

ART THERAPY FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

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ABSTRACT

Background: Art therapy is a technique used in mental health profession in which patients with special needs use creative process facilitated by the art therapist to explore patients' interpersonal and art skills. Art therapy teaches knowledge of visual art (drawing and painting) and the creative process involved is not only beneficial for fine motor skills development but also assists in dealing with emotions. The objectives were to identify interpersonal skills, to develop art skills and to increase self-esteem through art therapy activities.

Subjects and Method: This was a qualitative study. A series of art therapy workshop were conducted in University of Malaya in collaboration with Malaysian Rehabilitation Council, Maybank Foundation, and University of Malaya. A number of 38 participants from Malaysian Rehabilitation Council who were autistic were invited to University of Malaya for the art therapy workshop. Their age range was from 8 - 17 years old and consisted of Malays, Chinese and Indians. It was a participant observer study in which the researcher studied the life of a group by sharing in its activities. Art therapy workshop was conducted for 6 months duration twice a month and each session was for 4 hours. Art template, art materials and a list of activities were given to each participant. Throughout the sessions, the way participants communicate and interact with researcher were documented to identify interpersonal skills. The development of art skills was through the teaching of art using the different art template for each session.

Results: From the outcome of the artwork, participants showed increased self-esteem as their art skills improved throughout the art sessions.

Conclusion: Art therapy is able to develop interpersonal skills, art skills and increase self-esteem of people with autism.

Keywords: Art therapy, autism, interpersonal skills, art skills, self-esteem

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