



<https://doi.org/10.59298/ROJPHM/2024/416871>

The Future of Art Therapy in Mental Health Treatment

Nyambura Achieng M.

School of Natural and Applied Sciences Kampala International University Uganda

ABSTRACT

Art therapy has become a vital aspect of mental health treatment, providing an innovative, non-verbal way for individuals to express their emotions and process trauma. This paper examines the historical roots, current applications, and future potential of art therapy as a mental health treatment modality. The paper critiques traditional mental health practices and highlights emerging trends such as the integration of digital technology, innovations in trauma-informed care, and the potential for art therapy to evolve in a rapidly changing world. This study anticipates art therapy's increasing relevance in the field of mental health by evaluating how it has adapted to societal needs and technology improvements.

Keywords: Art therapy, mental health treatment, non-verbal therapy, trauma-informed care, creative expression.

INTRODUCTION

Art therapy is a powerful tool used in the treatment of mental health that connects creativity, art, and personal healing. It is a process to help children and adults process stressful events or emotions and get support in finding solutions differently. This type of art therapy is useful in the mental health treatment of individuals who are not able and do not want to talk about their emotional pain. Experts in art therapy believe this treatment helps individuals solve their problems that are too deep to address in talking therapy. This paper will consider the use of art therapy in personal, psychological, and emotional healing. They will critique traditional mental health practices. This review aims to imagine a future for art therapy examine the future of art therapy as a method of mental health and illustrate the objectives in the future of art therapy. There is a rising demand for alternative therapies, and practitioners and scholars who pay attention to the future may be interested in considering these points. Why would it be important to imagine a future for art therapy in the context of the study outlined above? The centrality of making, creating, and creativity is currently of much interest in society's collective agenda, and in how we understand mental well-being and the treatment of mental distress [1, 2].

Historical Overview of Art Therapy

Art therapy has a rich history. The tradition of self-expression as a means of establishing roads to mental and emotional healing has been practiced as long as writing and other methods of communication. Early examples of art therapy can be found in the form of indigenous art. Ancient glyphs, cuneiform, and writing are primitive scripts based on individual realization of purpose and reality. Historically, art therapy has been linked to ideas about the individual, including linking art as art therapy to the irrational and unconscious [3, 4]. In many ways, art therapy was the cultural reflection of psychological theories of the time. Art therapy became a tool for educators as a way of improving mental health and treating psychological disorders and as a means of improving coping skills and quality of life. Art therapy as a treatment modality has moved from being considered part of "charming superstitions, filled with communalism that was completely inoperative... a paradoxical contrivance twisted with superficial nonsense" to a burgeoning advancement. Art therapy emerged as a distinct discipline in the U.S. and the

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

United Kingdom in the 1940s, as art educators and artists began to combine their educational and therapeutic interests and talents in formal training programs [5, 6]. In the last decade, art therapy has been offered in diverse settings to meet the needs of underserved communities. Courses and training are now being offered in trauma and clinical art therapy, which are therapeutic processes that provide safety, stabilization, emotional processing, and post-traumatic growth for clients who have endured trauma. Advocacy and political activism have increased the acceptance and growth of art therapy as a trauma-informed treatment modality. To understand the current state of art therapy, one must appreciate the nuances of its evolution. Art therapists have explored a myriad of theoretical perspectives, culminating in a broad and expansive modality that holds great potential to serve individuals in the future who suffer from mental health problems [7, 8].

Current Applications of Art Therapy in Mental Health Treatment

Art therapy is a component of mental health treatment that many facilities employ. Applications of art therapy have been reported in hospitals, outpatient clinics, schools, and community centers, and with adult and child patient populations. Art therapy can be used in both long-term and brief treatment settings and has been reported to be beneficial for patients with mental illness, persons with substance use disorders, cancer patients, individuals with dementia, and even more. The fundamental construct of art therapy is the use of the therapeutic processes of drawing, painting, and/or working in mixed media to assist individuals in dealing with numerous presenting problems like stress, physical pain, depression, anxiety, life transition conflicts, and personality disorders. Art therapy can be used as a stand-alone therapeutic approach, just as traditional verbal therapies; however, the application of both can work well together, with art therapy serving as a complement to traditional therapies. Art therapy encourages all participants to be more self-expressive as it is designed to be a proactive form of therapy [9, 10]. From the initial application of this therapeutic modality over 60 years ago to the present, art therapy has been successfully an efficacious tool for helping individuals with mental health conditions. Services used include but are not limited to the diagnosis of conditions, development of self-awareness and/or clinical skills, relief of symptoms, client education, the development of additional coping strategies, psycho-education, and assisting individuals with their overall rehabilitation about the clients' own cultural, spiritual, developmental, and cognitive functioning. Potential use of the treatment approach includes but is not limited to the completion of one's mental health assessment or treatment needs and reinstatement of one's competency to function at one's optimal level of independence in the community or workplace. Art therapy will have the goal of enabling a marrying style, including an approach to resolving interpersonal conflicts with persons within the community [11, 12]. Art therapy is a vital part of mental health care that helps individuals apply the techniques needed to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe and non-judgmental setting, which is designed to meet the client's therapeutic needs. Research findings continue to support the contention that engaging fully in art therapy activities can often lead to positive changes in symptom management, emotional stability, and conflict resolution while reinforcing healthy components of an individual's psyche and self-worth. Art therapists work actively with individuals to help them identify barriers or other factors that have contributed to their illnesses or significant stress factors. Art therapists develop leading-edge treatment modules by exploring the underlying processes used before patients themselves ask for treatment. At present, these cutting-edge modules are in use in private practice and are being used in centers for mental health care treatment. Being in art therapy does not require a background in art or any training; your area of interest/desire and goal accomplished is a career in art or a pastime. If a person enjoys the activity, that's enough to attend [13, 14].

Benefits of Art Therapy in Mental Health Treatment

The benefits of art therapy in mental health treatment go beyond encouraging personal expression. Most people engage with creative processes in a therapeutic setting to better understand themselves by tapping into their unconscious thoughts and emotions. With guidance from a therapeutic professional, both the act of creating art and interpreting finished artistic products can provide meaningful insights that support mental wellness. Long-term studies have indicated that individuals who engage in art therapy demonstrate an overall decrease in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and trauma. No formal artistic expertise is required for individuals to benefit from attending art therapy sessions. Those who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally often find relief in non-verbal creative expression. When stressful events occur, many feel a renewed interest in developing new skills, a change that offers them a creative and artistic outlet. Also, from an empowerment perspective, the artistic process provides clients with a sense of accomplishment, mastery, and personal strength. People are realizing that the arts can

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

play a positive role in fostering emotional responses, upholding personal well-being, and potentially aiding in preventing future mental health crises. The creative process enables a flow state of awareness, increases self-expression, and cultivates a post-experiential discussion. As such, art therapy benefits a sense of community and connection through shared creative experiences. The growth of art therapy in young people is fueled in large part by increasing interest in the social and emotional consequences of utilizing art as a form of treatment for those suffering from childhood and adolescent mental illness. Overall, many aspects of art therapy compare to traditional recreational activities. However, art therapy is the only treatment method that has proven to foster personal expression and well-being in ways that surpass traditional therapeutic methods [15, 16].

Innovations and Emerging Trends in Art Therapy

Several current innovations and emerging trends in the field of art therapy paint an optimistic future for this creative mental health treatment. If there is one current development that excites the entire field of art therapy, it is the increased use of technology in the process of creating artwork. The opportunity to use digital art for art therapy is a way to involve clients who love technology but do not seek out art therapy in typical community settings. In addition, many applications are being developed that allow the therapist to create virtual reality experiences for the client to experience or collaborate in creating. Art therapy is used to treat many different groups of people, and innovative trends include adaptations and new ways of working with often-underrepresented groups. Ultimately, art therapists are responsible for demonstrating the effectiveness of the new trends. To that extent, many trends and new ideas being developed have little to no research behind them. There are, however, many art therapy researchers looking into the effectiveness of these new innovative methods. The large scope of art therapy can seem overwhelming when thinking about how to direct the field in a modern world, where there are so many contemporary issues with mental health. However, the art therapy training programs are ready for the challenge of producing therapists able to work ethically with these new trends and with a rapidly changing society. To this end, the training programs adapt and change, integrating changing values about multiculturalism and justice, the needs of new clients and their reasons for seeking mental health care, and the research that supports them. In sum, art therapy continues to innovate and adapt as rapidly as society and technology enable. Art therapists are ready to demonstrate to the public that art therapy is an effective and needed approach to contemporary mental health challenges [17, 18].

CONCLUSION

As mental health treatment evolves to embrace more holistic and individualized approaches, art therapy stands out as a unique modality that fosters emotional expression, healing, and resilience. The future of art therapy will likely see further integration of technology, expanded applications in trauma care, and increased recognition of its effectiveness in a variety of clinical settings. Its accessibility and adaptability make it an essential tool in modern mental health care, offering a bridge between traditional therapies and innovative, creative solutions. With ongoing research and development, art therapy has the potential to redefine how we approach mental wellness, ensuring it remains a crucial part of treatment for diverse populations.

REFERENCES

1. Hu J, Zhang J, Hu L, Yu H, Xu J. Art Therapy: A Complementary Treatment For Mental Disorders. *Frontiers In Psychology*. 2021 Aug 12;12:686005.
2. Vaartio-Rajalin H, Santamäki-Fischer R, Jokisalo P, Fagerström L. Art Making And Expressive Art Therapy In Adult Health And Nursing Care: A Scoping Review. *International Journal Of Nursing Sciences*. 2021 Jan 10;8(1):102-19. [Sciencedirect.Com](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnur.2021.01.005)
3. Wang Y. Art Therapy For Individuals With Autism Spectrum Disorder And Depression: Effectiveness And Future Directions. *Journal Of Education, Humanities And Social Sciences*. 2023 Nov 26;22:168-74.
4. Jhaveri K. Healing Roots Of Indigenous Crafts: Adapting Traditions Of India For Art Therapy Practice. *Incraft In Art Therapy 2020 Jul 27* (Pp. 118-130). Routledge.
5. American Occupational Therapy Association. Educator's Guide For Addressing Cultural Awareness, Humility, And Dexterity In Occupational Therapy Curricula. *The American Journal Of Occupational Therapy*. 2020 Nov 1;74(Supplement_3):7413420003p1-9.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

6. Carden-Coyne A. The Art Of Resilience: Veteran Therapy From The Occupational To The Creative, 1914–45. In *The First World War And Health* 2020 Mar 27 (Pp. 39-70). Brill.
7. Dijkhoorn AF, Brom L, Van Der Linden YM, Leget C, Raijmakers NJ. Prevalence Of Burnout In Healthcare Professionals Providing Palliative Care And The Effect Of Interventions To Reduce Symptoms: A Systematic Literature Review. *Palliative Medicine*. 2021 Jan;35(1):6-26. [Sagepub.Com](https://doi.org/10.1185/13619202010000000000000000000000)
8. Samra B, Jabbour E, Ravandi F, Kantarjian H, Short NJ. Evolving Therapy Of Adult Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia: State-Of-The-Art Treatment And Future Directions. *Journal Of Hematology & Oncology*. 2020 Dec;13:1-7. [Springer.Com](https://doi.org/10.1185/13619202010000000000000000000000)
9. Emblad SY, Mukaetova-Ladinska EB. Creative Art Therapy As A Non-Pharmacological Intervention For Dementia: A Systematic Review. *Journal Of Alzheimer's Disease Reports*. 2021 Jan 1;5(1):353-64. [Iospress.Com](https://doi.org/10.1185/13619202010000000000000000000000)
10. Moula Z. A Systematic Review Of The Effectiveness Of Art Therapy Delivered In School-Based Settings To Children Aged 5–12 Years. *International Journal Of Art Therapy*. 2020 Apr 2;25(2):88-99.
11. Shafir T, Orkibi H, Baker FA, Gussak D, Kaimal G. The State Of The Art In Creative Arts Therapies. *Frontiers In Psychology*. 2020 Feb 5;11:68.
12. Beerse ME, Van Lith T, Stanwood G. Therapeutic Psychological And Biological Responses To Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy. *Stress And Health*. 2020 Oct;36(4):419-32.
13. Uttley L, Scope A, Stevenson M, Rawdin A, Buck ET, Sutton A, Stevens J, Kaltenthaler E, Dent-Brown K, Wood C. Systematic Review And Economic Modelling Of The Clinical Effectiveness And Cost-Effectiveness Of Art Therapy Among People With Non-Psychotic Mental Health Disorders. *Health Technology Assessment*. 2015;19(18).
14. Bowling DL. Biological Principles For Music And Mental Health. *Translational Psychiatry*. 2023 Dec 4;13(1):374.
15. Morison L, Simonds L, Stewart SJ. Effectiveness Of Creative Arts-Based Interventions For Treating Children And Adolescents Exposed To Traumatic Events: A Systematic Review Of The Quantitative Evidence And Meta-Analysis. *Arts & Health*. 2022 Sep 2;14(3):237-62.
16. Liu Z, Yang Z, Xiao C, Zhang K, Osmani M. An Investigation Into Art Therapy Aided Health And Well-Being Research: A 75-Year Bibliometric Analysis. *International Journal Of Environmental Research And Public Health*. 2021 Dec 26;19(1):232. [Mdpi.Com](https://doi.org/10.1185/13619202010000000000000000000000)
17. Datlen GW, Pandolfi C. Developing An Online Art Therapy Group For Learning Disabled Young Adults Using Whatsapp. *International Journal Of Art Therapy*. 2020 Oct 1;25(4):192-201.
18. Zemaitaityte I, Bardauskiene R, Pivoriene J, Katkonienė A. Digital Competences Of Future Social Workers: The Art Of Education In Uncertain Times. *Social Work Education*. 2024 May 18;43(4):1078-91. [\[HTML\]](https://doi.org/10.1185/13619202010000000000000000000000)

CITE AS: Nyambura Achieng M. (2024). The Future of Art Therapy in Mental Health Treatment. *Research Output Journal of Public Health and Medicine* 4(1):68-71. <https://doi.org/10.59298/ROJPHM/2024/416871>