

Art Therapy and Mental Health: Effectiveness in Adult Patients with Depressive Mood and Anxiety Disorders



Alyssa Eberling, Amie Uithoven, Kaitlyn Hassman, and Kayla Schut, Dr. Michelle Van Wyhe
Nursing Department, Northwestern College



Abstract

A literature review was conducted between the months of August 2020 and November 2020 to determine the effectiveness of art therapy in adult patients with depressive mood and anxiety disorders. Nine articles were pertinent to the research question and were reviewed to provide insight into the topic. The purpose of the project was to provide Spencer Hospital with evidence for art therapy as an effective intervention for patients on the behavioral health unit along with the most efficacious modalities for implementation. Results showed that any form of art therapy is effective in reducing depression and anxiety regardless of group or individual, structured or unstructured approaches. However, evidence from studies suggested certain structured activities such as making clay pinch pots, coloring mandala images, and utilizing adult coloring books to be slightly more beneficial in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Keywords: anxiety, depression, adult patients, behavioral health unit, art therapy, clay, mandala coloring, adult coloring books, structured interventions, unstructured interventions, group therapy, individual therapy

Clinical Question

In adult patients with depressive mood and anxiety disorders, how does the use of art therapy affect patient outcomes?

Introduction

- ❖ Depression and anxiety disorders are prevalent among adults in society
- ❖ Multiple life stressors contribute to feelings of helplessness and an inability to cope
- ❖ With rise in mental health awareness organizations and counselors are constantly seeking ways to help patients recover or cope
- ❖ Art therapy has the potential to improve mood, decrease anxiety, and improve patient outcomes in patients with anxiety and mood disorders
- ❖ Depressive and anxiety disorders are prevalent among adults in society, with anxiety affecting approximately 18% of the population and depression affecting an estimated 7.1% of adults in the United States according to the National Institute of Mental Health (Major Depression, 2019)

Nursing Theorist

- ❖ Phil Barker's "Tidal Model of Mental Health Recovery"
 - ❖ Focus of Theory
 - ❖ Help patients create meaning in the journey of their life
 - ❖ Find their voice to reclaim their stories of mental distress
 - ❖ Integration of theory into art therapy
 - ❖ Art therapy is one way to help patients reclaim their voices
 - ❖ Find meaning of their experiences by reflecting on their artwork
 - ❖ Expression and discovery pushes patients towards the process of recovery, healing, and growth

Results

- ❖ Overall, results of the evaluated studies show that any form of art therapy is effective in reducing depression and anxiety levels
 - ❖ Participants of art studies reported positive feelings of: Acceptance, Achievement, Hope, Empowerment, Meaning, Sense of control over circumstances
 - ❖ Helped patients connect to inner self and create safe space to express emotions
 - ❖ Sharing art with others in group settings fostered feelings of connectedness and belonging
- ❖ Both structured and unstructured forms of art therapy proved beneficial in reducing symptoms of mental illness
- ❖ Some evidence suggested that structured forms of art therapy are more efficacious in reducing symptoms of depression/anxiety

Evaluation Tools

- ❖ GAD-7
- ❖ PHQ-9
- ❖ Patient Satisfaction Surveys

Definitions

- ❖ **Art therapy:** a type of psychotherapy that encourages the expression of emotions through artistic activities such as painting, drawing, or sculpture; psychotherapy based on the belief that the creative process involved in the making of art is healing and life-enhancing (Art therapy, (n.d.))
- ❖ **Mandala coloring:** pages with a big circle filled with geometric shapes that are colored using bold color schemes that promote mindfulness and relaxation (Wong, 2020)
- ❖ **Nonstructured/unstructured art therapy:** "spontaneous art making" such as free drawing (Why art therapy, (n.d.))
- ❖ **Structured art therapy:** "focuses on specific goals"; activities like coloring sheets (Why art therapy, (n.d.))

Outcomes

Short term goals

- ❖ Spencer Behavioral Health will create and implement an art therapy program for the unit within the next 6 months
- ❖ Patients on the unit will have less anxiety and/or depressive symptoms after each session

Long term goals

- ❖ Spencer Behavioral Health will evaluate anxiety and/or depressive symptoms in patients at 6 months and one year.
- ❖ There will be an increase in patient satisfaction post-therapy and at the time of discharge

Interventions

- ❖ Offer both group and individual therapy options for art-making
 - Clay pinch pots
- ❖ Structured coloring of mandalas and/or adult coloring books
- ❖ In group therapy, a facilitator will guide patients and ask specific questions at the end of the session

Gaps

- ❖ Populations participating in research studies are not specific to behavioral health patients
 - ❖ Location of studies were not in the United States
 - ❖ Hong Kong & Australia
- ❖ Design of study: no longitudinal design, short term studies
 - ❖ No Control group or confusing information

Conclusion

- ❖ Evidence concludes that art therapy is an effective method to decrease levels of depression and anxiety
- ❖ Both structured and unstructured art therapy is beneficial in either a group or individual setting
- ❖ Structured activities have shown to be slightly more effective at decreasing levels of depression and anxiety and can include:
 - Creating clay pinch pots
 - Coloring pre-drawn mandalas
 - Using adult coloring books
- ❖ Having options for both group and individual art therapy with more structured activities will allow patients to choose which method they are comfortable with
- ❖ Implementing art therapy at Spencer Hospital will give patients with depressive mood/anxiety disorders a valuable resource to positively impact their symptoms and mental health

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