

Art Therapy in Psychiatry

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Abstract

Art has always been connected to human experience, serving as a medium for expressing emotions, and inner conditions. In a contemporary context, art therapy presents a specific psychotherapeutic approach that utilizes creative processes to explore and express aspects of human health. It is especially applicable in work with persons experiencing different psychiatric disorders.

Though it was developed from different theoretical approaches, its value was mostly recognized within the integrated psychotherapeutic models that connect creativity, therapeutic relation, and individual needs of patients.

This review paper aims to present the theoretical foundations, therapeutic approaches, and clinical applications of art therapy in psychiatric settings with an emphasis on specific methods, the role of the psychotherapist, and therapeutic effects on psychological health.

Methodologically, the work is based on a systematic review and analysis of available scientific and professional literature in the field of psychiatry, psychotherapy, and creative therapies. The literature was collected by systematically reviewing electronic databases, including PubMed, ScienceDirect, APA PsycInfo, Scopus, Hrcak, Google Scholar, using relevant key words.

The literature review encompasses different art therapy approaches including psychodynamic, humanistic, psychoeducational, systemic, and integrative, and their application with individuals diagnosed with depression, schizophrenia, posttraumatic stress disorder, and intellectual disabilities.

Clinical studies indicate that art therapy has positive effects on emotional expression, symptom reduction, better social adaptation, and general improvement of overall quality of life.

Ultimately, art therapy is recognized as a valid psychotherapeutic modality in psychiatric practice, where the therapist's competences and individualized approaches have an important role. Additional research is warranted to strengthen the evidence base, support broader application, and enhance accessibility in clinical settings

Keywords: *art therapy, psychiatry, mental health, art psychotherapy, creativity*

Introduction

Britannica (2019) defines art as product of imagination and skill, often emphasizing beauty or expression of ideas or feelings.

It involves the deliberate engagement of skill and imagination to create aesthetic objects, surroundings, or experiences.

Art can include visual media such as painting, modelling, photography, and sketching, as well as performing arts like music, dance, and theatre. The aims of art vary, but often include the exploration and expression of emotions, ideas, or even social and political commentary.

Given the diversity of art definitions and functions, thematic frame of this work is clearly defined within the area of visual art expression. In this context, the focus will be exclusively on visual art forms which include media such as drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, and mixed techniques which are applied in art therapy within psychiatric practice. Despite the long

tradition of theoretical reflection on art, in contemporary literature there is no universally accepted definition of a work of art (Law, Karulkar & Broadbent, 2021).

Beardsley (1983) defines an artwork as a creation intended to satisfy aesthetic interest. Schlesinger (1979) describes a piece of art as content that produces an aesthetic experience for its observer, while Lind (1992) defines it as any creative engagement involving one or more art media, whose main function is to convey aesthetically significant content.

Considering these diverse theoretical perspectives, it can be concluded that a piece of art is a complex phenomenon whose definition varies depending on aesthetic, functional, and contextual factors.

From this understanding of art and artwork as tools for expression, communication, and interpretation of inner experiences, it is a logical step to examine

their application in therapeutic models, especially within psychiatric practice, where visual art can serve as a valuable tool in the process of healing, self-understanding, and emotional integration.

Art and psychiatry share a complex and evolving relationship. Although art was initially used as a diagnostic tool in psychiatry, it is increasingly recognized for its therapeutic and social benefits. Both disciplines explore the human experience, including subjective states, consciousness, and extreme emotions, offering valuable insights into mental health.

There is a deep connection between art and mental health, with artistic expression serving as a significant tool in coping with and expressing mental disorders. Art therapy uses creative processes as a psychotherapeutic approach with the goal of alleviating symptoms, enhancing emotional functioning, and improving overall psychological well-being.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2023), this form of therapy allows individuals to express their emotional states and life experiences through art. Beyond this, art therapy is used in a broader context, as defined by the American Art Therapy Association (AATA, 2022), as a therapeutic process that reduces conflict and stress, improves cognitive function, fosters self-esteem, and develops emotional resilience and social skills, engaging the mind, body, and spirit in ways that go beyond the capabilities of verbal communication.

The AATA further defines art therapy as an integrative mental health and human services profession that assists individuals through the active creation of art and participation in the creative processes within a psychotherapeutic setting.

Methodology

This systematic review paper is based on a comprehensive analysis of the available scientific and professional literature in the field of art therapy and psychiatry. The aim of this paper is to present the theoretical foundations, therapeutic approaches, and clinical applications of art therapy in psychiatric settings. Through an analysis of relevant literature, the paper seeks to highlight the role of art therapists, the specific methods and interventions they use in working with psychiatric patients, and the potential effects of art therapy on their mental health, emotional processing, and rehabilitation.

In addition, the work seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of art therapy as an effective psychotherapeutic method within contemporary psychiatric practice.

The literature was collected by searching electronic databases including PubMed, ScienceDirect, APA PsycINFO, Scopus, Hrčak, and Google Scholar, using the following key terms: *art therapy, psychiatry, mental health, art psychotherapy, and creativity*.

Research included in this systematic review comprised studies published in

Croatian and English language between 2010 and 2024, with the exception of theoretically significant works published earlier.

The criteria for inclusion were: (1) empirical and theoretical papers dealing with the application of art therapy in psychiatry, (2) research involving adult, adolescent, and pediatric populations with psychiatric diagnoses, (3) papers available in full text. Studies addressing art therapy in physical illnesses, as well as those lacking clearly defined methodologies, were excluded.

The literature was analyzed qualitatively, with an emphasis on identifying key therapeutic benefits, implementation challenges, and specific elements of art therapy application across diagnostic categories. Interpretation was guided by a critical and comparative approach in order to synthesize relevant insights.

Topic Overview

Art Therapists in Psychiatric Institutions

Based on the previously presented concepts and definitions related to art, its connection to mental health, and the basic principles of art therapy, the next step is to focus on its application within psychiatric institutions, which represent a specific and challenging environment for therapeutic work.

Hospital stay is often a source of stress and anxiety for patients, and art therapy can

serve as a valuable psychotherapeutic tool for alleviating psychosocial difficulties that often remain unrecognized in the clinical context.

Through the creative process, art therapists not only encourage the expression of repressed emotions but also facilitate the process of emotional and physical recovery. Artistic expression allows patients to visually articulate unconscious content, often through metaphor, thus creating space for a deeper understanding of inner states. This approach may have a less invasive effect, especially for those patients who do not perceive their difficulties as psychological, but still need emotional support (Shella, 2018).

The approaches and goals of art therapists in healthcare institutions largely depend on the specific context of their work, and therapeutic practice is most often defined within certain theoretical frameworks – including psychodynamic, humanistic, psychoeducational, systemic, integrative, and eclectic approaches.

In addition to these formal orientations, therapists' personal characteristics and working methods influence therapeutic practice. For example, some therapists emphasize the role of observer, witnessing the internal processes of self-recognition in patients, while others take an interventionist approach aimed at stimulating new insights and meanings. Still others base their orientation on creating relationships of trust and safety, or on activating different dimensions of human

experience – from sensory-motor, through cognitive and emotional, to spiritual and social levels (Van Lith, 2016).

In therapeutic practice, art is often seen as a means for safe, introspective processing of intense emotional experiences, precisely because of its indirect nature. The use of art in art therapy largely depends on the therapist's theoretical and psychological orientation, which is particularly evident in the clinical context.

Within psychodynamic approaches, art expression is used to access unconscious content, develop adaptive defense mechanisms, and elaborate interpersonal relationships. The phenomenological approach, in contrast, focuses on authentic self-expression and the subjective meaning patients attribute to their own work.

Art can also serve as a diagnostic tool for assessing emotional states or cognitive abilities, providing the therapist with functional and dynamic insights. Regardless of the approach, any form of therapeutic use of art opens up the possibility of a deeper understanding of the patient's experiences and emotions and encourages dialogue about the creative process itself and its content (Shalev et al., 2025).

Within psychiatric practice, art therapy is used as a psychotherapeutic approach in the treatment of various mental conditions, including depression, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and intellectual disabilities. The therapy process is based on the application of diverse creative methods that allow in-

dividuals to develop their own artistic expression, thereby encouraging introspective engagement with the inner world.

In art psychotherapy, in addition to the creative process itself, art materials constitute a key element of the therapeutic relationship because they open an additional communication channel that allows for deeper insight into the patient's psychological state. The therapist is no longer the only bearer of therapeutic action - art materials serve as intermediaries through which the patient expresses emotions and thoughts that often remain beyond the reach of verbal expression.

Such an approach not only contributes to the establishment and deepening of the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and the patient, but also actively supports the rehabilitation process through experiential expression and symbolic processing of psychological content (Gatta et al., 2014; Hilbuch et al., 2016).

Art therapists have a responsible and structured role in planning therapeutic encounters with the aim of achieving clearly defined therapeutic outcomes. Through a thoughtful selection of art materials and intervention techniques, therapists design individualized interventions that encourage patients' personal development. This creative process contributes to improving self-awareness, reducing stress levels, facilitating the processing of the traumatic experiences,

as well as improving cognitive and neuro-sensory functions.

In addition, art therapy encourages better interpersonal relationships and contributes to a sense of personal fulfillment, thus becoming an integral part of the comprehensive rehabilitation of individuals with psychological difficulties (Shukla et al., 2022).

Application of Art Therapy in Psychiatry

Application of Art Therapy in Depressive Disorder

Depression is a common, debilitating, and potentially fatal disorder (Stringaris, 2017). Depression can manifest as an independent disorder, but also as a symptom or syndrome within a broader spectrum of psychiatric conditions. At the symptom level, it is a pathological mood that differs significantly in intensity and quality from normal sadness.

When it comes to a syndrome, depression includes a complex interplay of psychological, psychomotor, and somatic signs, which can be expressed in different forms and degrees of severity. The most common clinical signs include persistently depressed mood, loss of interest in activities that previously provided pleasure (anhedonia), pronounced fatigue, psychomotor retardation, suicidal ideation, sleep and appetite disorders, feelings of guilt, self-blame, and low self-esteem (Karlović, 2017).

In the professional and scientific literature, there is a long-recognized association between creativity and depression. This opinion stems in part from historical accounts of highly creative individuals who also suffered from depressive disorders, further contributing to the common perception of creativity as arising from personal suffering (Lam & Saunders, 2024).

Since ancient times, the symbolic expression of emotions and thoughts has been one of the primary means by which humans have attempted to understand themselves and the world around them, especially in dealing with existential questions.

In the context of depression, art helps patients move beyond a limited, negatively biased perception of reality, encouraging them to explore their own experiences more broadly and deeply. Throughout history, artists have used the creative process not only to express and understand their own emotional states, but also to transform emotions into artistic form. Creativity, in itself, requires the active involvement of an individual's cognitive, emotional, and volitional capacities, making it a powerful tool in a therapeutic context (Blomdahl, 2013).

Furthermore, some research suggests a significant connection between creative expression and mood disorders, especially among individuals with pronounced affective fluctuations, which further confirms the theory of the connection be-

tween emotional dysregulation and artistic production (Andreasen, 2008).

Within psychiatric and psychological disciplines, drawings and paintings have always been recognized as the most useful components of therapeutic processes (Al-Rasheed & Al-Rasheed, 2023). Art therapy, as a form of integrative psychotherapy intervention, provides access to different aspects of depressive mood – biological, psychodynamic, and cognitive – opening a space for complex and in-depth therapeutic work with the aim of achieving long-term and more comprehensive therapeutic effects.

Within this framework, painting therapy stands out as a specific method that encourages the expression of emotions and inner states through visual creation. The guided process of drawing and painting – through the interplay of colours and shapes – does not primarily serve to improve artistic skills but rather allows participants to introspectively explore their own emotional states.

Previous research has shown that this approach can lead to a reduction in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and chronic fatigue. During the therapeutic process, patients often find space for emotional relief, which contributes to better self-understanding and psychological healing (Xian, 2024). Research also shows that the experience of participating in artistic creation can have a profoundly fulfilling and motivating effect on individuals dealing with symptoms of depression. The

sense of satisfaction that comes from creative expression indirectly improves overall quality of life, further confirming the value of art therapy as an effective psychotherapeutic intervention (Ilali et al., 2019).

Application of Art Therapy in Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a chronic psychotic disorder characterized by the presence of positive symptoms, such as delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech and marked disturbances in behavior, as well as negative symptoms, including emotional dullness, poor speech (alogia) and loss of will and motivation (avolition) (Singh & Chaudhuri, 2014).

Although a number of evidence-based treatments that can alleviate the symptoms of schizophrenia are available, many patients have persistent chronic difficulties in social and occupational functioning.

Empirical research indicates that these deficits are often associated with disturbances across a broad spectrum of emotional and motivational capacities (Cohen et al., 2010).

Today, the diagnosis of schizophrenia is primarily based on the presence of clinical symptoms, but due to marked heterogeneity of this disorder, the process of diagnosis and differentiation remain a significant challenge in psychiatric practice (Zhang et al., 2023). Most

individuals with schizophrenia experience multiple relapses and episodes of intermittent symptoms exacerbation. Although antipsychotics are the mainstay of pharmacological treatment for schizophrenia, a growing body of research suggests the potential benefits of additional therapeutic approaches, including art therapy. As a non-pharmacological adjunct, art therapy is increasingly used alongside standardized psychiatric treatment, with the aim of improving patients' psychosocial functioning (Luo et al., 2022).

People with schizophrenia often experience severe verbal communication difficulties, manifested through unusual speech patterns. These disorders can include sudden changes, from excessive verbalization (verbal pressure) to significant impoverishment of speech (alolgy), which is associated with language deficits characteristic of this diagnosis. Such communication difficulties frequently hinder therapeutic engagement and treatment efficacy, especially in psychotherapeutic approaches that rely on verbal expression (Rubinstein, 2008).

The value of art therapy lies in the possibility of establishing communication at both conscious and preconscious levels without relying on verbal expression, which psychiatric patients may often experience as overly invasive or demanding. This characteristic is particularly pronounced in individuals with schizophrenia, for whom, the type of relationship

that require verbal therapeutic approaches often cannot be achieved. Through the creative process, patients develop a sense of agency, a confirmation of existence in the world, and the possibility of symbolically leaving their mark, thereby encouraging the formation of an identity that goes beyond the one defined by the illness. The therapist's unconditional acceptance of the expressed content fosters feelings of acceptance and belonging. Simultaneously, patients strengthen autonomy and control by independently choosing art materials and deciding on the level of inclusion of others in their own creative process (Ivanović et al., 2013).

There is a long tradition of a connection between creativity and schizophrenia. Available research suggests that certain psychological aspects that accompany schizophrenia, such as a tendency toward original and unconventional thoughts, can contribute to the development of creative thinking. Although the ideas of individuals with schizophrenia may be unusual, it is precisely this ability to generate new associations that meets one of the key criteria for creativity – originality. However, the crucial difference between originality and psychopathology lies in the ability to select and structure ideas.

A creative person manages to organize and functionally integrate a multitude of thoughts, while this ability is often impaired in individuals with schizophrenia (Degmečić, 2018). Other research indicates that visual art therapy can have a

positive effect on alleviating both positive and negative symptoms, including comorbid depression and anxiety, by fostering creative expression. It has been particularly noted that longer weekly sessions can significantly contribute to the alleviation of positive symptoms. Art therapy has also proven to be particularly useful in working with women with schizophrenia, where it contributes to the reduction of negative symptoms and anxiety. Various forms of expression, such as painting, handicrafts, and the combination of painting and calligraphy, demonstrate therapeutic efficacy within a visual-creative framework (Du et al., 2024).

In the context of care for people with schizophrenia, assessing the level of social functioning and quality of life is essential to the therapeutic process.

Evidence suggests that art therapy can enhance quality of life and social inclusion, underscoring the need for further research to ensure its broader clinical integration (Cataldas et al., 2025).

Application of Art Therapy in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental disorder that develops as a result of exposure to extremely traumatic or threatening events. The clinical picture includes symptoms such as recurring and disturbing memories of the event, increased alertness (hypervigilance), nightmares, and emotional numbness. The disorder can occur after various forms of

trauma, including traffic accidents, physical or sexual assaults, and combat experiences in wartime settings (Moini et al., 2021).

In its chronic form, PTSD often leads to the development of depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse. Adjustment disorders represent excessive emotional or behavioral responses to stressful life circumstances, which is why they are sometimes called situational depression. Such disorders can significantly impair social, professional, or educational functioning (Moini et al., 2024).

Psychological trauma can significantly impair an individual's creative potential, primarily by affecting authenticity, the ability to express vulnerability, trust, passion, and spontaneity. The legacy of trauma often results in a loss of personal initiative, curiosity, the will to explore, and the willingness to engage fully in their own activities. In this context, trauma penetrates and disrupts the emotional space necessary for creative expression, thus limiting the freedom of inner expression and creative capacity (Holtz, 2021).

According to Long (2022), traumatic experiences can significantly erode the feeling of hope. Trauma can lead to the disruption of core beliefs about personal safety and control, resulting in individuals shifting their focus from personal development to re-establishing a sense of security. Nevertheless, Long emphasizes that there is encouraging

evidence to suggest that hope can play a key role in building resilience and the recovery process from trauma.

Appleton (2001) emphasizes that hope can be rekindled through creative processes within art therapy. In his work, the author presents an example in which the act of painting enabled a person in a state of helplessness and frustration to move from passivity to active expression, thereby opening up space for emotional relief and a sense of overcoming the crisis. Through artistic work, negative experiences are transformed, and the process of creation becomes a source of hope and inner strength.

When hope is consciously and constructively fostered within the art therapy process, it can act as a catalyst for personal growth and change. The art therapist actively nurtures hope as an integral element of the therapeutic relationship, using the creative process to stimulate positive emotions such as hope and a sense of connection. The emphasis on hope is not set as a prerequisite for therapy but is provided to the patient during the therapeutic process. Through psychotherapy work, patients adopt new ways of interpreting and responding to life circumstances, which directly contributes to strengthening their ability to experience and maintain a sense of hope (Nilooofar, 2024).

Given that traumatic experiences are often stored in memory in the form of visual images, sounds and smells, art

therapy has emerged as a therapeutic modality that responds to the sensory nature of traumatic storage. Through a guided creative process within a psychotherapeutic relationship, structured by an art therapist, individuals can recognize, externalize, and process their own psychological difficulties, which allows for deeper insight and emotional processing of traumatic content (Malhotra et al., 2024).

Creative therapies have been shown to alleviate symptoms of depression and trauma, including alexithymia, dissociation, anxiety, nightmares, and sleep disturbances. Positive effects additionally include improving emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and body image (Schouten et al., 2014).

Application of Art Therapy in Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

According to the definition of the American Psychiatric Association (2013), intellectual disability is a developmental disorder that manifests itself in early life and is characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior across conceptual, social, and practical domains.

Recently, emphasis has been placed on community inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in order to improve their quality of life. Despite these efforts, this population often faces emotional and mental challenges. Research confirms that people with intellectual disabilities

can participate in certain psychodynamic therapeutic approaches. Art therapy provides a space for non-verbal expression of inner content through creative media, which has proven useful in working with this population. Successful therapy requires individualized approaches, therapist flexibility, and acceptance of the person as a whole. Even small therapeutic shifts can have a profound impact on the client's emotional and social functioning (Shir et al., 2024).

According to the findings of a study conducted by Hackett et al. (2020) interpersonal art psychotherapy leads to a significant reduction in perceived aggressive behavior and emotional distress associated with mental symptoms in adults with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, the results of the study conducted by Ho et al. (2020) indicate that their Expressive arts-based intervention (EABI) program is feasible and effective approach in working with this population. The EABI program proved to be successful in increasing participants' emotional awareness, encouraging the expression of emotions, and improving their behavioral functioning. After the interventions, participants used more colors in their drawings, which is consistent with patterns observed in the works of people without intellectual disabilities from previous studies. Combined with qualitative data from interviews, the findings suggest that the program can positively contribute to the emotional

well-being of people with intellectual disabilities.

Discussion

The aim of this review was to present the theoretical foundations, therapeutic approaches and clinical application of art therapy in psychiatric institutions, emphasizing the therapist's role, the methods, and the therapeutic impact on patients' mental health. The literature analysis confirmed that art therapy represents a valuable and effective adjunct to classical psychotherapy methods within contemporary psychiatric practice.

Art therapy starts from different theoretical frameworks that include psychodynamic, humanistic, psycho-educational, systemic and integrative approaches (Rubin, 2012). The psychodynamic model of creative therapies is based on the processes of projection, transformation and internalization. Through artistic creation, individuals express unconscious aspects of their own psyche, which they can then reshape and emotionally process, ultimately leading to their reintegration into the personal psychological framework (Johnson, 1998; Gerge et al., 2019; Graham-Pole, 2002).

Humanistic approaches emphasize a holistic view of the person, focusing on innate potential for growth rather than solely symptoms and behavior. Numerous studies confirm that person-centered and

experiential therapies are as effective as other therapeutic approaches, including cognitive-behavioral therapies, and can be useful for a wide range of psychological difficulties (Hlavek & Felwisch, 2022; Malchiodi, 2022; Joseph, 2008). Psychoeducation in art therapy involves the art-making process to provide educational content, helping to better understand certain mental health conditions and develop coping strategies (Marshall-Tierney, 2021). Integrative art therapy, similar to humanistic approaches, is based on flexibility and adaptation, multiple therapeutic models, and art media to respond to individual needs. Saikia & Deuri (2024) state that integrative art therapy is increasingly positioned as a key component of psychosocial interventions aimed at alleviating emotional and behavioral problems.

Summarizing the above, the theoretical frameworks of art therapy rely on the integration of different approaches, whereby special importance is given to a holistic view of the person, the flexibility of methods, and the active involvement of patients in the creative process. The broad therapeutic framework enables the adaptation of art therapy to the needs of individuals, making it a valuable therapeutic tool in working with people who face psychiatric difficulties. Specific clinical approaches to art therapy are developed on these foundations, which enable the application of these principles in everyday psychiatric practice.

The development of therapeutic interventions is a complex process during which therapists, including art therapists, design targeted actions in order to respond to the individual needs of the person as effectively as possible. The purpose of these interventions is to promote positive changes at behavioral, cognitive, and emotional level, aiming to improve mental and physical health and overall quality of life. Interventions carried out by art therapists are intended to strengthen cognitive and sensorimotor functions, build self-esteem, develop self-awareness, emotional resilience and insight, while improving social skills, and addressing internal conflicts and emotional difficulties.

Art therapists use specific methods to enhance quality of life, support therapy engagement, improve emotional awareness and expression, facilitate communication, and strengthen positive self-concept. According to the expressive therapy continuum model, art therapy interventions encompass three key areas: kinesthetic-sensory, affective-perceptive, and cognitive-symbolic, ensuring a holistic approach to individual therapeutic needs (Czamanski-Cohen & Weihs, 2023; Trably et al., 2024).

The clinical application of art therapy uses the process of artistic creation as a primary means of expression and communication within a structured therapeutic context. Under the guidance of an art therapist, art psychotherapy explores

the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of individuals.

Ciasca et al. (2018) report that art therapy, applied as a complementary method, has been shown to be effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety in older women diagnosed with a depressive disorder. Similar results have been reported by other authors who have investigated the use of art therapy in people with depressive disorder (Xu et al., 2024; Yin et al., 2023; Jenabi et al., 2022).

The clinical application of art therapy in people with schizophrenia also shows positive results. Utas-Akhan et al. (2023) emphasize the positive contribution of art therapy to clinical outcomes in individuals with schizophrenia, especially when combined with pharmacotherapy.

Sarandöl et al. (2024) report that art therapy improved negative symptoms, along with social and cognitive functioning in individuals with schizophrenia. Similar positive results have been confirmed in other studies conducted on the population of people with schizophrenia (Richardson et al., 2007; Teglbjaerg, 2011). The clinical application of art therapy in working with people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder shows diverse therapeutic effects. The findings of Campbell et al. (2016) indicate the possible contribution of a combination of art therapy with cognitive therapy to a more effective processing of traumatic experiences.

Participants, veterans with PTSD, highlighted art therapy as a valuable part of the therapeutic process because it allowed safe emotional distancing from traumatic content, facilitated recollection, and increased access to emotional experiences. Schnitzer et al. (2021) indicate that a certain number of individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder may benefit from art therapy, with positive effects noted across most symptom groups characteristic of PTSD. A meta-analysis by Wang et al. (2025) further confirms significant PTSD symptom reduction after the application of creative arts therapy. The clinical application of art therapy in this area therefore represents a valuable therapeutic resource, especially when used as part of a broader multimodal approach to trauma treatment.

Art therapy is a valuable therapeutic approach in working with people with intellectual disabilities, supporting communication skills and emotional regulation, reducing anxiety, and improving attention as well as social interactions. Through creative expression, emotions and thoughts are more confidently expressed, positively impacting mental health and quality of life. Adebayo and Adeife (2023) found a significant positive impact on improving attention in children with intellectual disabilities. The results of the study clearly confirm the effectiveness of this therapeutic method in stimulating and maintaining attention in this population.

Wright (2023) describes the experiences of implementing a six-week art therapy program with an adult with autism, intellectual disabilities, anxiety, and sensory processing disorder. The results of the study indicate the significant role that art therapy can play in the development of communication skills and adoption of emotional regulation strategies. Incorporating humor and spontaneity into the process also contributed to positive outcomes. In addition, art therapy reduces avoidant coping patterns and emotional suppression, which often increased anxiety and externalized behaviors. These findings emphasize the need for further research into the effects of art therapy in people with autism and intellectual disabilities.

Given the diversity of therapeutic approaches and proven clinical benefits, art therapy is confirmed as an effective and valuable therapeutic resource in psychiatric practice, with the art therapists' competencies playing a key role in shaping individualized therapeutic processes aimed at improving patients' mental health and quality of life.

Conclusion

Based on a review of the relevant literature, art therapy is confirmed as an effective psychotherapeutic approach within psychiatric practice. By integrating psychodynamic, humanistic, psychoeducational, systemic and integrative elements, this form of therapy provides a flexible framework adapted to the individual needs of patients. Clinical results indicate the positive effects of art therapy in working with people suffering from depression, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder and intellectual difficulties, especially in the area of emotional expression, reduction of symptoms and improvement of quality of life.

In particular, the role of the therapist is highlighted, as their expertise and adaptation of interventions to the needs of the individual play a key role in the success of the therapeutic process. Although certain methodological limitations exist and additional empirical research is needed, the available data clearly confirm the therapeutic potential of art therapy as a complement to classical psychiatric approaches. Given all of the above, art therapy deserves to be more widely recognized and systematically integrated into multidisciplinary teams in psychiatric institutions.

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