

Research Paper

## Assessment of art therapy's case studies as a measure for healing and therapeutic benefits

Ravneet Kahlon<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Art therapy's importance was realised by the artists themselves who found therapeutic impacts in it and started to use it as a therapy first with the war soldiers who had faced harsh conditions recently as art therapy came into its working right after the war ended and then it shifted to all other kinds of illnesses as well with which it too surprisingly showed positive results. Art therapy has been affective with many mental health conditions and has shown beneficial effects with people of all ages from children to adults either by helping them express, bonding with others, release their stress through it and find meaning to life and the list goes on. This study chooses the most engrossing and divergent cases that provides evidence of case studies of a patient with schizophrenia, military servant with PTSD, autistic non-verbal child, Prisoners with depressive symptoms, their art work, meaning attached to them and their healing effects with this therapy which showed overall escalation in their wellbeing and improvement with life thus showing how diverse the field of art therapy is and its restorative power.

**Keywords:** *Art Therapy, Schizophrenia, PTSD, Autism, Prisoners with Depression, Case Study, Therapeutic*

Art therapy, a relatively young profession, was “born” in the second half of the 20th century. It was developed by individuals, mostly artists themselves, who believed in the healing power of art making and imagery. (Durrani, 2014). Art therapy emerged from the proposition that the procedure of image making and creative expression heals and changes unpleasant life experiences by symbolic communication. (Malchiodi 2002). Art therapy is based on the idea that the creative processor art making facilitates reparation and recovery and is a form of nonverbal communication of thoughts and feeling. Like other forms of psychotherapy and counselling, it is used to encourage personal growth and has been employed in a wide variety of settings with children, adults, families, and groups. It is an approach that aid people of all ages create meaning and achieve insight, find comfort from overwhelming emotions or trams, resolve conflict and problems, enhance everyday life and achieve an increased sense of well-being (Malchiodi, 2006). In art therapy we do not view the content made by the patient from an artist's point of view but from a psychologist's point of view to see not that how good or bad the material made by the patient looks but to

<sup>1</sup>M.A., Department of psychology, D.A.V college, Punjab university, Chandigarh, India

\*Responding Author

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see that why did he choose to make what he made and what is the underlying meaning of them and sometimes only to enjoy the therapy for its healthful benefits which can only be best described by the patient alone.

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF ART THERAPY**

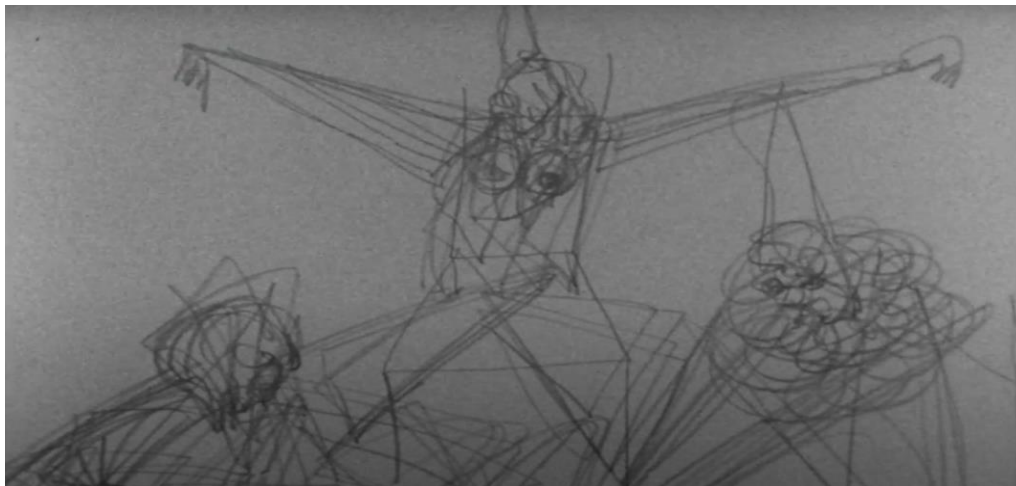
A British artist, Adrian Hill was the person who worked on Art therapy first. His progress throughout years. In 1938: Hill was suffering from tuberculosis and in the hospital, to pass his time there, he started making art and made objects that were near his bed to fill his time and expressed his annoyance in this way about his current state of affairs which made him realise that art was helping him in his recovery. In 1939: The same hospital introduced occupational therapy and invited Hill to teach some art practices like drawing and painting to the patients in which he found that art helped patients to channel their mental distress into solace. He believed that art can aid recovery from illness and got involved with the British red cross society in setting up art therapy schemes all over the country and by 1950, 200 hospitals had accepted his schemes and were following it. In 1942: Adrian Hill coined the term Art therapy. In 1945: He published his book Art versus Illness which birthed the field of art therapy.

As the second world war had ended in 1945, so it paid its major attention in helping and healing the soldiers of the war as they had faced a lot of damage during that time and as the research went further it started to get applied on the other patients suffering from various illnesses as well which showed positive results too. Since then a lot of other artists have worked immensely in this field and brought ahead different kinds of new methods involving drawings, paintings, ceramics and textiles etc in this therapy to express their emotions and internal feelings through this medium which are otherwise hard to express.

### **CASE STUDY OF A SCHIZOPHRENIC**

After Adrian Hill the prominent person who worked in this field was Edward Adamson who is also known as the father of the Art Therapy in Britain. He has worked in the field for a long time producing a lot of artwork from his patients. When he went to a hospital for working and practicing there, he met Rolanda Polonsky, who was an artist before the onset of her schizophrenia and had been mopping the hospital floors for years since she had been admitted there and had showed no improvement yet and as Adamson introduced art therapy in her life she made a lot of scriptures which can be seen in the documentary made on her "Rolanda Polonsky, Sculptor (1971)", which is available on YouTube and in which it can be clearly seen that how it had tapped in her a deep source of mystical vision and human feeling which demonstrates the effect of art in her overall personality improvement. He also persuaded free expression of his patients and allowed them to paint or sculpt without any kind of personal remarks or opinions and provided minimal aid to them with their work as he wanted it to be completely their own and also insisted that only the creator could explain their own work for the right interpretation. These are the images and Scriptures she made and how she defines them tells us very clearly about her inner feelings and how she perceives things around her.

*Image 1*



She describes that in this drawing it's a woman on the cross (in reference to Jesus on cross), and refers cross to suffering and says “In my modest opinion it's the women who has more crosses in the world than the man itself.”

*Image 2*



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This image, she describes as the portrait of happiness which means solitude and sufferance in her own words, "You're born alone and you'll go away alone."

*Image 3*



*Image 4*



As art had tapped a deep mystical vision and human feelings in her, this sculpture shows her perception as she describes in image 3 that god is stretching his arms to the people and all kind of people (by all kinds she means good and bad people altogether) and in image 4 which is a closer look of image 3 itself, she says that people are always seen with infants,

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you don't see people without infants and so she has designed in this the motherhood that is important than all according to her.

*Image 5*



In this sculpture, she defines these people as broken and says that all people are broken and are the same so I represented the Jesus here who also is broken as his life has been taken away from him.

In all of these images, her work's meaning can only be interpreted by her alone as she gives her own description of every drawing and sculptures. How she describes happiness in her own meaning tells us that as her life was filled with misery, she found her happiness in solitude in the end and in Image 3 as she says that god is stretching his arms to all good and bad people which shows her deep faith in god and how she made every sculpture hold an infant tells how deep-rooted motherhood which could have different meaning in her life as it could be that always wanted or be a mother or close relation to her own mother etc.

Art being used as a therapy is clearly seen in this work of a schizophrenic, that how it helped her express her innermost sentiments in the most beautiful way possible which also gave her a sense of meaning in her life as she stayed in the hospital for 26 years, art filled her life with zest and purpose in life as well as a way to pass her time in a worthwhile way, imagine if in this 26 years she wasn't provided with this measure, she would have lost all meaning in life mopping the corridors of the hospital whereas art gave her more insight into herself and the world.

Patients like her and many others who are suffering from any kind of mental disorder and their lives has been put to a pause don't deserve to live without a sense of purpose or being unable to be in touch with their inner selves and those who have faced any kind of traumas in their lives, art therapy from time to time has proven to be very efficient in helping them to express their innermost experiences which sometimes are hard to express. Art therapy helps

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in processing and gives them a measure to express themselves completely, their artwork does not have to look good or catchy to the eyes as art and art therapy are two different things and its major role is to be therapeutic and to have healthful benefits as it will be unique to everybody according to their life experiences. A study found that three fields of communication in art therapy relationship that are important during working with patients who have schizophrenia. (Killick, 1995) Since trauma is stored in memory as imagery, expressive art processes provide an effective method for processing and resolving it. It has been suggested that people with psychosis, for them art therapy has an advantage over traditional psychotherapies (e.g. story, painting image or making sculptures etc) provides safe place for the patient with the therapist, which helps to contain strong feelings that otherwise would be overwhelming for the patient to talk about or express. (Killick, 1997)

### CASE STUDY OF A MILITARY SERVANT

*Image 6*



This image is from a four-week programme which was a part of a research done by Jones, Walker, Drass, and Kaimal in November 2017 in USA which was held on the military servants' members with Traumatic brain injury (TBI) and Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In this process the selection of masks as a medium was preferred because it represents a human face which would help them associate their feelings more to it. When the art therapist facilitates in the process of art making, this experience hooks the service members in externalising their PTSD symptoms. People learn to manage to channel their negative emotions by creative expression (Walker et al., 2017).

In Image 6 it is very prominently visible that how a military servant portrait's his life by dividing half his face into the beautiful blue sky and land whereas the other side is dark and has thunderstorms in it. He painted his head red with wires which can depict tangled thoughts. Creatively expressing the internal traumas have therapeutic benefits. Art through different mediums can bring out the internal feelings out with also having therapeutic effects during the process of making it. This military servant reported having felt better with his previous experience which is does like to talk about but this helped him release his inner thoughts while also being happy with the outcome made feel more positive feelings towards his own self.

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Yamaguchi (1997) also utilised art therapy for the treatment of the survivors. He used the painting and sculpturing as his medium with which the survivors were able to work with their fear, anger, resentment and isolation. They showed their improvement which was measured by the amount of verbal disclosure about the art paintings and sculptures. Also, art therapy helped them in a way that as the treatment survivors did not want to talk about their war experience in the starting but by the middle and the end of the treatment individuals started to share their experiences and got involved in greater group discussion.

Art theory also helps in the processing of the experience of the trauma by accessing and integrating those memories by communicating their feels and documenting pictures of those memories and by rituals (Wertheim-Cahen, 1991). Art therapy was also used in the hospital settings to help Vietnam veterans for their recovery from post-traumatic stress symptoms. (Johnson, 1987).

Art therapy not only has its impact on PTSD treatments but also creative art therapies are also helpful in decreasing depression, trauma symptoms like alexithymia, dissociation, nightmares, sleep problems or anxiety (Foa, Keane, Friedman, & Cohen, 2009) whereas it also lifts the emotional control, helps in interpersonal relationships and improving body image (Johnson & Lahad, 2009).

### **CASE STUDIES OF AN AUTISTIC NON-VERBAL CHILD**

This case study was done by Huma Durrani on Tom, an Autistic child who was non-verbal till the age of 12, his parents were divorced so Tom had anxiety problems as well and had difficulty to get attached with anyone as because of his parental conflicts his emotional development was disrupted, he also had severe sensory dysfunction and self-regulatory issues so art therapy was used on him after using other therapies which did not have any benefit on him. It aimed to generate emotional development and treating his autism symptoms.

In the starting of the therapy, Tom's activates were very short lived, had very little eye contact with the therapist, could not sit on the table for too long and would do impulsive activates and was extremely restricted to himself. He also banged his head on the floor or the table because of his anxiety or frustration. The therapist got him involved with art very meekly and he too started using art along with the therapist and got familiar with the art supplies with which his concentration, time for sitting still and doing art also increased. For Tom the goal of the sessions was not for getting his internal feelings out or drawing out his symbolic thoughts but for him it was to enjoy the session and to be fully present in it with all his senses though the art materials and to let down his defences which he had built over age and to communicate with the therapist. Tom started enjoying this therapy and it had started showing positive results.

After 8 months of Art therapy, his father set up an art space for him in the house so he could keep going on with his art making in his own space. He always seemed very happy with the results and wanted to share his work with his parents or his nanny who always reinforced his work which highly suggests that it was enhancing his desire for human connection which was lacking before. His nanny also reported that he now seemed calmer at home who was hard to handle before for her. His speech therapist also disclosed that he was improving with his speech development in the year he was practising art therapy. As his language was completely absent before starting with art therapy which triggered his anxiety and other problems had got lowered as he found a medium to express himself though art which was

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otherwise impossible for him before because of his lack of verbal language. It also helped him bond with his therapist and others around him while using it as a communicative medium other than a verbal one. (Durrani, 2014)

### CASE STUDY ON PRISONERS WITH DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

This study was done on prisoners to reduce their depression by David Gussak in 2007. As prison life is hard and can easily cause distress and other psychological problems. In 1997, Gussak outlined these 8 benefits of art therapy in prison.

1. It helped with verbal communication as well as cognitive development of the prisoners as a majority of them had low educational level, low level of literacy from proper expression of themselves.
2. It helps in converting complex things into a simpler manner.
3. As prisoners do not feel comfortable expressing themselves because of the environment, art encourages disclosure for them.
4. It also helps in bypassing the defences which can be either conscious or unconscious.
5. It helps in receding pathological symptoms.
6. It establishes a creative and a different activity for the prisoners which helps them to escape from their mental turbulences for some time.
7. It also helps them to shape themselves in a manner which is culturally acceptable for their own selves and for people outside. (Gussak,1997)

*Image 7*



*Image 8*





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In this research, art therapy was conducted twice a week for 4 weeks, these two images portray A person picking an apple from a tree, Image 7 was drawn before the therapy and Image 8 was drawn after therapy. There is a visible difference for the level of organisation and neatness in it while in the first image the person was not able to touch the apples but in the next image he did with a smile on his face overcoming the sad and confused one in the image before, other significant changes such as Colour prominence, energy, detailing of objects, objects in the environment also had improved which supported the results of reduced depressive symptoms in the patients proven by the test conducted before and after the therapy through Beck Depression Inventory (BDI- II). (Gussak,2007)

### CONCLUSION

In this study only a limited cases was used to demonstrate the potent use of art therapy which were carefully chosen to be different from each other to show that art therapy has shown positive results with people with different problems using different ways and mediums. Whereas it is used with many other psychological disorders. Different type of mediums than can be used are paint, pencils, clay, oil paints, water paint, printmaking and any other creative medium can be used. Art therapy has shown great impact over cancer patients as well as the patients of cancer found the art sessions as their breathing spaces and very relaxing while their chemotherapy was going on. (Bar-Sela et al, 2007). Art helped in painting external images of their inner world through visualisation. Meijer-Degen & Lanssen, 2006). Hence evidence have proven that art therapy is extremely valid and helpful for people in difficult situation such as prison, who are verbally handicapped, patients such as military persons who otherwise find it hard to talk about their traumatic experiences and inducing life and adding meaning into patients' lives beautifully as they are locked up in the hospitals because of their conditions which they have no control over as seen in the case of Rolanda Polonsky. Including art therapy as an intervention in the hospital setting would aid the patients in such depth that is unimaginable to us as we cannot understand their pain of physically staying in one place and mentally in your mind all the time.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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