

## The Impact of Arts Based Therapy (ABT) on Children with Special Needs

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to determine whether Arts based therapy (ABT) has a significant impact on the participants. The sample for this research study were initially 10 students in the age group of 14-30 from Vishesh special needs school which is based in Kудasan, Gandhinagar. Afterwards three students stopped coming to the sessions which made the sample group only 7 participants. The findings of the research indicate that Arts based therapy has a significant effect on different therapeutic domains namely Motor, Attention, Cognition, Expressive capability. Narrative capability and Group interaction of the participants. Furthermore, the limitations of the research indicate a more objectionable data due to the low reliability and validity of the psychometric tools. Also, a lack of external validity due to a diverse age group in the sample. The future implications of the research can be to conduct more longitudinal studies as well as population specific research studies.

**Keywords:** *Arts Based Therapy, Children with Special Needs*

According to the Child Care Law Centre, a child with special needs is one who requires some form of special care due to physical, mental, emotional or health reasons (Mahmoud, 2021). Adolescents and Children with disabilities comprise a diverse group with extensive life experiences. Adults and children with special needs/learning disabilities/intellectual disabilities have issues in communicating their needs through the mediums such as speech, social skills, language and behavior.

This population may find it difficult to optimally utilize their motor skills. They may struggle to focus their attention on tasks and it can be a magnanimous task for them to follow instructions cognitively. Narrating their experiences and showcasing their perception of the world can be a challenging task for children/adults with learning disabilities.

According to the British Association of Art Therapists, "a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of expression and communication." Any individual who is referred to an arts based therapist/practitioner does not need to have a previous experience in artistic forms. The primary goal of an arts based practitioner does not include making any assessments on the aesthetic or diagnostic image of their clients. As a matter of fact, they are

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Received: August 29, 2023; Revision Received: December 05, 2023; Accepted: December 09, 2023

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required to provide clients with the opportunity to alter and develop personally via the use of artistic materials in a convenient and safe setting (Hu, Zhang, Hu, Yu, & Xu, 2021).

By choosing appropriate materials and interventions for their clients, arts based therapists arrange sessions to accomplish therapeutic goals and objectives. They engage in creative activities to aid their patients' development and help them gain insight, reduce stress, heal trauma, develop their cognitive, memory, and neurosensory skills, enhance their interpersonal interactions, and feel fulfilled. Practice of art with an emphasis on skill development and mastery, studio art making, individual art making, program-supervised and structured art groups, art psychotherapy, and personal art creating with a healing objective are some forms of arts based therapy utilized in mental health treatment. Participating in group artistic endeavours can improve mental health. Using visual and symbolic expressions in art therapy can help people feel more valuable and confident in themselves. As a result, individuals with mental diseases can communicate with one another and expand their social networks (Shukla, Choudhari, Gaidhane, & Syed, 2022).

### *Rationale of the Study*

The research aims to spread awareness for the alternative new age of therapy namely arts based therapy and how it affects children with learning disabilities. Research on such therapy is limited especially in a country like India, this research serves to add to the future of arts based therapy as an emerging practice.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design*

The research follows an experimental design to accomplish the research objectives.

### *Sample and Sample Design*

10 students from Vishesh special needs school based in Gandhinagar were selected at random from different divisions. There are 3 female students while the rest of them are males. All participants have been diagnosed with intellectual disability except 3 participants who have been diagnosed with down syndrome, locomotor disability and speech disability respectively. Initially 30 participants were added from different divisions with different age groups, however only 10 students were later selected in the pilot project to make the assessment process easier. As the action research project resumed, the group only consisted of 7 participants as the other participants refused to either participate or did not attend school regularly making it difficult to assess their progress. There were a lot of students who were present during the sessions who were sent by their class teachers due to them being a nuisance. These kids have not been counted in the overall ABT clientele group for this research project. The demographics of the group were as follows-

*Table 1 Demographic details of the population*

<b>AGE</b>	10-30 Years
<b>GENDER</b>	Male and Female
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	All from middle class families
<b>OTHER RELEVANT INFO</b>	Majority of students are from Jigisha ma'am's class. Most of the students in the group are not able to express themselves in the form of writing. Most of the participants are unable to write their own names in either English or their regional language (i.e.-Gujarati)

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### *Objectives*

The objective for this research was to determine whether Arts Based Therapy (ABT) would lead to any significant changes between the pre and post groups in context of the therapeutic domains amongst children with special needs.

### *Hypotheses*

- H0: ABT will not have a significant difference in the pre and post levels in the overall ratings of the children with special needs.
- H1: ABT will have a significant difference in the pre and post levels in the overall ratings of the children with special needs.
- H0: ABT will not have a significant difference in the pre and post levels in the round robin assessment for children with special needs.
- H2: ABT will have a significant difference in the pre and post levels in the round robin assessment for the children with special needs.
- H0: ABT will not have a significant difference in the pre and post behavioural levels for children with special needs.
- H3: ABT will have a significant difference in the pre and post behavioural levels for the children with special needs.
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### *Instruments Used in The Research*

1. **ABT rating scale for children with special needs:** The ABT rating scale for children with special needs (CWSN) (WCCL Foundation, 2005) is a scale developed by the WCCL foundation which consists of 25 items on a 5-point Likert type response to evaluate the overall psychological profile of CWSN based on therapeutic domains such as Motor, Attention, Cognitive skills, Narrative capabilities, Expressive capabilities and Group interaction.
2. **Round Robin Assessment:** This assessment tool was curated by the ABT practitioner depending upon the subjective therapeutic domains established during the sessions.
3. **The Personal Behaviours Checklist (PBCL – 36):** PBCL-36 ( Streissguth & Barr, 1998) is a 36-item standardized questionnaire in a 3-point Likert type response format which helps in ascertaining the behavioural tendencies for individuals who lie in the age group of between 2-35 years old. Scoring out of 36, Lesser score indicates better personal behavior among the subject.

### *Procedure*

Once the sample was selected, the sessions were conducted in two phases, a pilot phase which lasted of 15 hours from September,2022 till November ,2022. The second phase which was called the Action Research Project (Plan) consisted of 35 hours from March,2023 till July 2023. The findings from the Action Research Project (Plan) are the subject of this research paper. Every session lasted from 40 mins to an hour focusing on different therapeutic domains. Furthermore, interventions and ABT assessments in the form of neutral observers, standardized scales and round robin assessment was inculcated in the sessions. The data was divided into pre and post group to determine the significant impact of Art based therapy on the population.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A paired sample T-test was utilized to ascertain whether ABT had any significant effects on the pre and post population.

For the data obtained from ABT rating scale for children with special needs,

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**Table 2 Paired Samples Statistics for ABT rating form pre and post group**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ABTPRE	3.3643	7	.42618	.16108
ABTPOST	3.5771	7	.29686	.11220

**Table 3 Paired Samples T-test Differences for pre and post group for ABT rating form for CSWN**

**Paired Samples Test**

		Paired Differences					Significance			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
ABTPRE	-	-.21286	.37424	.14145	-.55897	.13326	-1.505	6	.092	.183
ABTPOST										

**Difference Scores Calculations**

Mean: 0.21

$\mu = 0$

$S^2 = SS/df = 0.84/(7-1) = 0.14$

$S^2M = S^2/N = 0.14/7 = 0.02$

$SM = \sqrt{S^2M} = \sqrt{0.02} = 0.14$

**T-value Calculation**

$t = (M - \mu)/SM = (0.21 - 0)/0.14 = 1.5$

Thus, the value of t is 1.50482. The value of p is .09154. The result is significant at  $p < .10$ .

**For the data obtained from the round robin assessment,**

**Table 4 Paired Samples statistics for round robin assessment**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ROUNDROBINPRE	8.8571	7	2.96808	1.12183
ROUNDROBINPOST	11.8571	7	1.21499	.45922

**Table 5 Paired differences for Round Robin assessment**

**Paired Samples Test**

		Paired Differences					Significance			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
ROUNDROBINPRE	-	-	2.38048	.89974	-	-	-	6	.008	.016
ROUNDROBINPOST		3.00000			5.20157	.79843	3.334			

**Difference Scores Calculations**

Mean: 3

$$\mu = 0$$

$$S^2 = SS/df = 34/(7-1) = 5.67$$

$$S^2M = S^2/N = 5.67/7 = 0.81$$

$$SM = \sqrt{S^2M} = \sqrt{0.81} = 0.9$$

**T-value Calculation**

$$t = (M - \mu)/SM = (3 - 0)/0.9 = 3.33$$

Thus, the value of t is 3.334314. The value of p is .00786. The result is significant at  $p < .10$ .

For the data obtained from PBCL-36,

**Table 6 Paired sample for PBCL-36**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PBCL36PRE	11.8571	7	5.01427	1.89521
PBCL36POST	3.0000	7	2.30940	.87287

**Table 7 Paired differences for PBCL-36**

**Paired Samples Test**

	Paired Differences				Significance				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		
				Lower	Upper	t	df	p	p
PBCL36PRE	8.85714	4.84522	1.83132	4.37606	13.33823	4.836	6	.001	.003
PBCL36POST									

**Difference Scores Calculations**

Mean: -8.86

$$\mu = 0$$

$$S^2 = SS/df = 140.86/(7-1) = 23.48$$

$$S^2M = S^2/N = 23.48/7 = 3.35$$

$$SM = \sqrt{S^2M} = \sqrt{3.35} = 1.83$$

**T-value Calculation**

$$t = (M - \mu)/SM = (-8.86 - 0)/1.83 = -4.84$$

Thus, the value of t is -4.836474. The value of p is .00145. The result is significant at  $p < .10$ .

**CONCLUSION**

All alternate hypotheses have been accepted

H1: ABT will have a significant difference in the pre and post levels in the overall ratings of the children with special needs.

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H2: ABT will have a significant difference in the pre and post levels in the round robin assessment for the children with special needs.

H3: ABT will have a significant difference in the pre and post behavioural levels for the children with special needs.

The research establishes that Arts based therapy leads to a significant difference in the overall psychological profile for children with special needs (CSWN). However, as an ABT practitioner, one can never fully diagnose their clients based on psychometric tools, the overall experience will always be subjective based on the perception of the practitioner and the group.

In conclusion, the current study contributes towards the bleak existing literature present on Arts based therapy and further seeks to serve as a droplet in a to be filled bucket.

### *Limitations*

- The study was conducted with a mixed age group comprising both adults, teenagers and preteens. This reduced the overall external validity of the study with respect to the population.
- Technical issues such as data wipe led to an inability to recover the best moments which were captured on the film. The film carried observable shifts which may lead to certain conclusions.
- All the data collection formats are subjective in nature and rely heavily on the researcher's perception.
- The reliability and validity of the psychometric tools opted in this research is questionable and thus leads to the results being questionable.
- Social desirability can be at play when neutral observer assessment was being conducted which could lead to the assessment of the therapeutic domains being questionable.

### *Future Suggestions*

- Future research in this area could utilize standardized psychometric tools to enhance the overall reliability and validity of the research.
- A uniform group with a specific age range might help in enhancing external validity when it comes to future research.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

Firstly, I'd like to mention my sincerest thanks to the Lord for helping me through this beautiful journey. Special thanks to my supervisors Nabhiraj Mehta and Neha Patel for all the guidance throughout this research. I would like to give a shoutout to my classmates for motivating me through the slumps. Special shoutout to Liza Abadan (my favourite smol person in the entire world) for everything. To Vishesh special needs school and the staff, thank you for giving me a chance.

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

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Desai, M. (2023). The Impact of Arts Based Therapy (ABT) on Children with Special Needs. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(4), 1890-1896. DIP:18.01.176.20231104, DOI:10.25215/1104.176