be investigated so that art therapy can become more effective and available for bigger group of patients.

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