



ART BASED THERAPY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effect of art-based therapy on psychologically distressed young adults using a pre-test and post-test research design. Thirty participants were part of the research study. There were two groups, control group (n=15) which didn't receive art therapy sessions, whereas, the experimental group (n=12) was given art-based intervention, which comprised activities such as scribbling, drawing, and painting, conducted over eight sessions. The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS21) were administered before and after the sessions to measure participants' levels of psychological distress of both the groups. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in participants' DASS21 scores of experimental groups following the therapy

sessions, indicating a reduction in depression, anxiety, and stress levels. These findings suggest that art-based therapy may be an effective intervention for alleviating psychological distress among young adults. Further research with larger sample sizes and longitudinal follow-ups is suggested to confirm these findings and explore the mechanisms underlying the therapeutic effects of art-based interventions.

Keywords: Art Therapy, Psychological Distress, Anxiety, Depression, Stress

INTRODUCTION

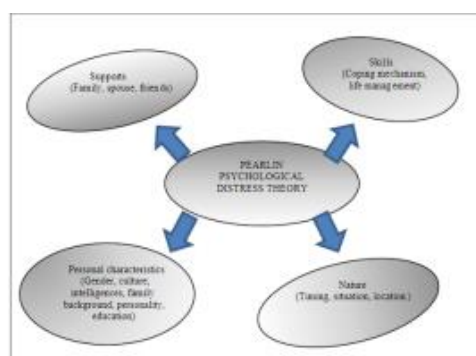
In art-based therapy a variety of creative approaches, including painting, drawing, sculpting, and other artistic expression within therapeutic environments (Engelhardt, Courtney, 2023) are included and using the ability of creativity, which is innate in humans, this method facilitates communication and allows people to explore and describe ideas, emotions, and experiences that may be challenging to convey verbally (Drake & Winner, 2012).

Young adults represent a pivotal phase characterized by numerous shifts in living situations, interpersonal connections, academic pursuits, and career paths. These transitions often provoke stress and emotional strain among individuals in this stage of life (Matud et al., 2020). Due to the stress that the young adults are facing they are not able to express their emotions. Art helps individuals in regulating emotion, improve communication (Drake & Winner, 2012) and it is very flexible and it can be used in numerous ways of a person's dynamic life (Bitonte & De Santo, 2014). In art therapy, through creative expression and nonverbal communication are important in the psychotherapy process (Engelhardt & Courtney, 2023).

Psychological distress is defined as “an undifferentiated group of symptoms ranging from anxiety and depression symptoms to functional impairment, personality traits (confusing, troubling), and behavioral problems” in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5).

Psychological Distress Model

Art based therapy module is based on the Pearlin's psychological distress model which describes distress as psychological responses to stimulus (Rose et al., 2019). This theory explains how human life experiences help him to gain maturity throughout their lives (Rose et al., 2019). Pearlin believes the environment plays an important role in self-development.



Sources: Mirowsky & Ross, 2003

Figure 1: Pearlin Psychological Distress Theory

According to Pearlin's theory of psychological distress, there are four elements that help in an individual's self-development. First, is the personal characteristics which includes gender, culture, intelligence, family background, personality, and education. Second, coping mechanisms to deal with stress in life. Third, support from family and other relationships to deal with the stressful situation in life. Fourth, the nature of the situation (Rose et al., 2019). Art based therapy sessions focus on all these four factors to address the psychological distress faced by the individuals.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative research methods with a pretest and post-test design to comprehensively investigate the effect of art-based therapy on psychological distress among young adults.

Procedure

Initially the screening tool that is DASS 21, was shared using a Google Form, 150 responses were received. 30 people who scored high on the DASS 21 for psychological stress out of which 15 participants were then contacted by email and WhatsApp. Informed consent was taken. All information regarding the intervention program and the research were shared with the participants. Twelve people in this group regularly showed up for the sessions, three participants were not able to continue with the sessions due to their personal reasons. Fifteen participants were a part of control group, and they were not given any intervention. The control group was not provided art therapy sessions but was administered the pre- and post-assessments.

A module consisting of eight sessions was developed with the assistance of an art therapist, and these sessions were conducted over eight consecutive days. Each session lasted for one hour 30 minutes and took place online via Google Meet. Participants were instructed by the art therapist to gather art supplies such as pencils, colors, watercolors, and sheets for the sessions. The module was structured around Pearlin's psychological distress model. After the intervention program was over, DASS 21 was shared via google form to these participants of the experimental group after 15 days to check if there was any effect of art-based therapy intervention on their psychological distress level. And form was shared with participants who were part of the control group, who didn't receive any intervention. After collecting the data scoring was done, and data analysis was done using the paired t- test.

Figure 1

This table shows the module of art therapy sessions:

Sessions	Duration	Activity
Session 1	1 hour 30 minutes	To draw four objects that they felt best represented themselves and give one title to the artwork that they created.
Session 2	1 hour 30 minutes	To draw a roadmap of all the good memories that have happened with them from their childhood till now.
Session 3	1 hour 30 minutes	To scribble for 10 minutes. Then after 10 minutes the therapist instructed them to create an art out of scribbling that they have done. They can use any art material like colors, paint, origami but the only point to keep in mind is to make an art out of scribble.
Session 4	1 hour 30 minutes	Participants were asked to imagine that if there is a window, when someone opens it, they can directly see what's there in your heart, so participants must draw things that can be seen from their heart.
Session 5	1 hour 30 minutes	They must draw, color, write thank you to the people who have always supported them, and they were present in their hard times.
Session 6	1 hour 30 minutes	They were asked to “make a comfort basket” which should include items related to all the five senses i.e. hearing, seeing, smell, touch and taste.

Session 7	1 hour 30 minutes	to draw a superhero, name it and must tell the superpowers they wish they had to deal with their problems and how the superhero is going to help them to deal with the stress.
Session 8	1 hour 30 minutes	They must tell a story through six boxes, the first column should consist of hero i.e. main character, then in second column they have
		to draw things that the hero wants to achieve in his/her life, in third column they must draw the superpowers of the hero which means the strengths of the main character, fourth column they have to draw the villain in hero's life that is the problems/challenges they are going to face. Fifth column, twist and turn that is what will happen between the hero and villain, fight, argument etc., sixth column in these participants must draw the ending of this story. What happens when hero and villain fights, who wins?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The aim of this research was to study the effect of art-based therapy on psychological distress among young adults. There was a total of 30 participants in the study. The random assignment of participants was done into the experimental (n=12) and control (n=15) groups. In the experimental (n=12) group there were 11 females and 1 male and in the control group

(n=15), there were 11 females and 4 males.

This table demonstrates the scores of control group in depression, anxiety and stress which measures the psychological distress of an individual.

Table 1

This table shows Pre-test and Post-test scores of controls groups

Group	Variables	Pre- test		Post- test		N	T	P	Cohen's d
		M	SD	M	SD				
Control group	Depression	33.73	5.06	35.07	6.04	15	-.94	.36	0.24
	Anxiety	30.93	6.75	35.07	6.04	15	-1.96	.07	0.64
	Stress	31.67	6.34	35.60	6.28	15	-2.10	.06	0.62

Note: * $p < 0.05$

In **control group**, pre-test scores of depressions, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) is 33.73 and 5.06, n=15, whereas in post test score, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are 35.07 and 6.04, the t-value is -.94, p value is .36 which shows that there is a no significant difference in the mean depression scores among the participants. Cohens d value of 0.24 showing statistically small effect.

In **anxiety**, the pre-test scores are as follows, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) scores is 30.93 and 6.75, whereas in post test score, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are 35.97 and 6.04, the t value is -1.96, p value is .07 which shows that there is a no significant

difference in the anxiety scores among the participants. Cohen's d value of 0.64 showing large effect on anxiety of the participants.

In *stress*, the pre-test scores are as follows, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) scores is 31.67 and 6.34, whereas in post test score, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are 35.60 and 6.28, the t value is -2.10, p value is .06 which shows that there is a no significant difference in the stress scores among the participants. Cohen's d value is 0.62 showing large effect on stress of the study participants. The findings indicate that the psychological distress levels of the control group participants increased in the absence of art-based therapy interventions.

Table 2

This table shows Pre-test and Post-test scores of experimental groups

Group	Variables	Pre- test		Post- test		n	t	p	Cohen's d
		M	SD	M	SD				
Experimental group	Depression	26.67	11.48	12.25	11.80	12	2.94	.01	1.23
	Anxiety	29.17	9.62	20.17	8.02	12	2.89	.01	1.01
	Stress	27.67	8.58	16.67	8.83	12	3.88	.00	1.26

Note: *p< 0.05

In pre-test, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) scores of depression in experimental group are 26.67 and 11.48, n= 12, Whereas in post-test, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are

12.25 and 11.80, the t value is -2.94, p value is .01 which shows that art based therapy has a significant difference in reducing depression levels among the participants and Cohens d value is 1.23 showing large effect of the art based therapy of study participants on depression.

In anxiety, the pre-test scores of experimental group the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) is 29.17 and 9.62, Whereas in post-test, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are 20.17 and 8.02, the t value is 2.89, p value is .01 which shows that art based therapy has shown significant difference in reducing anxiety levels among the participants and Cohen's d value is 1.01 showing large effect of the art based therapy of study participants on anxiety.

In stress, the pre-test scores of experimental group are, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) is 27.67 and 8.58, Whereas in post-test, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are 16.67 and 8.83, the t value is 3.88, p value is 0.00 which shows that art based therapy has a significant difference in reducing stress levels among the participants and Cohen's d value is 1.26 showing large effect of the art based therapy of study participants on stress. Hence, the results reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference of art-based therapy on psychological distress in young adults.

The study's findings show that there was a significant difference in the experimental group's pre- and post-test scores for stress, anxiety, and depression. This shows that the participants' psychological distress was effectively addressed by the art-based therapy intervention. The therapeutic program included a range of activities based on Pearlin's theory of psychological distress, which considers four essential aspects of an individual: environmental context, coping strategies, social support, and personal traits (Rose et al., 2019)

Participants in the eight-day intervention program participated on a variety of activities,

including coloring, sketching, and scribbling, with the goal of evoking a range of feelings, such as joy, thankfulness, and grief. According to Eaton and Tieber's (2017) research, engaging in artistic activities can be an effective way to lessen symptoms of anxiety and depression. The participants expressed that these activities gave them an outlet to release pent-up feelings that they had been battling for several months. These activities helped individuals to express their deepest emotions and experiences via art-related activities, which encouraged self-expression and a sense of empowerment (Alwledat et al., 2023; Blomdahl et al., 2016).

These endeavors work as both preventative measures and therapeutic outlets (Gómez-Restrepo et al., 2022). Furthermore, patients' artistic expressions give medical professionals insightful information (Hu et al., 2021). Beyond clinical contexts, art-based therapies have been shown to have therapeutic advantages. They have been found to be especially successful in educational institutions, where peer and staff support systems are critical in reducing psychological distress (Mittal et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the intervention sessions' judgment-free and encouraging atmosphere encouraged open and honest communication among participants. In addition to enabling people to explore various aspects of their personalities, this group experience sharing promoted a sense of belonging and community. Participants were given tools for self-awareness and personal development throughout the intervention sessions, which helped them create new coping strategies and take better care of their psychological health (Potash et al., 2017).

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, using artistic expression and social support as therapeutic instruments, art-

based treatments offer a complete approach for relieving youths' psychological distress. The findings point to the potential of using art-based therapies in a variety of contexts, such as therapeutic settings and educational institutions. Therapists can help their clients develop self-awareness by doing the exercises in the intervention module. These treatments can provide essential skills for self-discovery to young adults who are struggling with mental health issues by utilizing the supportive surroundings typically seen in school settings. Additionally, these activities foster personal development in addition to facilitating peer support and teamwork. As we research and develop these treatments, it is imperative that the inclusion of art-based therapies within mental health treatment paradigms be given high attention to enhance the well-being of those coping with psychological difficulties.

LIMITATION

Firstly, the sample size was small. Secondly, there was a significant gender disparity among the participants, reflecting existing stigma surrounding men's mental health. Finally, extending the duration of assessment phases could provide further insights into potential interferences or variations over time.

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