



Evaluating The Effect Of Art Therapy On Life Satisfaction, Emotional Intelligence And Self-Esteem: A Review Of Literature

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Abstract

Art therapy has gained popularity in the recent years due to its holistic nature and artistic in its process. It is a type of treatment that promotes better mental health and psychological well-being. It is best known for helping the individuals in the process of emotional and self-expression. This detailed review of literature attempts to extract the concrete basis that supports the impact of art therapy in three major areas: life satisfaction, emotional intelligence and self-esteem. Systematic reviews of existing studies and researches indicates that art therapy has shown a positive impact on emotional well-being, increasing self-esteem and overall satisfaction with life. Theories such as positive psychology, models drawn from art-based therapies also reveals the ways of art therapy works while also highlighting the advantage of emotional expression, symbolically communicating without use of just words and self-exploration that overall facilitates better regulation of emotions and developing positive self-concept. However, there are also evidences, limitations and visible gaps that are persistently being there specifically regarding systematic researches in a non-clinical population. It is suggested to use a more standardized and controlled researches using rigorous methods to further validate and generalize the finding to a larger population in the future studies.

Keywords: Life Satisfaction, Self-esteem, Emotional Intelligence, Mental health

Introduction

Mental health can be understood as a state where an individual has good emotional, psychological and social well-being and so they are able to be more self-aware about their capabilities and are able to handle stress in their lives and contribute to the community (WHO). Well-being, solely does not only include the emotions but also the cognitive aspect where subjective well-being is important, which may affect positively or even negatively and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). Satisfaction with life means how well satisfied a person feels with their overall life and its quality (Diener et al., 1985).

Self-esteem is one of the important factors that influences our mental health through a great extent without being noticed. self-esteem is basically how much an individual place worth upon themselves which may include their acceptance of their real self, their perceived confidence and perception of themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). The higher is the self-esteem, the better an individual is able to cope and perform, tolerate stress and function well. There is a theory called sociometer theory which talks about self-esteem as a sort of Reflection of perception of social acceptance and values and this is where it connects personal judgment of self-worth to social and sense of security (Leary & Downs, 1995; Wikipedia). On the other

hand, a low self-esteem can lead to psychological symptoms such as distress, anxiety, bad coping mechanism, depression.

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in our day-to-day life. It is not just about being able to control and manage one's emotion but also to understand other's emotion and use it in a well-regulated manner, it indirectly guides one person's thought process and behavior (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) especially in important situations. Some important components of emotional intelligence include feeling of empathy, well equipped social skills, emotional management and awareness. Theoretical models like trait and ability models of emotional intelligence indicates how emotional intelligence can be an influencing factor when it comes to mental health, stress management and social well-being (MDPI Literature).

Art therapy is a creative medium that combines various artistic activities which have therapeutic effect in the process itself which helps the individuals to process their blocked emotions, explore their internal thoughts and which is why it is often considered important to know that in art therapy process is more important rather than the final product. American psychological association and clinical literature define art therapy as a unique creation that uses various activities such as drawing, collage making, painting that works as both medium as well as symbolic play allowing the individuals to express their internal thoughts, emotions and building resilience as well gaining insight.

Art therapy has its own advantage of non-verbal communication by using symbols, drawing along with mindful presence and a person's unique creation, which does not require to use only words or perfection. Expressive art therapies Provides an outline to understand how these works by integrating the therapeutic processes with individual's thoughts and emotions (ETC Model). Even history and literatures put art therapy into the field of psychology and humanistic relevant for highlighting self-empowerment, sense of achievement and restructuring maladaptive self-narratives.

Researches other than the one based on clinical population or setups have talked about integrating art therapies into the treatment modalities for non-clinical population as well as in general also, as it helps in reducing day to day life stresses, enhancing mood, self-esteem and overall mental health (BMC Public Health). Further it has been also suggested in studies to include these expressive therapies into the mental health field as a proper intervention.

Review of literature

Art therapy and Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is an important part of mental health and it represents how much an individual is satisfied with their overall quality of life it is usually just based on personal criteria (Diener et al., 1985). Many researches have constantly talked about art therapy as an effective medium in increasing satisfaction with life in individuals. One of the recent systematic reviews and a meta-analysis found effective results of art therapy intervention in satisfaction with life amongst diverse population categorizing it as a useful psychotherapeutic approach for enhancing mental health but there's also the need for systematic and more stabilized researches so as to increase the validity and generalization of findings (Fernandez-Sanchez et al., 2025). Another study done in the oncology settings found that those female patients who have breast cancers and risk undergoing treatment for it when participated actively in expressive art therapies they showed positive change in their emotional state, life satisfaction as well as reduction in psychological symptoms like stress indicating towards therapy being an complementary approach (Zou et al., 2025)

When it comes to diverse cultural backgrounds, art therapy has again proven to be effective in increasing emotional health reducing day-to-day life stresses thereby enhancing sense of belongingness amongst the immigrant youth and the changes were measurable in overall mental health and satisfaction with life (Kim et al., 2022). One of the therapy also known as nature-based therapy where individual engage in the artistic medium in the natural settings have again shown positive results and improvement in these important domains of life (Elkis-Abuhoff et al., 2022).

Among the old age peoples residing in institutional settings, methods like ceramic based paintings are one of the most beneficial activities for both mental health and life satisfaction again highlighting art therapy as an effective non-pharmacological approach useful in enhancing life quality among geriatric population (Cetinkaya et al., 2019)

Overall, all these studies and reviews indicate towards an holistic nature of art therapy that proven to be very effective for life satisfaction through emotional expression, awareness, Self exploration. Despite all this, there is a need of large sample size-based researches that could explore the exact mechanism of how exactly art therapy works (Fernandez-Sanchez et al., 2025; Zou et al., 2025)

Art therapy and Self-esteem

Self-esteem can be understood by how much worth an individual place upon themselves or subjective judgment of oneself worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem plays a very crucial role when it comes to strong self-concept, resilience and self-trust. Various review of literature have shown art therapy as a potential intervention for people with low self-esteem as it boosts self-esteem by restructuring the maladaptive thought patterns bringing more clarity to self-identity to be able to gain mastery over experiences and moreover to be able to express well.

Detailed reviews of art therapy have talked about the uses of art-based intervention in the field of psychology and mental health as a potential medium for active engagement, boosting strength, better coping and well-being across variety of population ranging from veterans to young adults, children and correctional settings (Hiang et al., 2025). In the period of adolescent art therapy plays significant role in reducing anxiety, stress, identity issues and noticeable strengthening of self-esteem and improved emotional health (Mittal et al., 2022).

In the detailed analysis of art therapy, it suggests that it is beneficial for both clinical and non-clinical populations (Shukla et al., 2022). When it comes to emotional well-being and expression, increased self-esteem in the old age population is seen, It has been noticed that there was an active engagement in the program and benefits in reducing stressful psychological symptoms such as depressive symptoms specifically among the people residing in nursing home (Ching Teng et al., 2019). Among the Alzheimer patient as well as dementia art therapy has performed well in improving emotional expression and quality of life followed by active engagement in the therapeutic process (Chancellor et al., 2014).

In cases of chronic health issues, a well-planned structured art therapies have gained fruitful results in positively influencing emotional health, self-concept, life satisfaction, sense of well-being and social support specifically in individuals with multiple sclerosis (Fraser & Keating, 2014). In case of paediatric population art therapy works well specifically for those with aggressive behavioral patterns where visible decrease in anger outburst, noticeable gain in self-esteem were observed (Mousavi & Sohrabi, 2014).

When combining Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) along with art therapies it has shown as a powerful combination, effective in bringing significant improvement in all these three important areas of life. Overall, there are evidences that has shown art therapy as a powerful tool in strengthening an individual's emotional well-being, self-esteem and life satisfaction (Roghanchi et al., 2013).

Art therapy and Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a very important area of life which helps the person to be able to adapt in different situations, cope with stress, manage and regulate their emotions, preventing them from stress but emotional intelligence is not just about managing or understanding once own emotions but that of others too as it is very important to be able to interpret other's emotions in day to day life especially in social settings and using those skills in an effective manner (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The creative process of art therapy facilitates emotional expression and awareness in individuals by providing them the liberty of expressing themselves through symbolic play, arts and not just by words.

Art based intervention has shown promising results in improving emotional health, self-awareness, regulation as well as improvement in ability to understand and interpret other emotions while developing effective skills among students who have mental health issues (Xu, 2025). In another study it has been found that through an active engagement in the artistic process it is beneficial in increasing ability to manage and regulate emotion, developing better perception of oneself and increased resilience (Lian & Hai, 2025)

In the school settings art therapy works very creatively especially in the young kids through a non-verbal medium for emotional expression, stress release and greater sense of psychological and social well-being (Rege, 2025). Among the adolescent population it has been noticed that there is a significant gain in emotional well-being, ability to manage emotions and self-awareness through art therapy which has improved overall well-being (Mittal & Mahapatra, 2024).

Not just reviews but experimental researchers have also found that art activities have worked well on children as a result of which improved emotional health, ability to regulate and developing empathy was seen when compared to a controlled group (Da Costa & Keni, 2014). In another study people who often experience stress in their life when undergone expressive therapies have shown improvement in emotional intelligence scores in their assessments post intervention (Nagpal & Kumar, 2024)

Even in the college and university students, art therapy has proven to be effective in increasing self-awareness, emotional well-being, coping skills and better adjustment in their academics (Durairaj, 2023). Researches when done on children with learning disabilities have also reported art therapy as an effective medium for emotional expression, social well-being and fruitful in reinforcing the developmental effect on emotional intelligence (Freilich & Shechtman, 2010).

Overall, all of these studies have suggested so far that art therapy is useful and is an effective therapeutic intervention in enhancing emotional intelligence through well-structured sessions

Conclusion

Across major areas of life satisfaction, self-esteem and emotional intelligence, the previously available literatures have concluded that art therapy is a beneficial art-based intervention and a non-pharmacological intervention beneficial for improving mental health and psychological well-being. The exact underlying mechanism of how art therapy works have included emotional expression, self-awareness, identity exploration, restructuring of maladaptive thoughts. However, concerns like small sample size, area of focus, lack of proper protocols, insufficient and lack of systematic long duration research has to be considered. Additionally, there are need of further researches exploring non-clinical populations is also recommended. There's a need of standard framework for these art-based interventions and also required assessment to measure the changes in order to understand the underlying mechanism for better understandings.

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