

## EXPLORING ART THERAPY IN HELPING PROFESSION

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### ABSTRACT

Psychological deprivation, which emphasises a lack of understanding in thinking, feeling, and behavioural issues, can be most effectively addressed by individuals in helping professions using appropriate techniques and approaches. Helping professions like counsellors, psychotherapists, and therapists play extremely important roles and are practically required in every department or organisation to obtain the best possible guidance and outcomes from people who seek out emotional, mental, and physical support. Having access to a diverse range of techniques and a willingness to learn new things is crucial for helping professionals to deliver more inventive, engaging, and creative guidance and counselling services. The helping professions have therefore changed to reflect the times, emphasising the development of creative and innovative thinking that can result in the production of creative and innovative individuals. Helping professionals can equip themselves with a multitude of techniques and approaches to become better practitioner in this helping profession. One of the method is art therapy, which is drawing increasing attention from professionals for its innovative approach to incorporating artistic expression through games, dance, music, visual art, creative writing, and imagery. It can also be summed up as a range of multi-modal art. Thus, this paper will be a preliminary writing that focuses on the need for empirical studies of exploring the usage of art therapy in the helping profession to help their clients.

**Keywords:** art, therapy, art therapy, helping profession

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

People are under increasing pressure to solve problems, whether they like it or not, as a result of globalisation. Dealing with all these issues at school, in the workplace, in relationships, or within oneself is becoming more and more necessary. People view problems differently from one another, and since humans are incredibly diverse creatures with varying backgrounds, aptitudes, and emotional states, so are their reactions. The difficulties in addressing issues can have a variety of effects. Some learn how to cope on their own, while others give in and exacerbate the situation. Counselling and therapy become apparent in this context as means of assisting individuals in managing their psychological health. The term "psychological well-being" is wide and encompasses many different aspects of an individual's functioning and mental health. It is influenced by many things, including stress at work, physical activity, social support, religion, and self-stigma. Researches shown that psychological well-being influences more general outcomes such as the probability of developing dementia, one's financial status, and the welfare of children with chronic illnesses, in addition to being essential for personal fulfilment and happiness (Ridley et al., 2020).

Counselling and psychotherapy services are in great demand. According to Samadi Ahmad in Berita Harian (2022), counselling is a basic service that most organisations provide to their target groups, and it is not only necessary in schools and hospitals. This news report states that the need for counselling extends to issues with marriage, household, and marital related problems as well as issues at work, such as employee motivation, communication problems in the workplace, and emotional disorders. Counselling services are also necessary to heal community members, and on top of that, 60 000 counsellors are required to assist in providing for the needs of Malaysians who are in need.

The services provided by helping professionals every so often see upgrades and improvements to guarantee the psychological and mental health of their clients. These days, efforts are focused on helping clients develop their mental balance or stability through ongoing therapy, counselling and guidance. In order to foster the development of people who are socially and spiritually stable and, as a result, contribute to the general well-being of society, the Malaysian government has consistently supported and acknowledged the value of guidance and counselling services in schools (Siti Nubailah, 2021).

Art therapy is one of the approaches in helping professions that can assist therapist and counsellors to equip themselves with knowledge and skills as the use of art is a very good way to help clients to find purpose and meaning in life. Research shows that the use of Arts Therapy can assist counsellors and therapists in recognise issues that are related to the issues affecting adolescents as it also helps in understanding clients' life experiences wholly and holistically (Avi Goren-Bar, 2019; Sesar et al., 2022). It is also a fairly new approach in Malaysia to begin with so it has to be explore for the sake of knowledge and skills for counsellors and clients' gain (Johan et al., 2018). There's also a growing need to shift some paradigm in the diversification of the helping professionals approaches to help improve the professionalism of the field.

The majority of research has been done thus far in Western environments and communities. It's time to examine the results of former researches in order to provide guidance, improvement, and a catalyst for helping professionals in Malaysia. It's a method that should be emphasised because it makes it easier for helping professionals to undertand clients who find it difficult to communicate their emotions (Adibah & Zakaria, 2015; Sh Marzety Adibah Al Sayed Mohamad et al., 2015). Additionally, the use of this therapy can serve as a module to support future scientific research in the fields of therapy, counselling and psychotherapy as well as to help therapists, parents, teachers, and other relevant parties continue to reach out to their clients in order to ensure their psychological well-being and address psychological issues that is prevalent throughout our country. It is also highly significant because it creates new avenues for thought and discussion as well as opportunities for innovation and action to advance our understanding of this subject. Furthermore, in order to help therapist and counsellors identify, develop, and acquire new knowledge, theory, practice, and approach in order to assist their clients, there is a growing need for research on this specific topic, particularly in the context of Malaysia. (Malchiodi, 2023).

## **2.0 ART AND IT'S INFLUENCE ON HUMAN**

Although there isn't a single, accepted definition of art, most people agree that it is the deliberate use of ability and creativity to create something lovely or significant. Throughout

history and across various cultures, the meaning and worth of art have evolved (Lisa Marder, 2019). Lisa also states that the Latin word "ars," which denotes art, skill, or craft, is connected to the English word "art." The word was first recorded in 13th-century manuscripts. Still, the term "art" and all of its derivatives (eart, artem, etc.) date back most likely to the time when Rome was founded. From the traditional point of view, Plato in (Adajian, 2022) describes arts as something that representational or mimetic and sometimes translated as imitative. Another definition come from Kant (2000) who says art is composed of representational, formalist, and expressivist elements. It also emphasises the creative process of the artistic genius, who, in Kant's view, has a natural mental aptitude that serves as the basis for art's rules. It can be conclude that Kant define art as a form.

Art also define as expression of emotional content as artists attempt to engage their audience and elicit reactions from them (Graham, 2005). Art began to be defined as something that was made with skill but also with the intention of expressing the artist's emotions and beauty during the Romantic era of the 18th century. This was a reaction against the Enlightenment and its emphasis on science, empirical evidence, and rational thought. Spirituality and freedom of expression were embraced, and nature was exalted. In addition to becoming famous in their own right, artists frequently entertained members of the upper class (Hacmun et al., 2021).

On the other hand, Keifer-Boyd (2011) states that art is something that come hand in hand with insight and artists conducting in-depth research to produce their works. The same research also states that art is about exploring ideas or concepts through a multisensory approach that upholds human dignity by subversively depicting differences and dispelling hatred towards oneself and others. Fundamentally, it also can be say that arts seek to explain phenomena by capturing them (Adajian, 2022). It is also possible to view art as a physical manifestation of human nature, available for interpretation by others. It can be a representation of a tangible object, idea, feeling, thought, or concept. It conveys the whole gamut of human experience in a nonviolent way (Lisa Marder, 2019).

There are also a number of universal qualities that are acknowledged as essential to art. These include the physical or experiential art object being valued for its own sake instead of just serving a practical purpose, offering creative experiences to both the creator and the viewer, and evoking or containing strong feelings. Additionally, the requirements for originality, creativity, or uniqueness; the requirement for specialised knowledge; and the observance of composition, form, or expression rules set the creation of art apart (Galassi et al., 2022; Sanjay Jangid, 2022). Arts also can be view as communicative, embodied, and active social practices as it said that participating in the arts can improve some people's perception of themselves (Sherman & Morrissey, 2017). Art encompasses a wide range of human influence and output, such as imaginative or creative talent that conveys technical mastery, aesthetic appeal, emotional impact, or conceptual ideas (Wang & Ma, 2019).

People have used art as a means of self-expression for millennia. A society's collective memory is frequently referred to as art, which preserves the sensation of being in a specific place and time that fact-based historical records might not be able to. The ability of art to soothe, connect, and communicate has been emphasised more than ever in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Art has brought hope and much-needed human connection across geographic, racial, and cultural boundaries, whether it is through individuals singing to each other from their

balconies, musicians playing orchestral works over Zoom, or artists using their creativity to explain public health guidelines (Darda & Cross, 2022; Fernández-Cao et al., 2020; Hacmun et al., 2021; Kendra Cherry, 2023; Sonke et al., 2023).

Jin & Ye (2022) state that human ideals, culture, identity, lifestyles, emotions, and societal experiences can all be most effectively expressed through art. A vast array of expressive and creative practices are included in the category of art, and they are effective means of expressing emotions, advancing one's own growth, representing culture, and altering society. It encompasses a wide range of artistic mediums and is vital in boosting mental health, encouraging innovation, and subverting social norms (Fancourt & Finn, 2019b). Furthermore, in many disciplines, including psychology, medicine, and social psychology, art is a potent expressive tool with a wide range of applications. A variety of settings have investigated the use of art as a therapeutic medium, showcasing its capacity to encourage emotional expression, enhance wellbeing, and aid in personal growth (Binson & Lev-Wiesel, 2018; Hu et al., 2021a).

### 3.0 THERAPY ROLES IN HUMAN'S LIFE

Therapy can be found in a several field namely medical, mental health or psychiatry and psychology. This paper will focus on therapy from the psychological perspectives. According to Psychology Today (Therapy | Psychology Today, n.d.) therapy or psychotherapy is an approach to treatment that aims to relieve mental health issues and emotional distress. It involves analysing and gaining insight into life choices and challenges faced by individuals, couples, or families, and can be provided by any of a variety of trained professionals—psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, or licenced counsellors. The term "therapy," also known as "talk therapy," describes a range of medical interventions designed to assist an individual in recognising and altering problematic feelings, ideas, and behaviours. Most therapy sessions involve a patient and a licenced practitioner meeting one-on-one or in a group setting with other patients (Psychotherapies - National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 2023) .

Based on a partnership between a patient and a psychologist, therapy is a collaborative treatment approach. Situated amidst discourse, it furnishes a succinct setting that permits candid conversations with an impartial, unbiased, and exempt therapist. To find and alter the thought and behaviour patterns preventing patients from feeling their best, patients and their psychologist will collaborate (American Psychological Association, 2023). Therapy is also one kind of treatment that can benefit people with a variety of emotional problems and mental health issues. In addition to treating symptoms, therapy can help pinpoint the psychological underpinnings of a person's illness so they can heal and function better on an emotional level. This is also known as psychotherapy. Therapy can help with a variety of conditions, such as managing stressful life events, the effects of trauma, medical illness or loss (such as the death of a loved one or grieving), and certain mental health issues like anxiety or depression (Wiswede et al., 2014).

Therapy can benefit both adults and children and can be provided in a group, family, couple, or individual setting. Psychotherapy can be short-term (a few weeks to months) to address more pressing issues, or long-term (months to years) to address more complicated and persistent problems. Together, the patient and therapist discuss the objectives of the treatment as well as its length and frequency. In addition, confidentiality is a fundamental prerequisite of

psychotherapy (Knekt et al., 2016). McLeod and Sundet (2022) suggest that therapy should be viewed as a process of making rather than an intervention, providing a cultural environment in which people can jointly create fulfilling lives that make use of common cultural resources.

As an addition, according to APA's 2022 COVID-19 Practitioner Impact Survey (American Psychological Association, 2022), there is a high and growing demand for therapy, with 79% of psychologists reporting a rise in patients with anxiety disorders and 64% reporting an increase in patients seeking help for disorders related to trauma and stressors. When compared to prior years, two thirds of the patients they see now have symptoms that are more severe. Thus, this shows that therapy play a really important role in helping people deal with their psychological problems. A person's unique circumstances, the kind of therapy employed, the strength of the therapeutic alliance, and their level of commitment to the process are all important variables that can influence the impact of therapy. It is also crucial to note that different people will respond differently to therapy, and that no two people will necessarily have the same results. Therapy has been shown to be beneficial for many people, but it's important to understand that there are some barriers that can affect how effective it is. Despite these challenges, the positive outcomes and potential for transformative change underscore the significance of therapy in supporting mental health and well-being.

#### **4.0 ART THERAPY: ABILITIES AND IMPACTS**

Art therapy started to be used extensively, particularly in the post-World War II rehabilitation efforts. When Adrian Hill was a painting instructor at the King Edward VII Sanatorium in 1942, he coined the phrase "art therapy" (Mollaoğlu et al., 2022). Art therapy is a mix of a number of artistic expressions including movements, music, visual art, creative writing, games and imagery. Art therapy can also be summarized into an integrated therapy of various therapies and also use a variety of multi-modal art (Adibah & Zakaria, 2015; Johan et al., 2018; Razali, 2021). According to the American Art Therapy Association (AATA), art therapy is a contemporary method that uses creative processes to enhance the individual's physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all ages (Mohamad et al., 2020). The use of digital tools and media also open a huge space into the therapeutic setting and are being integrated into creative therapies such as visual arts, music, and the intermodal use in expressive art therapy (Mcadams, 2021). As its main means of communication, art therapy is a type of psychotherapy (Tripathi, 2012). Art therapy is one of the ways for people to engage with and find expression in the arts (Ahessy, 2013). Art therapy also a type of expressive therapy in which the client creates artwork using one or more of a wide range of media to communicate thoughts and feelings (Crawford, 2008).

The ability of expressive arts therapy, which includes art therapy, to promote people's mental health and wellbeing has been acknowledged. Studies have shown how art therapy can be used in a variety of contexts, including the treatment of eating disorders (Bucharová et al., 2020), the treatment of trauma (Fernández-Cao et al., 2020), and the support of people who have cystic fibrosis (Posa & Moola, 2020). Professionals have employed expressive arts, such as visual arts, music, dance, and drama, to facilitate self-expression, emotional regulation, and experience exploration with youth in schools (Degges-White, 2019). Art therapy has also been demonstrated to be helpful in helping people express and communicate their emotions, especially in settings like juvenile detention centres and oncology and palliative care ("Art

Therapy in Oncology and Palliative Care – Overview of Empirical Results And A Case Vignette,” 2018; Liesera et al., 2020).

Many populations, including adolescents (Fotima, 2020) and people who struggle with anger management (Yusof et al., 2020), have acknowledged the potential of art therapy as a tool for self-discovery and emotional expression. Furthermore, the application of art therapy has been investigated in relation to social inclusion and the advancement of fundamental knowledge and abilities in art education (Al-Radaideh et al., 2019). (Bucharová et al., 2020) have identified the intermodal approach of expressive arts therapies as a valuable framework for supporting individuals' emotional expression and well-being. This approach includes art therapy, music therapy, drama therapy, and dance or movement therapy. In addition to giving people opportunities for self-expression and empowerment, the use of art therapy has been linked to promoting client voice and choice (Van Lith, 2020). Poems, music, and visual art were frequently used as platforms for people to express their hardships. These techniques are demonstrated by artistic mediums like sculpture and pottery, as well as musical genres (Oluwamayomikun Ajayi, 2023).

From another perspectives, children are encouraged to paint, sculpt, draw, and create from an early age, so it's likely that they find this to be a familiar and comfortable way to express themselves using art therapy (Karkou et al., 2022). Art therapy also has been shown to assist people in understanding their thoughts and feelings, expressing themselves, and creating positive, adaptable behavioural patterns (Nielsen et al., 2017). Additionally, art therapy has been linked to improvements in clients' sensory perception, self-perception, physical and psychological health, social skills, communication, personal integration, and insight (Dowla et al., 2019). As an addition, it has been observed that the application of art therapy helps people shift their focus from their illness to its positive aspects and cultivates feelings of productivity, calmness, and value (Rüütel et al., 2019). The positive impacts of art therapy also acknowledged by clients , family members, and helping professionals who have witnessed the amazing transformational effects of art therapy (Olonite et al., 2020). All in all, it can be said that art therapy offers a wide range of benefits, including cognitive, psychological, and emotional improvements, and has shown effectiveness in enhancing people's well-being across diverse demographics. The research backs up the use of art therapy as a beneficial and all-encompassing strategy for enhancing mental health and wellbeing.

## 5.0 HELPING PROFESSION: ROLES AND COMPETENCIES

From psychotherapists to learning mentors, social care support workers to life coaches, and counsellors to paramedics, the term "helping professions" has become widely used to characterise a variety of roles found within a wide range of professional contexts. The American Psychological Association (APA) refers helping profession as career that offers individuals and groups health and educational services. It covers careers in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, counselling, medicine, nursing, social work, physical and occupational therapy, teaching, and education that involve providing health and educational services to individuals and groups. It can be said that a broad spectrum of professions committed to supporting and aiding those in need are included in the helping profession.

According to Egan and Reese (2018), people who make counselling and helping skills a major part of their work are referred to as "helping" in a general sense. This covers a variety of

professionals, such as social workers, paramedics, mentors, support workers, and teachers, who work with patients, students, and clients in a supportive and helpful environment but are not always involved in therapeutic interventions. This includes counsellors, psychotherapists, and other similar professionals. Individuals working in these fields may offer patient care, contribute to community safety initiatives, or implement programmes designed to safeguard and rehabilitate vulnerable groups (Pipere & Mårtinson, 2021).

Defining the term "helping professions" also may require us to consider practitioners who use helping skills as an integral part of their work, which is not always evident from their job title, rather than just identifying a position within an organisation that is defined as "therapeutic" (Westergaard, 2017). This line of work is intended to provide institutionalised support to people who are at risk, such as those who have experienced trauma, violence, oppression, or discrimination. It is defined by the growth of a professional identity, the development of resilience, interprofessional cooperation, and the moral obligations connected to different professions (Vîrga et al., 2020). The special difficulties and requirements of the helping professions highlight the value of training, supervision, and ethical concerns in ensuring the welfare of practitioners and the people they assist (Margaliot & Gorev, 2020).

Helping professionals who work in direct-service occupations like medical, nursing, social work, psychotherapy, psychological counselling, and other fields. People in these settings are listeners, sounding boards, nurturers, and carers. They are always reaching out to help others (Jennifer Abcug, 2023). A helping profession includes any medical, nursing, psychotherapy, psychological counselling, social work, education, or coaching that is characterised by a professional relationship between a helping expert and a client, with the goal of fostering the development of the client or addressing issues related to their physical, psychological, intellectual, or emotional (Graf et al., 2014). Human and social services are provided by those in the helping professions. The specific verbal and non-verbal interactions that take place between the participants are what define the helping profession (Miller & Considine, 2009). Thus, this article may focus on counsellors and therapists as helping professionals that relates to the practice of art therapy.

It is worth to note that those who involve in helping professions should aware of current practitioners' levels of competence (Oxhandler et al., 2017) and this is because this kind of occupations need specific training, expertise, and knowledge, highlighting the significance of specialised training in establishing and preserving professional competence (O'Reilly et al., 2020). Hendrawan et al., (2021) and Kassirer et al., (2019) also highlight the importance specialised training, professional standards, and codes of ethics play in enhancing helping professionals. Furthermore, training, further educational opportunity and benefits for personal development also should be consider by helping professionals (Tan et al., 2023). It is also evident that specialised training is necessary to improve the cultural competency of helping professionals, as highlighted by Costa & Dewaele (2019), who call attention to the lack of training that therapists and counsellors receive in effectively treating clients.

This is echoed by (Meier, 2021) who stated that helping professionals from all theoretical backgrounds should possess the fundamental ability of involving clients and promoting attendance, demonstrating the necessity of client engagement strategies training for the establishment of successful therapeutic relationships. As an addition, in order to help people

achieve optimal well-being in terms of physical, mental, social, emotional, and intellectual aspects, helping professions working in this field must change laws and regulations, vocational training, and practices (Mollaoğlu et al., 2022). Thus, it can be said that helping professionals should be ready to equip themselves with new knowledge and training so that they can help their client better and not only stuck to the only method they know. They should be ready to change and adapt to new knowledge as stated by Rønnestad et al. (2019) that highlight the most important discoveries from empirical research on the development of helping professionals, illuminating the need for professional development, training and discovery for new knowledge for those working in these fields.

## 6.0 HELPING PROFESSION AND ART THERAPY

In earlier research by Opegard et al. (2005) they found that the reason why helping professionals use art therapy because they possess a great passion for both helping others and art. Helping professionals also utilize the artistic process to improve and heal people of all ages' mental, physical, and emotional well-being (Elkins & Deaver, 2010). Furthermore, helping professionals who work in art therapy integrate one or more of the few categories of psychotherapy techniques, such as painting, reading, dance, drama, music, poetry, and psychodrama, to help them choose their own therapeutic approaches (Mollaoğlu et al., 2022). This is second by other researches that indicate helping professionals use art as a form of development and therapy for individuals who suffer from illness, trauma, or other challenges in life, or who simply seek personal growth. It has been demonstrated that engaging in artistic expression helps people recover from traumatic experiences, enhance their cognitive abilities, and find more joy in life (Chang et al., 2019; Shukla et al., 2022). Also, numerous art therapists concur that the act of creative in art itself has healing properties (Bostancıoğlu & Kahraman, 2017; Gilmour et al., 2020; Hemingway et al., 2018). The goal of helping professionals in using art therapy is to transform negative emotions into honest expressions through creative means, rather than to eradicate a person's fears, anxieties, restlessness, or unhappiness (Case et al., 2022; King & Kaimal, 2019).

By supplying the materials and creating a safe space where clients can explore and learn new things about themselves via their artistic experiences, helping professionals or therapists actively participate in the art-making process with their clients (Marshall-Tierney, 2021). They also think that active artmaking, creative process or theory, applied psychological theory, and human development within a psychotherapy relationship are the ways in which art therapy improves the lives of individuals, families, and communities (Elkins & Deaver, 2010; Hemingway et al., 2018). Through the integration of human-helping techniques with artistic expression, helping professionals who use art therapy provide their clients with a creative and supportive environment (Mollaoğlu et al., 2022). For over a century, art therapy has been employed in suitable settings and is professionally maintained. Systematic and controlled researches have demonstrated the healing effects, advantages, and important contributions of art to the healing process in recent years (Bostancıoğlu & Kahraman, 2017; Case et al., 2022). In addition to being a helpful therapeutic approach that helps patients communicate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, art therapy can be used as a complementary treatment to help professionals in their diagnoses by providing them with additional data (Hu et al., 2021b).



In order to help their clients reach self-realization, helping professionals who use art therapy see this type of therapy as a collaborative creative journey that makes use of the therapist's genuine presence, empathy, and unconditional acceptance (Tompkins Rosa, 2023). Helping professionals also believe that through their guidance and professionalisme, they are able to address psychosocial problems in individuals, particularly children and adolescents using art therapy (Bosgraaf et al., 2020). They believe that there are uniqueness in art therapy in which its emphasis on experience-based, nonverbal therapy through the use of visual arts, including painting, drawing, and sculpture. It is also frequently offered as a stand-alone therapy or as a component of multidisciplinary treatment programmes for a range of issues (Abbing et al., 2019; Haeyen et al., 2020). Thus, it can be said that helping professionals choose art therapy because of its exceptional capacity to treat patients experientially, encourage self-expression and resilience, lessen pathology, and improve mental health in a variety of populations. In order to effectively address psychosocial issues and promote positive mental health outcomes, art therapy makes use of art supplies and the guidance of professionals during the creative process (Preston, 2019; Schweizer et al., 2020).

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

After all the discussions about helping professionals and art therapy, it can be conclude that the benefits of art therapy in counselling and therapy are becoming more widely acknowledged, especially when it comes to treating a range of psychological and emotional issues. Throughout the three decades covered (1990 to 2020), an increasing number of educational studies mentioned an art therapy approach (Wu & Chung, 2023). Promising outcomes in improving the therapeutic process also have been observed when art therapy is combined with conventional counselling or therapy techniques. Additionally, it has been discovered that there is a perceived therapeutic benefit to combining verbal and nonverbal activities in art therapy (Karkou et al., 2022; Malchiodi, 2023).

In addition, art therapy has been shown to be a successful intervention for people with limited language proficiency, which makes it a perfect tools for psychological counselling and therapy (Abdul Rahman et al., 2023). These results demonstrate the potential of art therapy as an adjunctive strategy in counselling and therapy, providing a special channel for emotional exploration and self-expression. It also one of the most practical and flexible tool in counselling and therapy that can be intergrate in many settings (Azmawati et al., 2018). Although it fairly new in our local settings, counsellors, researchers, parents, educators, and individuals from diverse backgrounds can employ art therapy as a specialised intervention to further engage with clients and lessen the prevalence of social disorders, a problem that jeopardises peace and prosperity. Thus, further in-depth research and development for this therapy in Malaysia's setting must be done to help the professionals and their clients to reach their goal in therapy and sessions.

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