

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on Art Therapy

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Abstract: *Learning art therapy is able to improve relationships between people (Shukla et al 2022. Aside from participating in sports and recreation arts and crafts activities are ways to address mental health concerns (Liu et al. 2019. Mental health is one of the impacts of residents' lives in fast-paced and developed cities (Marzukhi et al. 2020.) This systematic literature review (SLR) of 44 studies relevant to arts and crafts programs as a strategy for mental therapy aims to explore the similarities, differences, benefits and constraints pertinent to program implementation. The method of conducting this SLR refers to Khan et al (2003) guidelines, which suggest the following steps: determine the research question, choose the types of study to be included, design a search to identify those studies, review the relevance and results of the studies. The research question for this SLR is what are the similarities and differences of art therapy programs that aim to promote mental therapy? The explicit set of rules applied in this SLR are to review studies published from 2019 until 2024 using five established and open-access academic web database research tools i.e Web of Science, Science Direct, Scopus, IEEE Xplore and Emerald Insight. All databases are academic, online resources available to the researchers. For efficiency, and transparency, the researchers use Google Notebook LM, an AI tool to analyse the selected literature. The findings of the SLR highlight there is varied literature, diverse types of art activities for therapy, specified target population and different program settings implementation. The findings of the gap within the literature are useful for further research on art therapy effectiveness and practices towards an improved mental and quality of life.*

Keywords: art and craft, therapy, mental health, community

1. Introduction

One of the impacts on residents' lives in fast-paced and developed cities such as Petaling Jaya is the increasingly challenging mental health (Marzukhi et al., 2020). This concern can be addressed by the involvement of residents in various healthy and meaningful activities such as activities related to arts and crafts (Liu et al., 2019). Therapy through arts and crafts programs can improve the quality of life and improve human relationships (Shukla et al., 2022). However, scholars report varied constraints towards art and crafts program implementation for positive outcomes of mental related due to variety of constraints. The systematic literature review (SLR) aims to explore past studies on how arts and crafts activities within a community program context provide a platform to improve mental health.

In dealing with mental health, apart from sports and recreation, the proven effectiveness is through the art of painting, and making handicrafts can give peace and joy to its practitioners (Shukla et al., 2022). In reality, learning art does not need to involve high costs if operating costs are kept to a minimum with the involvement of the community, i.e. teaching staff and facilities available within the community itself (<https://www.volunteerworld.com/en/volunteer-abroad/culture-arts>). In addition, this art community program can foster an attitude of concern and mutual relations towards the community and local authorities.

2. Theoretical Background

Art therapy practice has become prevalent giving rise to a multitude of programs initially emerging from experiential learning in medical and psychiatric hospitals (Lopez Escribano et al., 2023). The Lima Declaration on Art, Health, and Development (PAHO 2009) emphasises the ingrained power of art in promoting cultural and social diversity and considers art as “a powerful tool for promoting and repairing health, allowing individuals and communities to rework critical, painful or problematic situations and promote better and happier scenarios for their lives” (PAHO 2009, p. 3). Art therapy faces a challenge i.e. the lack of robust research into the profession (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). Art therapy, a therapeutic practice combines aspects of psychotherapy with art to support healing through individual or groups (Ontario Art Therapy Association, 2014). Engagement facilitates the healing process by encouraging the creative expression of feelings, thoughts, and memories through sensory engagement (Ansloos et al., 2022). According to Claisse et al (2024), recovery or healing can be described as a process of becoming well and hopeful despite having an illness. Understanding this healing process is important in improving mental health for better quality of life. However, the recovery journey can be chaotic, and conceptual models to identify key processes and stages for recovery were identified. Key processes for recovery are Connectedness; Future Hope and optimism; Identity; Meaning in life; and Empowerment (Leamy et al., 2011). Scholars define place as ‘a lived environment constructed by people, through interactions, shared experiences and connections’ (Doroud et al., 2018).

Social creative experiences, according to Wood et al. (2023) as cultural and community activities enable older women create social networks with others. Perkins et. al. (2022) survey of 5892 adults in the United Kingdom explores the extent to which arts engagement is perceived to be linked with feelings of social connectedness for example attending a live music performance and theatre, and watching a film or drama at the cinema were found to (Perkins et al., 2021). In another study student repurposing materials as art developed an even greater awareness of waste and began to reframe their ideas about waste with greater empathy (Corbisiero-Drakos et al., 2021). From the perspective of educational curriculum, art classes or activities face issues of the types of activities to match the skills learned and learning outcomes, effective vs ineffective communication and balancing user needs (Sheridan et al., 2022). Leavy (2020) suggests that the evaluation of arts programs for therapy should be robust with clear evaluation methodologies. They further argue that little attention is given to whether cultural and art initiatives are cost-effective (Belfiore, 2002). More recently, studies of participatory arts-based research projects highlight that outcomes within and beyond the project should address budget constraints, inclusion criteria, location of the session, project duration and resources (Nunn, 2022).

3. Methodology

The methodology of this SLR refers to the five-step method as proposed by Khan et al. (2003). In conducting an SLR, Khan et al. (2003) suggest that the SLR must frame the research question, select the relevant studies, assess the quality, synthesis the data and interpret the findings. In this study, upon defining the research question i.e. what are the similarities and differences of arts therapy programs, the first task was to search and log into five online databases to which the researcher has access through their library subscription. The databases applied in this SLR are Scopus, IEEE, Emerald Insight, Science Direct and Web of Science. The first database is a Scopus online database, provided by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education. This database is a powerful tool to find scholarly articles and track research trends across various fields. The online database search engine allows a search of articles of keywords, article titles and abstracts relevant to the topic of study.

For this SLR, we chose to review articles published in the past five years i.e. from 2019-2024 considering more recent studies. The researchers used the keywords “arts and crafts”, “therapy”, and “community” applying filters for articles on social science subjects. The search yielded 880 documents initially in the Scopus database. Upon further readings of the abstracts by the researchers, the search narrowed to eleven articles that we consider aligned with the research question. The second online database selected was the IEEE Xplore in which the content comprises conference papers and technical standards. Relevant to the research question of how arts and crafts programs benefit therapy and learning, the search in IEEE Xplore found six results comprising three conferences and two related journals but only one article was relevant. The third online database search for this study was the Emerald Insight considered as one of the global digital-first publishers. A search using the same keywords found 237 articles initially. Narrowing the search, the researchers decided on four articles relevant to answering the research question. Using the search on the Science Direct database, we selected eight articles that are also linked and accessible through Google Scholar, and twenty articles from the Web of Science relevant to the topic of this study. We used forty-four articles from the online database subscribed by the researchers’ university library. The study’s constraints include limited online access to full articles subject to the university’s subscription. We acknowledge that other databases could potentially yield additional relevant articles; however, the articles selected for review in context are of high quality, peer-reviewed studies published in credible databases and are relevant to the research question.

Upon downloading the full text of these articles for review, we uploaded them onto an AI tool i.e. Notebook LM developed by Google for further categorization according to the researchers’ queries and prompts. The motivation for using this AI tool was timesaving features and efficiency. Fabiano et al. (2024) state that there is much potential for efficiency in streamlining the research workflow by integrating AI tools into the systematic review process and points out that authors are responsible to cross verify the information provided. In addition, Golan et al. (2023) argue that AI tools for scientific writing should be widely adopted while scholars warn that researchers and authors when using AI must uphold scientific ethics. Ethical use of AI can be summarized as acting truthfully and honestly, not distorting data, and not trying to progress unfairly (Dolunay & Temel, 2024; Bin-Nashwan et al., 2023; Farina & Stevenson, 2024). The categorisation of the selected articles for review are in the following categories: similarities, differences and gaps of the study. Sauer and Seuring (2023) suggest one of the six steps in the process of conducting a literature review includes describing the gaps of the study.

3.1 Analysis and Findings using AI tool

Using an AI tool i.e. Google Notebook LM (Notebook) accessible on the website <https://notebooklm.google/> we uploaded the forty four selected articles that were based on meeting the research question and the protocol beforehand. We proceed to type the relevant prompt or query for example “List out the similarities, differences, findings and gaps of the selected articles”. We verified the citation information matches the original article and proceeded to further summarise the information brought forth and highlight the key findings. The AI tool works by connecting the articles with citations and synthesising the information across multiple documents, however, it is the responsibility of the researcher to verify the information and the sources. The query from the researcher acts as a basis for information analysis. The following Table 1: Summary of Key Descriptions of Art Therapy Review highlights the similarities, differences, findings and gaps of the selected articles verified and crosschecked by the researchers.

Regarding the benefits and constraints of art therapy programs, the literature highlighted several findings. Art therapy assists patients express themselves, heal mental health, and enhance social relationships Timm-Bottos, and Reilly, (2015). However, the causes of mental illness are varied and complex, thus treatment needs to be individualized (Ansloos et al., 2022). Another benefit is that digital art therapy can help connect geographical distances and facilitate mobility disabilities but there is limited literature available regarding this (Abbotts & Spence, 2013). Thirdly, although art therapy interventions can help reduce trauma symptom severity and anxiety in traumatized adults there are a limited number of controlled outcome trials incorporating art therapy for trauma and with methodological weaknesses (Lopez-Escribano et al., 2023). In addition, art therapy provides opportunities to explore interests, identify social expressions, manage emotions, increase awareness of empirical evidence, enhance understanding, and facilitate attitude changes but art therapists are missing an established research tradition, thus limiting the evidence base for the effectiveness of art therapy (Lopez-Escribano et al., 2023).

Table 1: Summary of Key Descriptions of Art Therapy Review

Authors/Article	Similarities	Differences	Findings	Gap
Timm-Bottos, J., & Reilly, R. C. (2015).	Qualitative Research Focus: These sources display qualitative research	Specific contexts and interventions vary: These sources examine different interventions and populations. It explores the efficacy of member checks and utilizes thematic analysis with a consensus-based approach. Different context of member checking include highlighting a community-based approach to research. Sources uses thematic analysis to assess the impact of an art program on mental health service users, focusing on	The importance of participant voices and perspectives: All sources highlight the value of participant input. Sources utilise member checking to ensure accurate interpretation, and use quotes to illustrate participant experiences.	Generalizability of findings: The focus on specific contexts and small sample sizes in these studies limits the generalizability of their findings to broader populations.
Ansloos, J. et al. (2022).	methodologies in exploring the effectiveness and impact of art and craft-based interventions. They prioritize understanding participant experiences and perspectives through methods like member checks, interviews, and thematic analysis.			
Chevalier-Amy, N. (2020).				
López-Escribano, C., Orío-Aparicio, C., & Cao, M. L. F. (2023).				
Ansloos, J. P. et al. (2024).				
Tselegkaridis, S., & Sapounidis, T. (2022).				
Clift, S., et al. (2021).				
Arslanbek, A., et al. (2022).				

Castle, C. et al. (2024). Wood, P. (2024). Coventry et al. (2021)		themes of health, social relations, and art benefits.		
Cassetti, V., et al. (2020). Costa, A. et al. (2021) Morse, D. F. et al. (2022)	Content Analysis: The sources analyze a collection of articles on art therapy, employing both bibliometric and content analysis methods to understand research trends and patterns.	Scope of analysis: The Sources highlight theoretical models, and research methods. They utilize visual representations to showcase data on population groups, artistic disciplines, and assessment types. The source focuses on the use of assessments, emphasizing the value of case studies in art therapy research.	Trends in art therapy research: The sources indicate several trends such as the predominance of female authors, visual art as the dominant discipline, and a limited use of standardized assessments.	Depth of analysis on specific interventions: Although the bibliometric approach provides an overview of research trends, it lacks an in-depth analysis of specific interventions or their effectiveness.
Evans, W. D., et al. (2022).	Scoping Review Methodology: These sources employ a scoping review methodology to systematically map the existing literature on approaches in health promotion.	Focus of intervention and synthesis: The primary focus is identifying key characteristics of interventions. The source outline the search strategy, data extraction, and synthesis process. The article present the results, including the number of studies and the variation in intervention forms and discuss a framework based on the findings and future research.	Key characteristics of asset-based interventions: The review reveals the diversity of asset-based interventions, strategies for asset mobilization, and the need for robust evaluation methods.	Impact and effectiveness of specific interventions: The scoping review does not deeply analyze the effectiveness of specific interventions.
Ventä-Olkkonen, L. et al. (2019) Urke, H.B. et al. (2021)	Photo-Elicitation and Digital Storytelling: The sources utilize photo-elicitation and digital storytelling methods in therapeutic contexts, analyzing the impact of these interventions on participants' experiences.	Target Population and Data Analysis: The article use thematic analysis with a team-based coding approach to study the experiences of individuals with chronic illness using photo-elicitation and digital storytelling.	Benefits of creative expression and therapeutic environment: The sources highlight the positive impacts of creative expression through these methods, emphasizing their potential benefits in therapeutic settings.	Long-term effects and generalizability: The source do not offer insights into the long-term effects of the interventions.

Masika, G. M., Yu, D. S., & Li, P. W. (2020). Ball, S. et al. (2021). Marshall, K. (2022). Hartmann, Koch, & Wenzel (2021). Hensen, Holt, Honda, & Bungay (2024)	Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of Arts-Based Approaches to Stakeholder Engagement in Research: These sources present a rapid evidence assessment (REA) of arts-based approaches to stakeholder engagement and feedback in research.	Focus of analysis: The articles describe the REA methodology, rationale for using arts-based approaches, desired outcomes, and the process for selecting appropriate methods. They describe the quality of evidence based on factors like clarity of aims, description of methods, and limitations acknowledged by authors.	Value and diversity of arts-based approaches: The REA highlights the value of arts-based approaches for engaging stakeholders in research.	Comprehensive comparison with other engagement approaches: While the REA focuses on the strengths and limitations of arts-based approaches, it doesn't provide a detailed comparison with other engagement strategies
Daykin, N., et al. (2021). Bild & Pachana (2022)	Social Capital and Participatory Arts: These sources investigate the role of social capital in promoting well-being through participation in the arts.	Focus of analysis: The articles describe the systematic review process, highlighting the inclusion of qualitative studies and the thematic analysis of social capital themes.	Positive Impacts of Arts Participation on Well-being: The review reveals positive impacts of participatory arts on well-being, highlighting the role of social capital in facilitating these benefits.	Quantitative measures of social capital and well-being: The articles primarily rely on qualitative data and does not provide quantitative measures of social capital or its relationship with well-being.
Jongen, C. et al. (2023). Stewart, V. et al. (2019).	Design for Behavior Change (DfBC): These sources explore the application of design principles to influence behavior change, focusing on various domains like sustainability, health, and well-being.	Focus and Method: The article provides a theoretical overview of DfBC and examines its implementation in organizations through an online survey and focus groups.	Emerging theories and tools in DfBC: The sources highlight emerging theories and tools in DfBC, emphasizing the importance of understanding user needs and motivations for effective behavior change interventions.	Specific case studies and evaluation of effectiveness: While providing an overview of DfBC, the sources lack detailed case studies or robust evaluations of the effectiveness of different approaches.
Keisari, S. et al. (2021). Bux, D. B., & van Schalkwyk, I. (2022).	Arts Integration in Education: These sources examine the implementation and assessment of an arts integration program in elementary schools.	Focus and Data Analysis: The source focuses on student outcomes related to arts integration and presents quantitative data on completed student rubrics across different years.	Trends in student performance: The data presented in the table highlight trends in student performance in arts-integrated learning environments.	Specific impacts on different learning outcomes: While providing overall trends, the source does not offer detailed analysis of the program's impact on specific learning outcomes or student subgroups.
Ferronato, N. et al. (2024).	Systematic Review of Waste Upcycling in	Focus of Analysis: Sources outline the review's	Barriers and Enablers to Waste Upcycling:	Detailed case studies and specific recommendations:

Moroz, N., Moroz, I., & D'Angelo, M. S. (2020) Niedderer, K. et al. (2016) Pöllänen, S. (2015). Caldera, S. et al. (2022).	Business Enterprises: These sources present a systematic review examining the barriers and enablers of waste upcycling practices in various business enterprises.	methodology, search strategy, and screening process, highlighting the use of the context-intervention-mechanism-outcome (C-I-M-O) framework.	The review identifies common barriers and enablers to waste upcycling practices across different types and sizes of business enterprises.	Although there is a general overview of barriers and enablers, it lacks in-depth case studies or specific recommendations for overcoming these barriers and promoting successful upcycling practices.
Coventry, P. A. et al. (2021). Feronato, N. et al. (2024).	Analysis of Plastic Waste Circularity: These sources analyze related to waste management of plastic and circular economy practices.	Focus of analysis: Sources describe the methodology, country selection process, and criteria for assessing plastic waste circularity, highlighting the use of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework.	Current state of plastic waste management & circularity initiatives: The analysis provides insights into the existing circular economy initiatives in the selected developing countries.	Economic viability and scalability of circular solutions: The analysis lacks detailed assessment of the economic viability and scalability of the solutions.
Ozer, E. J. et al. (2020). Choi, M., Tessler, H., & Kao, G. (2020). Broupi, A.E. et al. (2023) Corbisiero-Drakos et al. (2021) Nunes, C. (2022) Kim, Y., & Park, S. (2021) Corbisiero-Drakos et al. (2021) Fortunati, Manganeli, & Ferrin (2022) McClean, Holgate, Bloice, & Murray (2019)	Review of Youth Participation Approaches: These sources review existing literature on different approaches to youth participation in research and community settings.	Focus of analysis: Sources describe the search strategy and selection process for identifying diversity of approaches and their application in various contexts.	Benefits and challenges of youth participation: The review highlights the benefits and challenges of different youth participation approaches, emphasizing the need for consistent reporting standards, increased research with younger age groups, and further exploration of power-sharing dynamics.	Comparative analysis of different approaches and long-term impacts: The review lacks a comprehensive comparative analysis of their effectiveness and does not extensively explore the long-term impacts of youth participation.

3.2 Summary

In summary, the sources provide evidence about the benefits and constraints of art therapy programs. Research has shown that art therapy can be beneficial in a range of situations and for various populations. For example, art therapy can help patients express themselves, improve mental health, enhance interpersonal relationships, and slow cognitive decline. It can also help bridge geographical distances and cope better with mobility disabilities and stigma. Online art therapy can help sustain connections and build new relationships. In addition, visual art therapy can be effective in improving cognitive functions and can be an effective for dementia. However, the sources also note that art therapy can have some constraints. For example, the

meaning of some artistic outputs may not always be clear to the public, researchers and community (Lopez-Escribano et al., 2023). In addition, art programs face financial resources barrier as relationships with diverse stakeholders can require a significant financial investments including operating and staffing costs. Sustaining an art program for the community does require a sum of money to operate and sustain. Another constraint include time management as these programs require time to implement and develop. With low financial support, constraints of finding volunteers to contribute their 'free' time may be an issue. Finally, facilities eg space and tools must be fit for the purpose and is accessible to attract participants, which may be a constraint when there is limited budget or financing.

Several of the sources focus on research methodologies. They illustrate the use of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis in art therapy research, including thematic analysis, coding frames, and bibliometric and content analysis. They also discuss using various software programs to manage data, such as NVivo and Atlas.ti. (Woods 2024). Focus Group Discussions (FGD) is also a reliable method that scholars can elicit information from different communities about a specific topic (Kamaruddin et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2024). The sources highlight the importance of prolonged and continuous engagement and consistent observation, member checks, as important qualitative data collection methods in art therapy research

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the review consists of varied literature about the types of art therapy activities, the target population and the setting of the programs implemented. These characteristics are vital in any art therapy program. The findings of the review indicate that the outcome is varied but points towards uplifting mental health wellness, social inclusion and learning functions. Both qualitative and quantitative data are essential in art therapy research thus the analysis can lead towards understanding the efficiency of the program, resource requirements, effective duration and consistent reviewing and the necessary space or platform required. The suitable methods applied must consider the targeted population. The sources emphasize the importance of ethical considerations in research. Researchers should obtain informed consent from participants or, when necessary, ethical approval from appropriate boards and committees. Research gaps found the need for more studies to assess the effectiveness and development of art-based approaches to mental therapy and quality of life while taking into consideration the different geographical, and cultural contexts, and sustainability matters.

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