

## Tap into Your Inner Power: Art Therapy and Dementia

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### ABSTRACT

Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning and behavioural abilities to such an extent that it interferes and affects the way a person interacts with other people performs his daily life activities and is unable to remember anything. These functions include the ability to perceive our surroundings visually, problem-solving, self-management, and the ability to focus and concentrate. Today, dementia has become prevalent and common especially in the aged population. There are, however, many ways to treat and reduce its symptoms. Research has shown art therapy to be one of the ways by which we can reduce the symptoms of dementia. Art therapy refers to the process in which different art methods are used and applied to enhance the client's mental and emotional wellbeing. There are various types of art therapies which include narrative art therapy, cognitive-based art therapy, mindfulness art therapy, mandala art therapy, and environment-based art therapy. All of these therapies help the patient become more aware of themselves and the surroundings. Art therapies focus on ways through which one can gain personal insight and develop coping skills. Art therapy has shown positive changes in dementia patients like improvement in attention and orientation, reducing the psychological and behavioral symptoms and development of social skills.

**Keywords:** Dementia, Art Therapies, Enhance Wellbeing, Insight

**D**ementia in recent times has gained much recognition and importance in terms of a common illness especially in the geriatric population. It is a serious disorder than people perceive it to be because it directly affects a person's neurocognitive ability. More than 4 million people in India have reported some form of dementia. At least 44 million people worldwide have dementia making it a global health crisis that must be looked into. The number of dementia cases that get diagnosed is just about 10%. The reason behind this can be a lack of awareness, no medical help, no social support, and the financial burden which the families have to go through. Dementia is an illness with no permanent cure but only temporarily improves. Art therapies help a wide population which includes children, adolescents, adults, and the geriatric population to enhance their overall health by being aware of their emotions. It is widely used and famous among the international as well as the Indian population. Art therapies are used to treat a variety of disorders like anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, autism, PTSD, psychosis, etc. Art therapies have proved to have a positive effect on clients suffering from both behavioral as well as neurological symptoms. Experiments and researches are being done to study its

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effects. People are practicing self-care activities which include the use of art therapy techniques to relax and calm their minds. Thus, we can say that Art therapies lead to an overall improvement in areas like - emotional and developmental problems, depression, sexual abuse, autism, aggression problems, and ego defense issues, etc. it also helps improve cognitive functions, such as verbal skills, attention, orientation, etc., but has varying outcomes in overall cognitive improvement.

### ***Art Therapy***

The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) (2017) defines art therapy as “the therapeutic use of art-making, within a professional relationship, by people who experience illness, trauma or challenges in living, and by people who seek personal development.” Through drawings, people can increase awareness of self and others cope with symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences; enhance cognitive abilities; and enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of making art.

Kramer (1993) developed art therapy for emotionally disturbed people who suffer from aggression and ego defense issues. She focused on the process of sublimation and developed ways in which the client could strengthen mature ego defenses and cope with them. Brown & Church (1996) conducted a study on patients suffering from ADD or ADHD using mandala art to investigate if there will be any behavioral changes or growth in the patients. Through the examination of the drawings and objective findings of the Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (FEATS) scale, it appears that a visual measurement of creative growth was achieved. Results showed that mandala exercise leads to an increase in attentional abilities and a decrease in impulsive behaviors over time, enabling the participant to make better decisions, complete tasks, contribute towards personal growth and development, and establish a keen interest in personal life. Evans & Dubowski (2001) conducted a study and found that art therapy can be effective in treating children with an autistic spectrum disorder. Tension can be alleviated when the child is involved in communicative art-making with the therapist. Walker (2006) found that art therapy can help treat children with emotional and behavioral issues. This could be achieved by making the client communicate his/her emotions via art. Pifalo (2007) conducted a study on sexually abused children who faced trauma and used art therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy to reduce the symptom. Findings suggested that a combination of these therapies can reduce symptoms and enhance the potential for positive outcomes for sexually abused children in trauma-focused treatment. This article also suggests a treatment model that can be used since it makes use of some specific art therapy interventions to ease the treatment, based on studies that show the effectiveness of combined art therapy and cognitive behaviour therapy. Sela, Atid, Danos (2007) conducted a study with 60 cancer patients suffering from depression. The aim was to prove that art therapy can improve depression and increase energy levels in cancer patients. The results showed that holistic art therapy is worthy in the treatment of cancer patients with depression or fatigue during chemotherapy treatment. In another study conducted by Visser & Hoog (2008) it was found that creative art therapy benefits the quality of life of cancer patients. The participants indicated that they experienced some positive changes like the ability to cope with their emotions, the awakening of a process of “conscious living”, and the development of creativity Pretorius & Pfeifer (2010)\_found that art therapy can be used to treat 25 patients between the age of 8-11 years, who were the victims of sexual abuse and trauma. The sessions were based on principles that focused on a client-centered, humanistic approach. The results proved that the experimental groups showed signs of improvement as compared to the control groups and they were able to work on their trauma and anxiety. Beebe, Gelfand & Bender (2010) conducted a random trial on 23 children to test the

effectiveness of art therapy for children with asthma. The results indicated that there was an improvement in areas like problem-solving and affect drawing scores, worry, communication, quality of life scores, and improved Beck anxiety and self-concept scores in the active group relative to the control group.

### **Dementia**

According to DSM IV, Dementia is a chronic, debilitating condition, characterized by the deterioration of cognitive functions in several domains, in the absence of impairment of consciousness and persisting for at least 6 months. However, in DSM -V the broad diagnostic category of dementia has been renamed. The term major neurocognitive disorder is now used. DSM V defines it as a "major (or mild) neurocognitive disorder associated with Alzheimer's disease".

Rue & Jarvik (1987) conducted a study to predict dementia in old age people along with their cognitive functioning. In this study, a sample of aging twins some of whom developed dementia while others did not was studied concerning their cognitive functioning. Individuals who had dementia had scored low scores on most tests and experienced a substantial decrease in areas like vocabulary and forward digit span over time, than those surviving to a comparable age without dementia. This pattern was noticed in individuals who had mild, as well as moderate-to-severe, dementia and was not related to physical health status or premorbid activity patterns. Results showed dementing illness may develop very slowly, and that the likelihood of exhibiting clinically significant dementia may vary with premorbid intellectual level. Wilson, Begley, Boyle, Schneider & Bennett (2011) conducted a study on 785 aged people to identify the factors responsible for cognitive decline and dementia during old age. The results showed that during follow-up, 94 individuals developed Alzheimer's disease. The reason behind the increased risk of AD was associated with higher levels of anxiety and vulnerability to stress and more rapid decline in global cognition, with no effects for the other four trait components. The subscales for neuroticism were associated with a decline in memory (working and episodic) and perceptual speed, but not in semantic memory or visuospatial ability. The element of neuroticism was not related to the neuropathologic injuries most commonly associated with late-life dementia. Mukamal (2003) conducted a study on study of alcohol consumption and the risk of dementia among older adults. The results showed that a trend towards greater odds of dementia associated with heavier alcohol assumption was most apparent among men and a similar relationship of alcohol use with Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia was found. Compared with abstention, consumption of 1-6 drinks weekly is associated with a lower risk of incident dementia among older adults. Scazufca et al., (2007) conducted a study to determine the prevalence of dementia in a socioeconomically disadvantaged population of older adults living in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Findings showed that there was a 5.1% prevalence of dementia in that population since 105 out of 2072 individuals in the study met the criteria for a diagnosis of dementia. The widespread presence increased with age for both men and women after 75 years but was stable from 65 to 74 years. Thus, the prevalence of dementia among adults belonging to a low socioeconomic background is high. The reason could be adverse socioeconomic conditions and consequent failure to compress morbidity into the latter stages of life.

### **Art Therapies and Dementia**

Eekelaar, Camic, & Springhamn (2012) conducted a study in which dementia patients were subjected to a three-week course of art appreciation that focussed on creating portraits, landscapes, and narrative paintings. The result showed that responses associated with

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viewing visual art have recently been shown to have positive effects for people with dementia.

Family caregivers reported that their family members with dementia showed improved mood, confidence, and reduced isolation during the art gallery sessions. The results support the need for future research and investigation related to the potential positive impact visual art and aesthetic stimulation can have on people with dementia. Also, Stewart (2004) showed that after engaging in art activities like painting, patients with severe dementia could effectively improve their visual-spatial abilities and to a certain extent delay the deterioration. The results of the study showed that art therapy had significant positive changes in mood and cognition which lead to overall enhancement after the sessions ended. Rusted. Sheppard & Waller (2006) conducted a study to evaluate the immediate and long-term effects of art therapy for older people with dementia, specifically to test the assumption that participation in group art therapy leads to significant positive changes in mood and cognition. In this study dementia patients were subjected to 40 weeks of art activities, such as painting, making collages, making ceramics, etc., and found that the cognition and short-term memory of the patients were improved but the changes were not significant.

Kawabata, Maki, Yamamoto, Kida, Kuwahara, Gotom & Hamada (2013) conducted a study on aged patients suffering from dementia. In this study, colouring took place at the nursing home as a part of the recreation and the influence on the tenant was verified. The findings suggested that the tendency of wandering around and request for excretion got reduced with the help of colouring. As a result, the care worker's burden was also reduced. This suggests that art-related activities should be taken as one of the recreations at the nursing home. During an intervention, Kinney & Rentz (2005) encouraged 12 patients who engaged in an art program (*Memories in the Making*) that encourages self-expression through the visual arts with mild and moderate dementia to express themselves through artistic activities and provided stimulation based on senses. This was then compared to the well-being of the same individuals during participation in more traditional adult day activities, such as current events and crafts. Results revealed that the participants demonstrated significantly more interest, attention, pleasure, self-esteem, and normalcy during participation in *Memories in the Making*, additionally, there was not much difference in poor self-concept or sadness between the two types of activities. Peisah, Lawrence & Reutens (2011) conducted a study on an 82-year-old severe dementia patient. With the application of art therapy, the researchers noted calmness in her attitude and positive states of emotion. This suggests that art therapies can lead to improvements in dementia patients. Mimica & Kalinić (2011) published a case report on a patient with dementia. The results showed that art therapy, as an add-on non-pharmacological intervention, can improve the quality of life of people with dementia and their caregivers, but also be beneficial for communication and reducing stress-related behaviors e. g. behavioral disturbances in people with dementia taking an antidementia drug. Hattori, Hattori, Hokao, Mizushima, & Mase (2011) conducted a study with small groups of patients who had mild dementia, and the patients were asked to color and encouraged to recollect and paint pleasant scenes that they had experienced in the past; the control group was asked to perform as many as calculations as they could possible within the acceptable range. The results showed that there was an improvement in the symptoms of indifference and mental health but no improvement in the cognitive functioning or depression, maybe due to a short period of intervention (only 12 weeks) and a smaller number of intervention subjects.

### **Suggestions**

Art therapy began when some psychiatrists used various methods of art in their treatment in the 1800s. Consequently, it was found that art therapy when applied with psychotherapy yielded beneficial results. As a professional discipline, it was established in the 1950s by Margaret Naumburg. She was one of the pioneers of art therapy followed by Edith Kramer in 1973. This is when art therapy became widespread when colleges and universities began offering various degree programs in art therapy. By the end of the 20th-century art therapy was used to help patients with depression, cognitive issues, psychosis, behavioral and emotional problems, cancer patients, etc. and today it is a well-established and respected profession. To add to the advantages, art therapy does not have any side effects. It helps patients to gain a better understanding and awareness about their mental and physical being as well as their emotions and can express them well. However, there are very few institutions in the world that have art therapy centers due to which a large number of the population doesn't know about the benefits of art therapy and don't have access to it. Art therapies can be conducted on a one-to-one basis or in group settings. Group art therapies have been proved to be as effective and sometimes even more effective as compared to individual therapy. It helps people cope better with their illness, enhances the quality of their lives, and, in some cases, such as breast cancer, has even been shown to help people live longer. Art therapy sessions should be a part of the treatment along with other techniques so that the patient can experience overall growth, development, and a reduction in symptoms. Research has shown that art therapy has helped reduce the symptoms in dementia patients as well. To make the session more effective, one can start with warming up the patient by holding their hands, swinging them from left to right, and playing a soothing sound.

### **CONCLUSION**

Dementia is a very serious mental illness and it can get worse if not treated and looked after properly. This can only happen if we spread awareness and don't shy away from talking about it or even seeking professional help. We need to normalize the taboo associated with mental disorders so that people suffering from serious and fatal illnesses can get treatment as soon as possible. Art therapy has been one of the most effective ways through which one can reduce the symptoms of dementia and improve the quality of life of the patient. Through the use of different art methods, people can freely express themselves and experience positive changes which can further help alleviate stress. Art therapy when combined with other techniques in the treatment plan has been proved to be even more effective in bringing a positive change in the wellbeing of the patient. Apart from being used to reduce the symptoms of dementia, art therapies have served in treating illnesses like anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, autism, PTSD, psychosis, etc. Thus, the widespread application of art therapies makes it one of the most recommended therapies in clinical work

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