

The Effects of Art Therapy on PTSD

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Introduction

Art therapy is nonverbal therapy used to approach traumatic experiences. Because creating art is a fun, safe activity, patients are less reluctant, and their emotional threat level is lowered. There is some research that indicates that art therapy may be useful in revealing and processing disconnected memories in individuals who are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, it is important to consider whether this is true in all or most cases, as well as how effective this type of therapy is in improving PTSD symptoms and symptoms of other concurrent disorders. This study will explore the effects of art therapy on individuals experiencing PTSD and related disorders.

Research Question

- What are the effects of art therapy on individuals experiencing PTSD and related symptoms?
- Does art therapy have the means to reduce symptoms of PTSD and related disorders?
- Would it be better to only use a cognitive processing or prolonged exposure approach?
- If art therapy is not the best option, could it be used in addition to cognitive processing or prolonged exposure therapies?

Background and Literature Review

PTSD is experienced by 5-10% of people in the population [1]. In addition, 83% of adults with PTSD also experience related disorders, such as anxiety and depression [1]. All four studies conducted by Becker [1], Campbell [2], Goodarzi [3], and Woolett [4], reported that individuals experiencing PTSD experienced the inability to verbally communicate their trauma, emotions, and feelings. Becker's research indicates that there is often a disconnect between the right and left hemispheres of the brain that causes the inability to verbally communicate [1]. Art therapy provides a safe, enjoyable environment where an individual's sense of threat is lowered thus, creating lowered patient resistance [1]. Goodarzi et al. feel that because art therapy is an "indirect, non-verbal therapeutic approach," it may be a better way to approach patients.

Method

Design: The type of research design will be secondary research using a systematic literature review. This study will be both quantitative and qualitative as some studies have numerical findings and some have non-numerical findings.

Materials: Both primary and secondary research will be used for this study. These sources will be more recent (2012-2021) peer-reviewed journal articles including several systematic reviews. The databases that will be used are ProQuest Direct, Art & Architecture Complete, the Directory of Open Access Journals, and SAGE.

Procedure: Potential research that pertains to the subjects of PTSD and art therapy through the CSUSTAN library database will be collected. The keywords will be "PTSD" and "art therapy." Studies that address art therapy but do not include PTSD as a main area of interest will be excluded. Additionally, articles that do not include art therapy as a treatment for PTSD, specifically, will be excluded. Then, the results of the articles will be analyzed and synthesized.

Expected Results

Based on current research, it is expected that art therapy will reduce symptoms of PTSD and related disorders. However, it is also expected that the results may be ambiguous. Because every individual experiences PTSD differently, art therapy may not work for everyone. Thus, the results may be inconclusive.

Significance

This research is important, because 5-10% of the population experiences PTSD [1]. This includes 23% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans from recent wars, 17% of veterans from the Vietnam-era, and 10% of Gulf War veterans [2]. In addition, 83% of adults with PTSD also experience related disorders, such as anxiety and depression [1]. Because therapies such as cognitive processing and prolonged exposure tend to have a high dropout rate, art therapy may be an effective solution to the treatment of PTSD symptoms and related disorders [3]. This study will enhance our knowledge of how symptoms of PTSD and related disorders can be treated.

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