

Case Report Analysis: Art Therapy as a Tool During the Exploration Phase in Individual Psychotherapy

Mohammad Hazim Amir Nordin¹, Nurhafizah Amir Nordin²,
Mohd Fahridzakki Abd Rahman³, Nurul Ashyikin Mohd Jaafar⁴,
Nurshahrina Ahmad Tarmizi⁵, Nik Sasliza Nik Saberi⁶

^{1,3}Psychology and Counselling Unit, Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia Raja Melewar
Campus, Malaysia, ²Faculty of Art, Computing and Creative Design, Sultan Idris Education
University, Malaysia, ⁴Faculty of Education, Humanities and Wellbeing, University of
Geomatika, Malaysia, ^{5,6}Independent Researcher, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i4/15750>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i4/15750

Published Online: 31 December 2022

Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine and review evidence-based strategies through art therapy in the exploration phase during the individual psychotherapy session. Respondent in this study are 11 years old pupil who live in Kuala Lumpur. Art therapy can be used as a guideline for practitioners or psychologists to be practise in fields. These include antecedent strategies that can help reduce the emergence of problematic behaviours as well as interventions that provide positive consequences for appropriate respondent behaviours. Three contributing factor of reluctance were recognise such as environment, self-conflict and rapport. This study shows that implementing art therapy during the individual psychotherapy session has identified four positive impact (trust, openness, in depth of sharing and real issues for discussion) and helps psychologist to conduct the session in an interactive way.

Keywords: Art, Exploration, Behaviour, Psychotherapy

Introduction

Art therapy is a method that can be used during individual psychotherapy sessions to provide relief to respondent and to serve as a medium for the respondent to talk more freely about difficult-to-articulate ideas and feelings. Art therapy, defined as the utilization of art to improve and strengthen an individual's physical, mental, and emotional health, benefits from art's are imaginative, effective, and adaptable effect by artistic activities (Mollaoğlu et al., 2022). Art therapy may be used to assess a psychologist's capacity to convey and understand the issues of a client. Art therapy may help the psychologist explore the respondent's underlying issues and demonstrate critical abilities that might spark the respondent's interest in the session. According to Malchiodi (2012) story that have been shared by the client via art therapy can be observed to justify psychological improvements in respondent emotional growth. According to Judith (2016) acceptance of art therapy differs because there are too many interpretations that imply art therapy is also part of a treatment process. Art therapy is

beneficial to pupils because respondent can express himself through art therapy by using basic materials provided by the psychologist, such as several types of coloured pencils, pencils, erasers, rulers, drawing paper, and the freedom to sketch and colour. According to Karaca & Eren (2014), art therapy may be used in sessions since it helps in classifying situations, developing intervention and treatment planning.

Sample of Study

In this study respondent is a primary school pupil, 11 years old males and lives in the city of Kuala Lumpur. Respondent is the third child in a four-child family. He lives with his parents and his aunt in one house. Because he is impoverished and lives in the city, respondent believes that his life is less exciting and liberating rather than his friends. He stated that the limited living space made it difficult for him to do his routine activities such as sleeping, eating, and watching television. Respondent feel annoyed because he had to change his clothes in the bathroom due to the condition of the room, which had been assigned only to his sisters. As a result of these living arrangements, respondent prefer to spend his time outside of the house rather than being at home. He also indicated that he loves to be in the mosque since it is quiet, has air conditioning, and is quite spacious. When he walks into the mosque, he finds a serene and tranquil setting in which he can lie down and rest. Respondent expressed that he did not experienced the same environment at home, and he began to compare his condition at home to the mosque.

Finding and Discussion of the Study

This study is based on the psychologist's reflection conducting individual psychotherapy sessions with primary school pupil who are frequently absent in school. Respondent was referred by his homeroom teacher, who was worried about his academic performance. As a response, he was referred to a psychologist for individual psychotherapy session. Psychologists, on the other hand, had some difficulty conducting the session especially on the exploratory phase. This is due to the respondent reluctance to continue the individual psychotherapy session since he is embarrassed to share or discuss his issues with the psychologist. Because of his reluctancy to talk, psychologist took the initiative to implement art therapy in the psychotherapy session and asked respondent to draw his feelings when he imagine about his house on the drawing paper. Figure 1 is the process of the session.

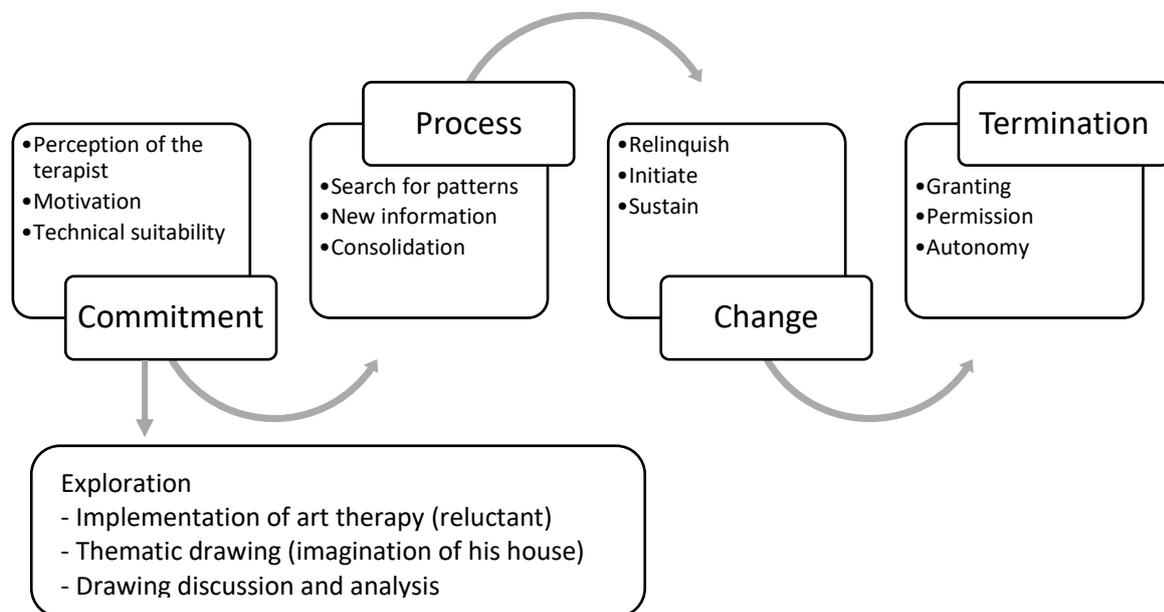


Figure 1. Adaptation of Rivera stage of psychotherapy session

Later on, psychologist discovered that respondent felt ashamed after he was being criticised by the other teachers and other pupils at school. This is one of the reason why he was absent. However, his attendance and academic performance was not the only reason why he has been refereed by his homeroom teacher, the other reason is he had been seen lingering in the new mosque near his house during the school time. During the session, psychologist ask respondent to draw a picture of his home and discussed his conditions that make him dislike being at home and prefer hanging out with his friends. Following the exploration phase with the respondent, he was asked to share his real issue which is school absence. However, the respondent only said that he was happy when he did not come to school, but on the other side he aware that attending school was his responsibility as a children. The respondent believes that the psychologist does not need to know the true reason for the respondent's absence from school.

Respondent: *"I'm happy that I don't have to go to school. The place I visited was both comfortable and beautiful".*

Psychologist: *"Can you tell the me what makes you happy to be in that place? Actually, where is the place?"*.

Respondent: *"At the mosque. Even though I know that I can't hang out there, it's a prayer place, but it's very comfortable. There's air conditioning, it's cool and the mosque is very comfortable. The mosque is very close to my house".*

Psychologist: *"Try to tell me more about what you really like, about being in the mosque?"*

Respondent: *(blushing, smile and show a shy reaction).*

As a result, the psychologist attempts to lead the respondent during the session using a few strategies since the problem addressed has not been resolved until the termination phase because the respondent's true issue has not yet been thoroughly investigated. The sessions are then continued by the psychologist by using art therapy as a technique for the respondent to reveal his real issues. Respondents can express their feelings in the exploration phase of individual psychotherapy sessions by the expression through art. Art therapy has long been employed primarily in the healing process by psychiatrist and clinical experts. Art therapy could be very beneficial in terms of treatment and therapy, as well as improving nonverbal communication. Art therapy may also be more effective in combination with several other forms of therapy such as music, dance, and other sensory stimuli (Hu et al., 2021). During the exploration phase in the session, respondent able to sketch the conditions and spaces identified in the respondent's home; respondent indicates that the condition of the house is crowded, and he feel tired of staying in the house because of the limited space. Below is the interview analysis regarding this issue.

Respondent: *"For your information, my house is very small because there are many people who live in one house".*

Psychologist: *"Oh, really, can you share with me who else is staying with you in the house?"*.

Respondent: *"There is me, my mother, my father, my aunt family, and my siblings. My aunt is a teacher. She is my mother's sister. Can you imagine how I can live and fit the whole family in just one house? (respondent shows an angry reaction while staring intently at the drawing)"*.

Psychologist: *"So, you feel uncomfortable staying at your home because of the limited space and little privacy for yourself. Is that the reason why you prefer to hang out at the mosque rather than at home?"*.

Respondent: *"Yes, it is"*.

Therefore, through art therapy, respondent able to express his feelings of boredom when he is at home, which is the main reason he left the house and does not willing to attend school. According to Judith (2016) art therapy can create good behaviour. Therefore, the respondent's narration through the drawing can create a good way or process of relief for the respondent. During the session, respondent expresses dissatisfaction with the house's overcrowded spaces. According to Barrett, Holttum & Wright (2022), art can be used to express and contain a wide range of ideas. There were non-verbal expression, emotions, memories and anxieties. Furthermore, before respondent begins to share his issues, he can recognize the distinction between the relief process and the drawing he have made. Despite of that, art therapy may assist respondents in the exploration phase of individual psychotherapy sessions by disclosing anything that comes to his mind.

According to Nordin & Mohd (2020) art therapy conducted by practitioners allows in-depth exploration of client's issues. In this study during the exploration phase, psychologist demonstrated confrontation skills by informing the respondent that he would not only have

to share a room with his brothers, but would also have to share a house with his mother's sister. In this case, the respondent stated that the living room, which is intended to be a place for siblings to watch television and play, has been given to his mother's younger sister, who also lives at his house. For example, respondent was drawing a cluttered living room full with beds and cushions. Psychologist observes that respondent is able to express the difficulty through drawing as a result of this art therapy. According to Nordin (2020) the use of art allows respondent to explore and develop a portrayal of their feelings throughout the session.

Respondent: *"Can you imagine that my aunt were staying in our living room. As the only son in the house, where should I stay?"*

Psychologist: *"Oh, who else is staying at the other two rooms?"*

Respondent: *"One room belongs to my parents, and the other one is used by both of my sisters. So where else should I go and sleep? What about my privacy as the only son in the house? (he was staring at the floor and in silence)"*

Psychologist: *"Are you thinking of something? Mind to share it with me?"*

Respondent: *"Yes, I just need my privacy. I feel sad. I need a place where I can do my own activities".*

According to Judith (2016) systematic thinking is one of the finest techniques for psychological growth and relief in family therapy. Despite of that Dolginko (2021) supports this by indicating that art therapy may be used to assist theoretical acceptance in psychotherapy as a treatment or intervention. As a result, respondent's issues might provide much-needed constancy throughout the exploration phase during individual psychotherapy sessions. In addition, art therapy can help respondents to express his feelings in the exploratory phase through individual psychotherapy sessions by putting the issues that arise in the drawing.

This can be seen in the respondent's drawing when he drew a cramped room where the respondent feels ashamed to share the room with his other siblings due to gender differences, it is because of the norm and religious fact that has been practised among Muslim families in Malaysia. In the session, respondent describes the condition of the room, which shows that the respondent has no comfortable place to sleep and rest. He had to slept on the floor at living room. Through this art therapy, psychologist finds that respondent start to talk more deeply about the real issues that he have. The cramped conditions in the house were describe by the respondent in his drawing, he drew a picture of a raging fire outside of the window. This shows the state of the respondent, who feels that he wants to burn down the narrow house so that his parents can buy a new big house for his family.

Respondent: *"You know what, sometimes I feel like burn this house to the ground. That is how much I hate my life right now (whilst saying that and laughing)."*

Psychologist: *"What makes you feel that way?"*

Respondent: *"If I put my house on fire, my parents will buy a new house. Maybe a bigger one! (whilst showing his drawing a fire on the window)."*

Psychologist: "Are you sure that your parents will buy a new house?"

Respondent: "Yes! I'm pretty sure about that. Where else can we live if the house were caught in a fire?"

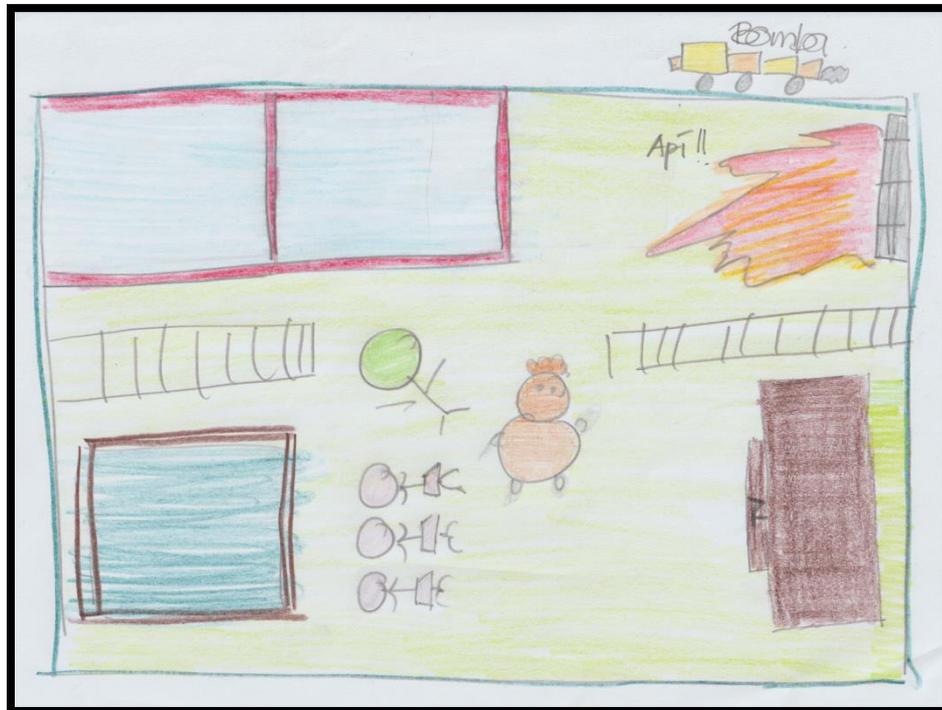


Figure 2. A drawing of a blazing fire burning through a window.

Art is useful for establishing rapport with a child who presents with a difficult-to-verbalize issue or who lacks the ability to express a problem verbally (Braitto et al., 2022). Psychologists can use adversarial techniques to gain the respondent's trust. Art therapy, according to Judith (2016) is the third phase in regression in regulating the human ego through psychodynamic participation. As a result, respondent appears more confident and willing to continue the session with psychologist. In this session, respondent shows that he does not like his cousin, who lives with his family in the same house. From his view a happy family is a family that lives together, consisting of a mother, father, and children. Therefore, the respondent found that the presence of his aunt families made the house cramped and limited.

Respondent decided to be in another place, namely at the mosque, because he stated that when he skipped school and he feel happy being at the mosque. Judith (2016) defines art as the interaction between things and human existence. As a result of this art therapy, respondent might discover the meanings of the drawings and relate them to the issues they are experiencing. This is supported by Winnicott (2019), who claims that changing the form and drawing on the sketched artwork would result in varied interpretations depending on the pupils' environment and life background. Art therapy can help respondent to share about his issues during the exploration phase of individual psychotherapy sessions by acting as a guide for them to describe the issues they are experiencing based on the chronologies they have encountered. The respondent can tell his or her problems one by one in art therapy. When he is able to draw the condition of a space in his home, it serves as a guide for him to describe problems that he encountered and become a memory for him. Examples of spaces that can

be shared in his drawing includes respondent's living room and bedroom. He can tell the psychologist about anything in depth. According to Razali (2021) art therapy can be used to express negative repressed emotions or trauma, improve communication, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and expand the support system.

Respondent: *“Teacher, this is the room in my house where I plan to put cupboards, toys and other items”.*

Psychologist: *“Can you explain more about your drawing?”.*

Respondent: *“Yes. This is a bedroom, and this is a living room. This is the room where my sister sleeps. So it's not fun to be in this house together with all this people. This house is so small”.*

In this study three contributing factor of reluctancy during the psychotherapy session were identified. Firstly environment factor, which consist of how his teachers, friends and school perception towards respondent is a reason for his avoidance. Secondly is self-conflict where respondent feel shy to start talking and share his issues. Thirdly is rapport between respondent and psychologist, on this terms psychologist competency played an important roles to attract and build trust between them. Figure 3 define this factor as below.

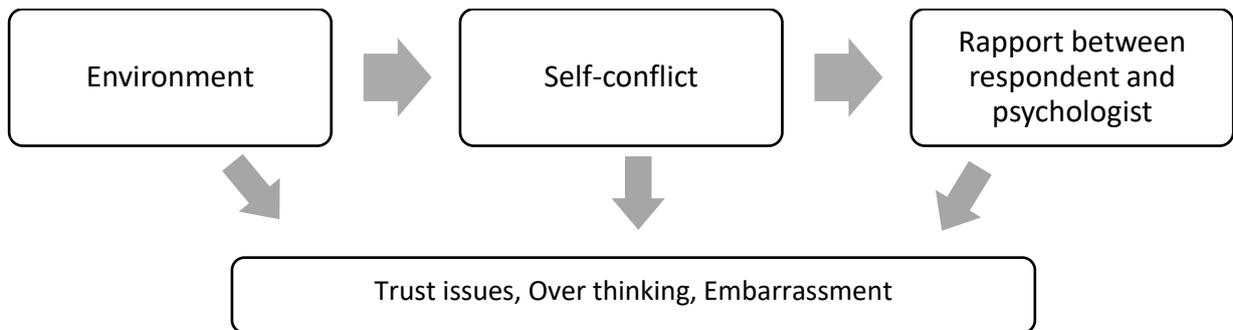


Figure 3. Contributing factor of respondent reluctancy.

Barton, (2019) explained children's artwork can convey more meaning than their words. Art-making in the community has been shown to improve mental health. Individuals can improve their self-esteem and sense of worth by using visual and symbolic expressions in art therapy (Shukla et al., 2022). Art therapy has been used to promote general population health as well as mental health, with cancer patients, the elderly, children, and various social groups as target populations, regardless of whether they have mental disorders or not (Mocerf, 2021). A part of reluctancy, in this study result showed four implication of art therapy during the session that shows these intervention are effective. Firstly, is trust issues between respondent and psychologist were resolved. Secondly, respondent ready for stage openness in his sharing. Thirdly is in dept of sharing consist of true emotion, feeling and thought. Last but not least through this intervention psychologist able to identify real issues in the sharing. Figure 4 define this implication as below.



Figure 4. Implication of art therapy in the session.

As a result, respondent able to express himself more deeply through art therapy. This is supported by Judith's, (2016) assertion that the level of unconsciousness in families is extremely high due to differences in thoughts, emotions, and self-development. During this exploration phase, respondent can learn indirectly about the real problems regarding his family and manage his issues accordingly.

Conclusion

Through art therapy, respondent can discuss their problems in greater depth without experiencing any negative feelings that bind in their hearts. This study shown the effect of art therapy during individual psychotherapy session. Three contributing factor of reluctancy and four implication of art therapy were identified in this study. Therapeutic session through art therapy implied in these session successfully made respondents to express his feelings during the relief process. This is important, especially during the exploration phase, because psychologist needs to know the respondent's real problem in order to continue the individual psychotherapy session. Beside addressing issues, art therapy can also be an enjoyable activity for respondent. When respondent is able to continue with the individual psychotherapy session, psychologist can assist respondent in developing a treatment plan or precise intervention based on the issues. For future research, implementation of art therapy and

Authors Contribution

Mohammad Hazim Amir Nordin and Nurhafizah Amir Nordin contributed to the development of the contextual, theoretical and study design. Nurul Ashyikin Mohd Jaafar, Nurshahrina Ahmad Tarmizi & Nik Sasliza Nik Saberi performed the data analysis whilst Mohammad Hazim Amir Nordin and Mohd Fahridzakki Abd Rahman drafted the manuscript and made the critical revisions in the study. Authors had discussed the results, implications, literature and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

References

- Barton, G. (2019). *Developing literacy and the arts in school*. New York: Routledge.
- Bal, M., & Bryson, N. (2014). Semiotic and art history. *The art bulletin*, 73(2).
- Barrett, H., Holttum, S., & Wright, T. (2022). Therapist and respondent experiences of art therapy in relation to psychosis: a thematic analysis. *International Journal of Art Therapy*. 27, (3), 102-111.
- Braitto, I., Rudd, T., Buyuktasgin, D., Ahmed, M., Glancy, C., & Mulligan, A. (2022). Review systematic review of effectiveness of art psychotherapy in children with mental health disorder. *Irish Journal of Medical Science*. 1369-1383.
- Dolginko, B. G. (2021). *Applying developmental art theory in art therapy treatment and interventions*. London: Routledge.
- Mocerf, C. C. P. (2021). Art therapy in mental health: the relevance of art in multidisciplinary workshop in the treatment process of psychic suffering. *Journal Psychology and brain Study*. 5(9),45.
- Hu, J., Zhang, J., Hu, L., Yu, H., & Xu, J. (2021). Art Therapy: A Complementary Treatment for Mental Disorders. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 12.
- Judith, A. R. (2016). *Approaches to Art Therapy Theory & Technique*^{3d}. United States: Routledge.
- Karaca, S., & Eren, N. (2014). The use of creative art as a strategy for case formulation in psychotherapy: a case study. *Journal of clinical art therapy*. 2 (1), 1, 3-8.
- Mollaoglu, S., Mollaoglu, M., & Yanmis, S. (2022). Art Therapy with the Extent of Health Promotion. In (Ed.), Health Promotion. *IntechOpen*.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2012). *Handbook of art therapy edited by Cathy A. Malchiodi*. New York: Guilford Publication.
- Nordin, M., A., & Mohd, A., A., B. (2020). Children psychological support through the application of biomorphic concept: an intervention in educational psychology. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 9(4), 106-122.
- Nordin, M., H., A. (2020). Exploration of biomorphic concept for emotions expression in educational psychology. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Science*, 10(6), 909 -915.
- Razali, S. (2021). Art therapy for people with mental illness: overview of the evidence from empirical research on the effectiveness of the treatment. *International Journal of Art and Design*. 5, 34-47.
- Shukla, A., Choudhari, S., G., Gaidhane, A., M., Quazi S., Z. (2022). Role of Art Therapy in the Promotion of Mental Health: A Critical Review. *Cureus*, 14(8) 2-6.
- Winnicott, D. W. (2019). E-book *maturational processes and the facilitating environment 1984*. London: Routledge.