

A Study of the Application of Creative Arts Therapy to Improve Depression

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Abstract: This paper explores the practical application and effectiveness of an emerging psychological intervention, creative arts therapy, in combating depressive mood. In today's society, depressed mood has become a mental health problem with wide-ranging effects in the face of increasing life pressure. Against this background, creative art therapy, such as painting, music composition, and handicraft production, as a psychotherapeutic approach that breaks through the traditional framework, is showing its unique charm in reducing depressive symptoms and improving mental health. Through in-depth analyses of a series of studies and real cases, this paper demonstrates the remarkable contribution of creative art therapy in promoting emotional recovery and improving quality of life and looks forward to its future application.

Keywords: Creative arts therapy; Depressed mood; Painting therapy; Music therapy; Handicraft production

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1. Introduction

Depression, a mental health disorder, often takes the form of persistent sadness, loss of interest, and sleep disturbances, profoundly affecting patients' quality of life and social roles. Traditional medication and psychotherapy have been the mainstay in the battle against this persistent illness. However, in recent years, creative art therapy, with its unique charm, through non-verbal communication and direct expression of emotions, is gradually coming into the limelight as an effective adjunctive therapy. The purpose of this paper is to comprehensively explore the theoretical roots and practical path of creative art therapy, as well as its specific effectiveness in helping depressed patients regain the colors of life.

2. The theoretical foundation of creative art therapy

Before exploring the application of creative arts therapy in contemporary mental health, a solid theoretical foundation must be established. Several perspectives will be examined on how art therapy, as a form of non-verbal expression, can play a role in facilitating individuals' emotional expression, self-awareness, and social

interaction. At the same time, theoretical perspectives on depressed mood will be explored to reveal the unique value of creative art therapy in understanding and treating depressed mood.

2.1. Theoretical framework of art therapy

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory points out that in addition to basic human needs, people also have aesthetic needs. Art, on the other hand, can satisfy people's needs from an aesthetic point of view and enrich people's real life. Art therapy provides a supportive psychotherapeutic space for people to express their emotions in a safe way ^[1]. The theoretical roots of art therapy, a way of communicating across words, are deeply rooted in the multidisciplinary intersection of psychology, art, and medicine. It places special emphasis on the direct unfolding of the individual's inner world and sees artistic creation as a mirror of the depths of emotion and mind. In this process of transformation, people can use diverse artistic languages such as painting, sculpture, music, and so on, to transform those emotions and experiences that are hidden at the bottom of the heart and difficult to describe in words into visible and palpable artistic results. The theoretical support of art therapy covers psychoanalytic theory, humanistic psychology, and cognitive-behavioral theory.

2.2. Application of creative arts therapy in mental health

The application of creative art therapy in the field of mental health is gradually expanding its influence, not only for the treatment of various types of psychological disorders, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and so on, which has shown remarkable results, but also in personal growth, educational counseling, and community services and other areas also play an important role. In practice, creative art therapy provides individuals with an outlet for emotional catharsis, enabling people to release their inner repressed emotions safely; it enhances the ability of self-knowledge, and through the process of art creation, individuals can engage in in-depth reflection and self-exploration; and it also facilitates social interactions, increasing the opportunities for individuals to communicate with others, thus improving social participation and sense of belonging. At present, a series of research for art therapy is flourishing, such as through painting art therapy, psychological sitcom art therapy, music art therapy, and other forms of creation and catharsis, expressing a rich and unique spiritual world, nourishing and comforting people's hearts and minds ^[2].

2.3. Theoretical perspectives of depressive emotions

The theoretical explanations behind depressive mood, a cloud that often hangs over modern people, are numerous and complex. From a biological perspective, depression may be inextricably linked to an imbalance of chemicals in the brain; psychodynamics delves into the role that childhood experiences and subconscious conflicts play in the formation of depressive moods; and cognitive theories reveal that the negative thought patterns that characterize depressed individuals are a key feature. In the practice of creative art therapy, these multi-dimensional theoretical perspectives provide rich perspectives and deep insights for a deeper understanding of depressed mood. As a therapeutic tool, art therapy can target and touch upon the biological, psychodynamic, and cognitive dimensions of depressive moods, to carry out comprehensive and in-depth therapeutic work, to achieve more comprehensive and far-reaching therapeutic effects.

3. Implementation of creative arts therapy

This section will introduce in detail the implementation of creative art therapy, starting from the conventional steps of art therapy, exploring specific methods and techniques, and proposing targeted treatment strategies for the characteristics of depressive mood. This study will endeavor to keep the content practical and in-depth, to

provide practitioners with a set of clear and feasible operational guidelines.

3.1. Drawing therapy

Painting therapy, as a unique psychotherapeutic method, allows participants to release their emotions and explore their inner world by guiding them to create paintings and drawings in the interweaving of colors and lines. This therapy not only focuses on drawing skills but also on the expression of personal emotions and the presentation of the inner world ^[3]. Studies have found that patients involved in drawing therapy have improved symptoms of depression, anxiety, and fatigue. For example, a study of cancer chemotherapy patients showed that patients who participated in more than four art therapy sessions experienced significant reductions in symptoms of depression and anxiety. Painting therapy provides a non-threatening platform for patients to express themselves, enabling them to deal with complex emotions in an externalized way and promoting psychological recovery. In the course of treatment, patients often find an outlet for their emotions in the free atmosphere of art creation, leading to a better understanding of self and spiritual healing.

3.2. Music therapy

With its unique charm of rhythm, melody, and harmony, as well as diversified activities such as music creation and performance, music therapy profoundly touches the emotions of participants, effectively reduces psychological pressure, and enhances mental health. As a means of communication that transcends national boundaries, music can cross the language barrier and directly touch people's hearts, evoking deep-rooted emotional resonance. Several scientific studies have confirmed that music therapy has a significant effect in relieving depression. For example, in a randomized controlled trial of 57 depressed patients, researchers found that those who received music therapy scored significantly lower on the Hamilton Anxiety Inventory and the Hamilton Depression Inventory than those who received only medication ($P < 0.01$). This finding not only reveals the potential of music therapy in clinical treatment but also emphasizes its importance in comprehensive mental health management. Through music, patients can find an outlet for their emotions and alleviate their inner pain, thus regaining hope and motivation for life in the healing power of music ^[4]. This suggests that music therapy is not only effective in improving depressive symptoms but also in relieving anxiety and bringing about a more comprehensive mental health improvement for patients.

3.3. Handicraft production

By engaging participants in handicraft activities such as knitting, pottery, and carpentry, handicraft therapy not only exercises concentration, but also enhances a sense of self-achievement, and serves as an effective means of emotional regulation. During the delicate crafting process, participants can focus their attention on their fingertips, temporarily leaving their daily worries behind and achieving peace of mind. For example, by pouring personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts into the craft, patients can explore their inner selves more deeply and release deep-seated emotions. Studies have shown that handicraft-making therapy is a significant adjunctive treatment for depressed patients, which not only helps to regulate emotions and alleviate depressive symptoms but also brings positive energy of tranquility and healing to the mind.

4. Effectiveness of creative art therapy in improving depression

Through an in-depth discussion of the practical application of creative art therapy in improving depressive mood. This study examines the specific effectiveness of art therapy in promoting emotion regulation, enhancing self-knowledge, and improving quality of life, and explores its applicability and limitations in different groups.

4.1. Emotion regulation and psychological relief

Creative art therapy has demonstrated its unique charm in the field of emotion regulation. Studies have repeatedly shown that immersed in the sea of artistic creation, depressed patients can find an outlet to release their emotions ^[5]. They can transform their deep-seated repressed emotions into visible artistic expressions through the dance of a brush or the flow of a melody, which not only reduces their emotional burden but also brings comfort to their soul. Whether it is painting or music, these artistic avenues are effective in reducing levels of anxiety and depression, helping individuals restore emotional harmony. Art therapy constructs a realm beyond words, a space where patients can transcend the limitations of language and express their innermost worlds freely and directly through the medium of art.

4.2. Enhancement of self-knowledge and self-efficacy

Creative art therapy opens a mysterious door to self-exploration and cognition for depressed patients. In the journey of art creation, they can delve into the corners of their mind to reveal and comprehend their inner conflicts and struggles, and this profound introspective process greatly deepens the patients' understanding of themselves. Whenever patients complete a painting or compose a piece of music, the sense of achievement not only enhances their sense of self-worth but also plants the seeds of self-confidence in their hearts. This increased self-confidence plays an indispensable role in alleviating depression and restoring mental health, and it makes patients believe that even in the darkness, they can find the light that illuminates their way forward.

4.3. Improvement of social skills and interpersonal relationships

In the practice of creative art therapy, group activities occupy a pivotal position, which builds a platform for patients to interact with others. In the process of collaborative art creation, patients are not only able to release their inner creativity but also learn to work side by side with others, communicate efficiently, and share emotions ^[6]. These enhanced social skills play a significant role in optimizing patients' social networks, reducing loneliness, and breaking down social isolation. What's more, enhanced social interaction itself is a powerful weapon against depressive mood, which brings comfort and a sense of belonging to the patients' hearts and souls and allows them to regain hope in life in the warmth of interpersonal relationships.

4.4. Improvement of quality of life and daily functioning

Several clinical studies have consistently revealed that patients who have participated in creative arts therapy for a long period have made significant progress in their quality of life. Not only did the art therapy effectively regulate their emotions, but it also improved their confidence and ability to handle daily tasks and pursue personal interests. This all-around enhancement enabled the patients to integrate more smoothly into society and resume their normal pace of life and functioning, thus finding new vigor and hope in every corner of their lives.

4.5. Case studies

The first International Symposium on Art Healing at Tongji University was successfully held, which was rich in content and covered many areas of art healing. The symposium discussed in depth the use of art healing in education and teaching methods, how to achieve interdisciplinary integration, and the application of multimedia in art healing practice ^[7]. In addition, the conference paid special attention to the trends and challenges of art healing in the post-epidemic era. The conference attracted experts and scholars from all over the world, who came together to discuss the emerging growth at the intersection of art and psychology and to share practical experiences and research results of art healing in promoting mental health and enhancing educational effectiveness.

5. Advantages and limitations of creative art therapy

By analyzing its performance in practical application, this study will explore how creative arts therapy can play a role as a complementary or alternative to traditional therapeutic approaches, and discuss the challenges it may encounter in the process of promotion and development.

5.1. Strengths

Creative arts therapy is like a bridge across the speech barrier, opening up a unique avenue of expression for patients who find it difficult to express their inner worlds verbally, such as children, the elderly, and those with limited speech. In this world of art, individuals are inspired to explore themselves and to reveal and express their deepest feelings, a process that not only promotes emotional release but also deepens their understanding of themselves. The charm of art itself greatly increases patients' enthusiasm and participation in therapy, making them more actively involved in the recovery journey ^[8]. Art therapy comes in a variety of forms, covering painting, music, dance, and so on, and such richness allows the treatment program to be personalized in response to the unique interests and needs of each patient. Art therapy is not just a method, it is the crystallization of multidisciplinary wisdom from psychology, art, and medicine, which provides all-around support for treatment. It has a wide range of applications, whether it is individual therapy, group therapy, or family therapy and community service, can see the figure of creative art therapy, playing an irreplaceable role.

5.2. Limitations

It is often difficult to assess the effectiveness of art therapy using traditional quantitative methods, and the subtle and abstract nature of its therapeutic effects brings difficulties in verifying the effectiveness of the therapy. Art therapy has high requirements for practitioners, requiring them to possess both artistic creativity and psychological knowledge, and this kind of composite talent is not easy to come by, which undoubtedly restricts the wide application of art therapy. Furthermore, the special needs of art therapy for space and materials may make it difficult to popularize this therapy in resource-limited settings ^[9]. Each patient's acceptance of art therapy and actual ability to participate in it varies, which also sets a limit to the general applicability of the therapy. The effective integration of art therapy and traditional psychotherapy is a topic that still needs in-depth research and practical exploration. At the same time, differences in cultural backgrounds have a profound impact on the implementation of art therapy, meaning that treatment strategies need to be more personalized and nuanced for patients with different cultural backgrounds.

5.3. Future trends

In today's society, mental health has become a growing concern. In this context, creative arts therapy, with its unique therapeutic approach, has gradually become a bright new star in the field of psychotherapy. Looking ahead, the growth of this field can be expected to unfold in several key directions.

Creative arts therapy will break down disciplinary boundaries and integrate more closely with psychology, education, medicine, and other fields to form a more comprehensive treatment paradigm. Treatment protocols will become more individualistic, tailored to each patient to optimize outcomes. As technology advances, the integration of art and technology will also become a trend, using digital tools and platforms, such as virtual reality, to bring patients a richer therapeutic experience. In addition, creative arts therapies will move beyond the confines of professional organizations and become more integrated into communities and families, benefiting a wider range of people. To meet the market demand, the professional training of therapists will also be strengthened to ensure that they can provide high-quality services. At the same time, more research will be conducted to deepen the understanding of the effects and mechanisms of art therapy and to provide a solid

scientific basis for its clinical application ^[10].

As public awareness of mental health issues deepens, the popularity of creative arts therapy will also increase, which will further promote its wide application in society. Therefore, the development prospect of creative arts therapy is undoubtedly bright, and it is expected to become an important force in the field of mental health, which is worthy of attention and investment.

6. Conclusion

Creative art therapy, as a kind of non-traditional psychotherapy, has significant effects in improving depressed mood. Through painting, music, handicrafts, and other forms, patients can express their deepest emotions and experiences in a non-verbal way, release their suppressed emotions, and achieve peace of mind and relief. Meanwhile, the process of art creation also helps patients explore themselves reconstruct their cognition, and improve their mental health. In the future, further in-depth research should be conducted on the mechanism and application effects of creative art therapy to provide more effective treatment options for patients with depression.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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