


ART THERAPY: POSSIBILITY OF CREATIVE INTERVENTION WITH ADULTS WITH SEVERE MENTAL DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To evidence the use of Art Therapy with adults in mental suffering due to severe mental disorders. Method: This is an integrative literature review of publications from the last ten years (from 2014 to 2024) in Portuguese, English, and Spanish. The following electronic bibliographic databases were used: Regional Portal of the Virtual Health Library (VHL), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), US National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health (PUBMED). Results: A total of 21 articles were selected. Regarding the type of person with severe mental disorder, five trials explored Schizophrenia and the impact of Art Therapy on the improvement of psychotic, cognitive and functional symptoms; four studies, Depressive and Anxiety Disorders; three articles addressed Substance Use Disorders; an article for interventions aimed at Personality Disorders and; three more articles for various mental disorders. The studies highlighted the versatility of Art Therapy in diversified environments, such as day hospitals and mental health services, promoting creativity, self-knowledge and social support. Conclusion: Different clinical profiles were identified, in which Art Therapy was reported, as having positive effects on its therapeutic performance. These findings suggest that Art Therapy can be applied as a psychosocial rehabilitation program in adults with severe mental disorders.

Keywords: Art therapy. Mental health. Mental Disorders. Health Care.

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INTRODUCTION

After the 1970s, in Brazil, the Psychiatric Reform represented a new paradigm of mental health care and brought the territorialization of care, transforming the care model that was previously centered on hospitalization in a psychiatric hospital into care in substitutive and open services in the Psychosocial Care Centers (CAPS). The group therapeutic workshops were activities introduced in the CAPS, whose focus was to promote greater social and family integration, expressiveness, the performance of activities that produce quality of life, with the practice of autonomy and citizenship (Brasil, 2004).

The CAPS are reinserted in the social context, through therapeutic workshops instituted for welcoming, the practice of active therapeutic listening, which strengthens the therapeutic bond through a Singular Therapeutic Project for situational diagnosis and insertion in activities, especially in workshops that contemplate the arts, working on the physical and psychological dimension (Cavalcante; Silva; Braga, 2022). Thus, the use of art and creativity has been fundamental practices within the therapeutic workshops offered at the CAPS, used as therapeutic resources aimed at people in mental suffering resulting from severe and/or persistent mental disorders, including those of abusive use and dependence on psychoactive substances, in Brazil and in the world (Bungay; Clift, 2010).

Integrative and Complementary Practices (PICS) are therapeutic approaches offered in a complementary way to conventional treatment, recognized and encouraged by the Unified Health System (SUS) in Brazil. These practices aim to promote the integral care of the individual, addressing not only the physical aspects, but also the emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects (Brasil, 2018). Among the PICS are acupuncture, phytotherapy, homeopathy, reiki, yoga, meditation, art therapy, among others, which have been increasingly incorporated into health care as a means of expanding the therapeutic approaches offered to the population (Brasil, 2017a). Art Therapy, specifically, is one of these practices that uses artistic expression as a therapeutic means, encourages the individual to explore their emotions and thoughts through creative activities, such as painting, drawing and modeling. This process allows for a form of self-knowledge and emotional expression that can help in the treatment of problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma (Camargo; Oliveira, 2020). PICS offer a care approach that values the user's global well-being, complements conventional treatments, and promotes health in a more comprehensive way, contributing to the user's quality of life and strengthening the user's immune system (Santos; Almeida; Martins, 2019).

Art Therapy is a therapeutic strategy that has art and creativity as its principle and has been widely used in therapeutic workshops at CAPS (Willrich; Portela; Casarin, 2018). In the face of so much psychic suffering, Art Therapy, with its symbolic aspect, stimulates the expression of feelings of people with severe mental disorders and favors a space for qualified listening, sharing of suffering and dialogue and, in this way, assists in the humanized care of these users (Valladares-Torres, 2021). According to the literature, Art Therapy is a mental health care tool that aims at the uniqueness of each subject, their life history, with an emphasis on the creative, playful and innovative process, as opposed to the pathologization of mental disorder with an emphasis on the disease and its symptoms (Valladares-Torres; Rodrigues, 2025; Valladares-Torres, Silva Júnior, 2025).

In this sense, scientific studies have related Art Therapy with the promotion of mental health, which highlights its importance as a positive influence in the psychosocial rehabilitation process (Facco *et al.*, 2016; Willrich; Portela; Casarin, 2018; Valladares-Torres; Days, 2025; Valladares-Torres; Neves, 2025; Valladares-Torres *et al.*, 2025). However, despite the evidence, Art Therapy is a recent tool in the world literature and the need to consolidate a body of evidence in this field to contribute to this practice is justified. In this context, this study aimed to highlight the use of Art Therapy with adults in mental suffering due to severe mental disorders.

METHOD

This research is an integrative review of the literature, which corresponds to a method that ensures a synthesis of knowledge and the integration of the applicability of results of expressive studies in practice (Sousa; Silva; Carvalho, 2010). In this review, the six steps described by Ercole, Melo and Alcoforado (2014) were applied, which were: (1) Identification of the theme and selection of the hypothesis or research question; (2) Definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria or literature search; (3) Deliberation of the information to be extracted from the selected studies; (4) Categorization and evaluation of the selected articles; (5) Interpretation of the results and (6) Dissemination of the synthesis review of knowledge.

The guiding question of this review was based on the PICO strategy (Santos; Pepper; Nobre, 2007), which is equivalent to the acronym for Population, Intervention, Comparison of interventions, *Outcomes* (results), which is this: "What existing research

evidence on the use of Art Therapy interventions aimed at adults in mental distress resulting from severe mental disorders?"

The inclusion criteria were: articles from the last ten years (from 2014 to 2024) and in Portuguese, English and Spanish, as well as complete and free scientific articles with quantitative or qualitative data that answered the guiding question, adult population with mental disorder, as well as individual and/or group Art Therapy studies. The exclusion criteria included: articles focusing only on children and adolescents, in healthy samples or exclusively with other creative Art Therapies (Drama Therapy, Music Therapy, Dance Therapy, Playful Therapies); studies that did not address Art Therapy as the main theme; review or reflection articles, from gray literature or non-scientific; theses, dissertations and monographs. Articles focusing only on neurodevelopmental and neurocognitive mental disorders were also excluded. Duplicate studies were computed only once.

The following electronic bibliographic databases were used as sources of information: Regional Portal of the Virtual Health Library (VHL), *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SciELO) and *US National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health* (PUBMED). The search in the databases took place in August 2024 and controlled descriptors were chosen based on the Health Sciences Descriptors (DECS) and *the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)* agreed with the Boolean operators OR and AND: "Art therapy" AND "mental disorders" OR "psychiatric disorders" OR "schizophrenia" OR "depressive disorder" OR "bipolar disorder" OR "anxiety disorders" OR "substance-related disorders" OR "stress disorders, post-traumatic" OR "personality disorders".

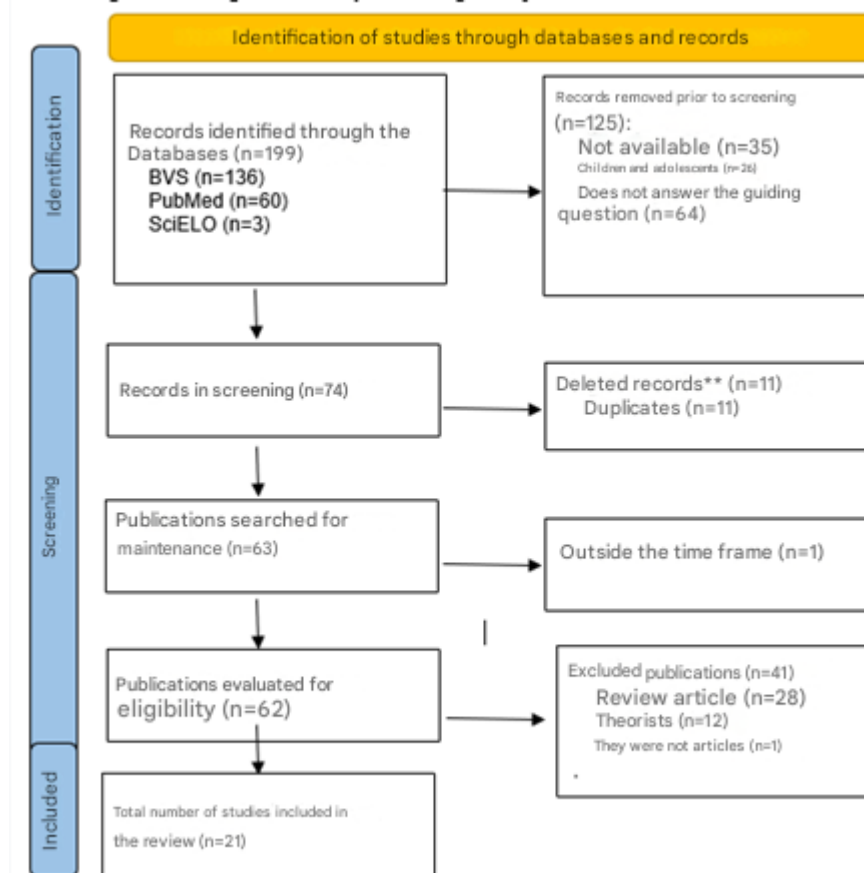
For the removal of duplicates, the *Mendeley software* (<https://www.mendeley.com/>) was used. The selection process with title and abstract reading was using the *Rayyan Qatar Computing Research Institute* (Rayyan QCRI) (<https://rayyan.qcri.org/welcome>) software. Subsequently, the Microsoft Excel 365© software was used to construct the extraction table. The description of this study followed the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses – PRISMA guide (Page *et al.*, 2022).

The synthesis and detailing of the articles were described in a table and was later discussed considering the year, authors, country in which the research was developed, journal, objectives, configurations, characteristics and sample size, the Art Therapy interventions identified, the duration of the interventions and the results related to the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

By combining the descriptors, 199 studies were identified in the database. At first, 64 studies were excluded because they did not have the guiding question as the central theme of the study, 35 because they were not freely available in the databases, and 26 because they addressed children and adolescents. After performing a detailed analysis of the titles and abstracts of the articles, one was excluded because it did not fit as a scientific article, one outside the time frame, and another because it was not a scientific article; twelve because they were not field research, 28 were excluded because they were review, and eleven studies were excluded because they were repeated in the databases. After the exclusion criteria were applied, 21 articles were selected for this integrative review. The following is a description of the search in the flowchart presented in Figure 1, which portrays the information stages for eligibility and selection of articles, according to the guidelines of the PRISMA 2020 declaration (Page *et al.*, 2022).

Figure 1. Article selection flowchart adapted from PRISMA. Brasília, DF, Brazil.



Source: Survey data, 2025.

The VHL had the largest number of studies searched (n=17), unlike SciELO, which did not present any article on the subject at the end of the search. Table 1 below shows the synthesis of the articles selected in the research. Eight variables of interest were defined, in addition to numbering (A1-A21): authors, year of publication, country in which the research was developed, journal, objectives, sample, intervention, and outcome of interest.

Table 1. Summary of included studies and complementary therapies identified in descending order of publication. Brasília-DF, Brazil.

Nº/ Authors, Year/ Country/ Magazine	Goals	Sample	Intervention	Outcome of Interest
A1 Estrada Gonzalez <i>et al.</i> , 2024/ USA/ Sci Rep	To see if art serves as a vehicle for emotional expression in people with PTSD, whose distress can potentially be ameliorated by artt.	Total 203 Independent and neutral and external collaborators. Personal Impact Group: 100. Artist Impact Group: 103. Mean age of 38.2 years.	Artt: making masks. 8 Artt sessions were developed with 20 service members and veterans with PTSD. And neutral viewers compared the impact of the masks created by them during the initial stage of the Artt with those created during the final stage.	Onlookers claimed that the initial masks conveyed more negative emotions such as anger, upset, and defiance than the later masks. Late-stage masks expressed more calm and pleasure than early-stage therapy masks. These observations are also consistent with the idea that the therapeutic intervention helped balance their emotions.
A2 Haeyen; Heres; Pol, 2024/ Holland/ J Clin Psychol	Present a narrative case report on the personal recovery of a person with PD.	Total 3 Co-creation between user, clinical psychologist and art therapist. Ages (years): 29, 56 and 68 respectively. The User participated in a psychotherapeutic clinic program at a specialization center for people diagnosed with PD.	Psychotherapy and Artt (writing and painting) online. Two psychotherapeutic interventions were developed on "An Empowering Story" and twelve by Artt with a focus on life history, for 24 weeks.	The user developed self-reflection and integration of internal conflicts, leading to better emotional balance and self-understanding. The blended approach effectively integrated sensory, experiential, and bottom-up experiences with top-down cognitive emotion regulation processes.
A3 Kong <i>et al.</i> , 2024/ China/	To explore the effect of Artt and Dance Therapy in the	Total 120 GE: 60 GC: 60 Male users hospitalized with	Artt and Dance Therapy GE: they went through Artt and Dance Therapy sessions for 90	The EG group achieved improvement in cognitive function, relief of clinical symptoms (positive

Medicine (Baltimore)	treatment of hospitalized users with chronic schizophrenia.	chronic schizophrenia. Minimum age of 30 and maximum age of 60 years.	minutes twice a week, in addition to standard care. CG: received standard drug treatment and nursing care.	and negative) and reduction in BMI.
A4 Sarandöl <i>et al.</i> , 2024/ Turkey/ Turk Psikiyatri Derg.	To evaluate and compare the effects of Artt and PSST in the treatment of schizophrenia.	Total 27 GE: 15 (GE Artt: 7 GE PSST: 8) GF: 12 Users diagnosed with schizophrenia and family members of users. Mean age of 44 (GE Artt) and 41.62 (GE PSST), minimum of eighteen years and maximum of 65 years.	Artt and PSST 90-minute sessions, once a week for seventeen weeks for both EGs in an outpatient psychosis clinic.	Artt and PSST have positive effects on improving negative symptoms, as well as improvements in social and cognitive functioning in schizophrenia.
A5 Kang <i>et al.</i> , 2023/ South Korea/ PLoS One	To investigate the effect of Artt on emotional and physical changes, expression of stress-associated proteins, and electroencephalography in alcoholics.	Total 35 GE: 20 GC: 15 Alcoholics hospitalized after completion of two-week detox. Mean age (years) was 46.9 (CG) and 40.7 (EG), minimum of twenty years.	Artt. GE: weekly group Artt sessions of 60 minutes for ten weeks and standard treatment. GC: Standard treatment only.	The EG showed significant and positive changes in the expression of proteins associated with stress, in emotional and physical symptoms, and in the decrease of symptoms of depression, anxiety, impulsivity, and alcohol dependence.
A6 <u>Cavalcante, Silva and Braga</u> , 2022/ Brazil/SP <u>CaringArt, Sick</u>	To identify the perception of CAPS-ad users and health professionals about the contribution of Artt to the evolution of users.	Total 23 Users: 21 Professionals: two Drug dependent users, nurse and occupational therapist. Minimum age of eighteen and maximum of 63 years.	Artt.	The benefits of Artt workshops have been observed in the daily lives of users. And they claimed satisfaction with the CAPS and with the feasibility of life prospects of their treatment.
A7 Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2022/ South Korea/	To investigate the effects of art psychotherapy on	Total 39 GE:20 GC: 19 Users with moderate and severe MDD	Art psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy GE: Art psychotherapy and	The primary outcomes indicated that EG significantly decreased depressive

Res Public Health	moderate to severe MDD.	from an outpatient psychiatric clinic. Mean age (years): 36.92 (EG) and 40.62 (CG).	pharmacotherapy, for six weeks, once a week and 50 min a day. GC: Pharmacotherapy only.	symptoms compared to CG.
A8 Sun, 2022/ China/ Occup Ther Int	Compare the therapeutic effect and explore the role of oil painting Artt in the treatment of mental illness.	Total 102 GE: 43 GC: 59 Users hospitalized with depressive episodes. Mean age (years): 36.4 (EG) and 32 (CG), minimum of eighteen and maximum of 60 years.	Artt with oil painting. GE: They were attended by six stages of therapy. GC: You did not receive the intervention.	The EG had significantly lower scores than the CG at four and six weeks after the intervention. The intervention can relieve anxiety and provide support to people with depressive episodes.
A9 Jansen <i>et al.</i> , 2021/ Brazil, CE/ Rev Enferm UFPI	To report the experience of using Artt as an instrument to promote mental health.	Total 20 Adult users of a semi-hospitalization unit of a Day Hospital. Minimum age of twenty and maximum age of 45 years.	Artt A 90 min intervention.	The participants expressed their feelings, emotions, or reported some fact of their daily life related to their production that meant happiness to them, in order to promote their mental health. Artt provides direct interaction between the therapeutic group and the professionals, with the sharing of emotions and feelings, in addition to the users' perception of their reality.
A10 Millard <i>et al.</i> , 2021/ United Kingdom/ BMJ Open	Analyze the interest in participating in group arts, question what their preferences are and why they have them.	Total 1541 Users of the National Mental Health Service 685. General population 856. Minimum age of eighteen years.	Artts: music therapy, dance therapy, artt and drama therapy. The survey took 10 minutes to complete, including informed consent and fourteen key questions.	Approximately 60% of participants would be interested in participating in group artts. Music therapy was the most frequent choice among mental health users (41%) and Artt was the most frequent choice in the general population (43%). Expectations of fun, usefulness, feeling empowered, impact on mood, and social interaction were most often reported as reasons for

				preferring a form of Artt.
A11 Tong <i>et al.</i> , 2021/ China/ Front. Psychol	To examine the effect of group Artt using traditional Chinese materials on improving self-efficacy and social function of individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia.	Total 104 GE: 53 GC: 51 People with schizophrenia hospitalized. Minimum age of eighteen and maximum age of 60 years.	Artt in a group. 30 sessions, using traditional Chinese materials such as calligraphy, painting, embroidery and Chinese beads. CG: standard treatment.	Artt can improve self-efficacy and social function, reduce social function and life problems, and promote recovery for individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia.
A12 Maltz <i>et al.</i> , 2020/ USA/ J Clin Psychol	Describe an Artt guideline for mask-making as a complement to group PTSD.	Total One Male active duty user in the Navy of a military intensive outpatient program. Age 47 years.	Artt: making a mask Weekly 90-minute group Artt intervention within the five-week intensive outpatient PTSD program.	The experience expanded the understanding of treatment progress reflected in diary entries, images of masks, and by a change in linguistic indices of trauma processing. The user reported improvement in coping and successfully returned to full military service after treatment.
A13 Abbing <i>et al.</i> , 2019/ Holland/ PLoS One	To explore anxiety reduction in women with ED, treated with Artt.	Total 59 GE: 30 GC: 29 Women with ED and with moderate to severe anxiety symptoms from 25 private Artt clinics. Minimum age of eighteen and maximum of 65 years.	Artt GE: It went through Artt's intervention. CG: Waiting list group. The EG received ten to twelve one-hour Artt sessions over a three-month period.	The efficacy of EG relative to CG has been demonstrated in improving resting heart rate variability and aspects of executive functioning; the latter was associated with reduced anxiety by Artt's intervention.
A14 Berberian <i>et al.</i> , 2019/ USA/ Med Humanit	Analyze the montage paintings created by military service members.	Total 208 Members of all branches of the Armed Forces active duty who were dealing with comorbid combat-related traumatic brain injury symptoms and psychological health	Artt Inserted in an intensive and integrative outpatient care program with other activities over four weeks. At Artt, there is the creation of three-dimensional	Group Artt experiences promoted improvement in interpersonal relationships, hope and gratification for participants, assist in externalization, progressive exposure and

		conditions, including PTSD. Average age of 35.75 years, minimum of 21 years and maximum of 59 years.	masks and assembly paintings.	construction of a trauma narrative imperative for recovery.
A15 Soares <i>et al.</i> , 2019/ Brazil/PR/ Rev Bras Enferm	To identify the impact of brief intervention in conjunction with Artt on alcoholic users.	Total 11 Alcoholics in the primary care network. Minimum age of 37 years and maximum of 64 years.	IB and Artt: with mosaic creation in tiles. Interventions for ten months, for three hours a week.	BI associated with Artt resulted in a great impact on the reduction of alcohol consumption.
A16 Ciasca <i>et al.</i> , 2018 Brazil (SP)/ Braz J Psychiatry	To assess whether Artt is beneficial as an adjunctive treatment for depression in the elderly.	Total 56 GE: 31 GC: 25 Elderly women with MDD who were stable on pharmacotherapy at the outpatient clinic of the Institute of Psychiatry. Minimum age of 60 years.	Artt EG: submitted to 20 weekly sessions of Artt (90 min/session). CG: did not undergo any adjuvant intervention.	Artt as an adjunctive treatment for MDD in older women and improved symptoms of depression and anxiety in EG relative to CG.
A17 Kaimal <i>et al.</i> , 2018 USA/ BMJ Open	Compare recurring themes in the artistic expression of military service members.	Total 370 Active duty military personnel with PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and psychological health conditions with measurable psychiatric diagnoses. Minimum age of 20 and maximum age of 50 years.	Artt: creating masks integrative treatment program with four-week Artt interventions.	Comparisons of visual and clinical data indicate that participants in psychological health conditions had higher scores for PTSD and depression. Depiction of military unit identity, nature metaphors, sociocultural metaphors, and cultural and historical characters was associated with lower PTSD scores, depression, and anxiety. Color-related symbolism and fragmented military symbols were associated with higher scores for anxiety, depression, and PTSD.
A18 Walker <i>et al.</i> , 2017 USA/ Int J Qual Stud	To analyze the experience s of making masks of	Total 370 Active duty military personnel with persistent symptoms of combat and	Artt: making masks Interventions are part of a four-week	Masks offer visual representations of the <i>self</i> related to individual personality, relationships,

Health Well-being	members of the military service of the Armed Forces.	mission-related TBI, PTSD, and other concomitant mood problems. Average age of 36.19 years, with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 50 years.	interdisciplinary intensive outpatient care of comprehensive care in a military care center. Data collection took place over five years.	community, and society. The image themes referred to injury, relational supports/losses, transitions/identity issues, cultural metaphors, existential reflections, and conflicting sense of <i>self</i> .
A19 Leurent <i>et al.</i> , 2014 United Kingdom/ Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol	To investigate whether Artt was more effective for specific subgroups of users.	Total 277 GE: 140 GC: 137 People diagnosed with schizophrenia from mental health centers. The mean age was 41 years.	Artt EG: submitted to twelve months of weekly Artt sessions (90 min/session). GC: Standard treatment only.	There was no evidence of greater improvement in clinical symptoms of schizophrenia for those with more severe negative symptoms or those with a preference for Artt.
A20 Montag <i>et al.</i> , 2014 Germany/ PLoS One	To evaluate the feasibility of a randomized, assessor-blinded controlled trial of psychodynamic Artt for the treatment of patients with schizophrenia and to generate preliminary data on the efficacy of this intervention during acute psychotic episodes.	Total 35 GE: 16 GC: 19 People hospitalized with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Minimum age of eighteen and maximum of 64 years.	Artt GE: Twelve twice-weekly sessions of psychodynamic group Artt plus usual treatment. GC: Standard treatment only.	Artt was associated with a significant improvement in levels of emotional awareness and a significantly greater average reduction in positive symptoms and better psychosocial functioning at post-treatment and follow-up, and with a greater mean reduction in negative symptoms at follow-up compared to standard care. The significant reduction in positive symptoms in the post-treatment period was maintained in an attempt at an intention-to-treat analysis. There were no group differences in relation to depressive symptoms.
A21 Morais <i>et al.</i> , 2014 Brazil/PR/ Research and	Understand the significance of Artt with clay for psychiatric patients in	Total 16 Users of a Day Hospital undergoing treatment. Minimum age of 26 and maximum age of 65 years.	Artt: Clay Minimum participation of seven group sessions of Artt with the use of clay.	The use of clay as an art therapy medium in these psychiatric users promoted creativity, self-awareness, and evidenced benefit in

Education in Nursing	a day hospital.			those seeking relief from anxiety.
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Legend: Artt: Art Therapy; PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; PD: Personality Disorder; GE: Experimental Group; CG: Control Group; BMI: Body Mass Index; PSST: Psychosocial Skills Training; CAPS: Psychosocial Care Center; MDD: Major Depressive Disorder; TA: Anxiety Disorders; IB: Brief Intervention; SERATS: Scale of Self-Expression and Emotional Regulation in Art Therapy; TBI: Traumatic Brain Injury.
Source: Survey Data, 2025.

The 21 studies included were distributed among the ten years, with the exception of 2015 and 2016 – years with no publications. The highest prevalence occurred in 2024 (four articles), followed by 2022, 2021, 2019, and 2014 (three articles), 2018 (two articles), and 2023, 2020, and 2017 (one article) – which shows that there was a balance in the production of articles. The studies were carried out in nine different countries and covered several continents: ten in America (five in the USA and five in Brazil), six in Asia (three in China, two in South Korea and one in Turkey) and five in Europe (two in the Netherlands, two in the United Kingdom and one in Germany), with several groups of researchers – which shows that Art Therapy with people with severe mental disorders is applied by different groups of researchers in almost all continents and, in particular, more recurrent in America. With the exception of the authors Walker, who was present in four articles (A1, A14, A17 and A18), Kaimal, in three articles (A14, A17 and A18) and DeGraba in two articles (A17 and A18) – all addressed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the USA.

Regarding the area of study of the journals, Medicine (n=10), Nursing (n=4), Psychology (n=3), Psychiatry (n=3) and Occupational Therapy (n=1). Three journals repeated: PLoS One (n=3-Medicine), BMJ Open (n=2-Medicine) and Clinical Psychology Review (n=2-Psychology). This shows that research in Art Therapy has conquered spaces in journals in the medical area, in addition to other related areas (Psychology, Psychiatry, etc.).

The sample of study participants was composed of a minimum of one to 1,541 people, the age ranged from eighteen to 68 years. Most of the studies took place in an outpatient setting (n=11) – of these, (n=3) they were specialized mental health services; in a hospital environment (n=5), Day Hospital (n=2), CAPS (n=1), Primary Care (n=1) or external collaborators (n=2). A10 used, in addition to external collaborators, users of unspecified mental health services. Three articles explored Art Therapy *versus* another technique: Psychosocial Skills Training (A4); Pharmacotherapy (A7) and among other Creative Art Therapies (A10). Three studies worked with combined therapies: Art Therapy

and Psychotherapy (A2); Art Therapy and Dance Therapy (A3) and Art Therapy and Brief Intervention (A15).

Most of the trials, nine in number, explored a specific Art Therapy technique: making a mask-5 (A1, A12, A14, A17 and A19); painting-2 (A2 and A8); tile mosaic-1 (A15); clay-1 (A21); and eight studies used Art Therapy interventions without defining a specific technique. The trials had a diversified number of interventions and the longest was developed for five years (A18) and the minimum duration of the sessions was 50 min and maximum 90 min. Fifteen articles evaluated the effects of Art Therapy interventions (A2, A3, A5, A6, A8, A9, A11, A12, A13, A14, A15, A16, A19, A20 and A21) and six compared Art Therapy with other therapeutic techniques or programs (A4 - Psychosocial Skills Training; A7 – pharmacotherapy; A10 – Art Therapies: Music Therapy, Dance Therapy, Drama Therapy and analyze visual images (A1, A17 and A18).

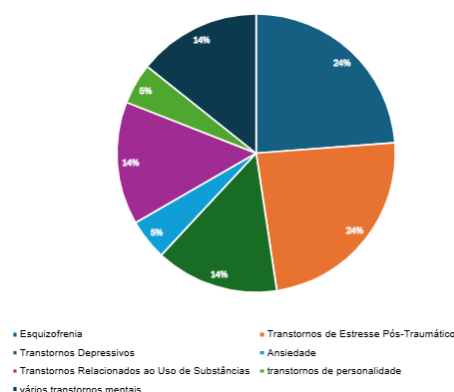
Of a total of 21 articles included, eleven were controlled clinical trials (A3, A4, A5, A7, A8, A11, A13, A15, A16, A19 and A20), eight were qualitative studies (A1, A2, A6, A9, A12, A14, A18 and A21) – two case studies (A2 and A12) and two were observational studies (A10 and A17). In ten studies (A3, A4, A5, A7, A8, A11, A13, A16, A19 and A20), there was the inclusion of an experimental group and a control group. Control groups varied between studies, but included: standard of care (A3, A5, A11, A19, and A20), no treatment (A8 and A16) and/or waiting list (A13), and therapy comparators (A4, A7) and pre- and post-test (A15). Regarding the type of person with severe mental disorder, five trials explored Schizophrenia (A3, A4, A11, A19 and A20) and explored the impact of Art Therapy on the improvement of psychotic, cognitive and functional symptoms, showing benefits such as reduction of negative symptoms and greater social integration. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders were addressed in five articles (A1, A12, A14, A17 and A18), with emphasis on the making of masks and other forms of artistic expression that helped in the externalization of traumas and in the construction of emotional resilience.

Depressive Disorders (A7, A8, A16) and Anxiety Disorders (A13) were the focus of four studies, which showed emotional improvements, increased self-esteem and reduction of symptoms such as stress and deep sadness. Three articles (A5, A6 and A15) addressed Substance Use Disorders, showing that Art Therapy can complement conventional treatments, promote consumption reduction and greater emotional well-being. Finally, one article for interventions aimed at Personality Disorders (A2) and three more articles for various mental disorders (A9, A10 and A21) highlighted the versatility of Art Therapy in

diversified environments, such as day hospitals and mental health services, promoting creativity, self-knowledge and social support.

Graph 1 below summarizes the total number of articles distributed by type of mental disorder. Schizophrenia and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders were the most addressed themes in the works, followed by depressive disorders, those related to substance use and those involving various mental disorders. Anxiety and personality disorders were addressed to a lesser extent. These data demonstrate a relative prioritization of studies in disorders of higher clinical prevalence, such as schizophrenia and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders, but also reflect the importance of Art Therapy in various psychiatric conditions.

Graph 1. Representation of disorders in relation to the total number of articles. Brasília, DF.



Source: Survey data, 2025

Art therapy was associated with significant positive changes in change in relation to the control groups, or in relation to the other interventions or on the evolution of the process itself, in qualitative research. To facilitate the reading of these findings, a Chart 1 was elaborated, a synthesis of the main findings found in the articles explored in this review study.

Table 1. General synthesis with the main findings found in the articles of this review. Brasília, DF.

Type of Disorder	Positive Aspects	Aspects Not Covered
Schizophrenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relieved clinical symptoms, reduced BMI, and promoted physical health and rehabilitation of the disorder (A3); - Stimulated cognitive function (A3; A4); - Achieved significant improvement in emotional awareness levels (A20); - Improved negative symptoms (A4; A20) and positive symptoms (A20); - Improved psychosocial functionality (A4; A20); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There were no differences between GI Artt and CG in relation to depressive symptoms (A20); - There was no statistically significant clinical evidence of improvement in more or less severe negative symptoms (A19).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was a significant improvement in the levels of emotional awareness and in the ability to reflect on the emotional mental states of others (A20); - Improved self-efficacy, as coping styles began to be used more positively (A11); - There was an improvement in social function skills, such as daily living capacity, mobility and communication. The limited levels of daily living capacity of the users were restored, resulting in attention to personal hygiene, maintenance of appearance, bed making and balanced diet (A11); - And the improvement in the communication function was reflected in a more harmonious relationship with the environment and with other people (A11). 	
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitated the externalization of emotions from the trauma (A1; A14); - Provided <i>insights</i> into the cognitive and creative processes of the case (A12); - Reported improvement in coping and consolidation of the trauma, with the overcoming of avoidance symptoms, greater involvement with the treatment and elaboration of traumatic events (A12; A14; On the 17th; A18); - PROMOTED IMPROVEMENT IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, HOPE AND GRATIFICATION (A14). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was an overall increase in symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders during the confrontation with traumatic experiences (A12).
Depressive and Anxiety Disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimized negative affective and emotional factors, such as: anguish, fear, stress, aggressiveness, social isolation, apathy, etc. (A21); - Reduced depressive symptoms (A7; The8; A16; A21) and anxiety (A16; A13 and A21); - Significantly improved emotion control, working memory, planning/organization, and task monitoring (A13); - It enabled the participants to face their difficulties, conflicts, fears and anxieties in a less painful way (A21); - Helped to channel personal and family conflicts (A21); - Promoted self-knowledge (A21); - Improved communication (A8); - Stimulated self-confidence about the future (A8); - Created an atmosphere of mutual trust and care to improve the resilience of the participants (A8). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No difference was found in cognitive measures (A16; A13); - Some hypotheses were partially achieved, such as that Art Therapy would contribute to better stress regulation and executive functioning (A13).
Substance-Related Disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had increased immune function, anti-inflammatory functions of the body and stress relief (A5); - There was a reduction in depression, anxiety, aggression, impulsivity, dysfunctional negative emotions, irritability, and aberrant experiences (A5); - Improved interpersonal relationships and social relationships (A5); - Increased positive emotions, cognitive impairment and self-concept (A5); - Reduced alcohol consumption (A15); - Enabled perspectives and changes learned in the daily life of users (A7); - Added welcoming and active listening to strengthen the professional-user bond (A7); 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoted a good adherence of users to the PTS (A7); - It stimulated the evolution and personal, emotional and social development of the users and helped them to reestablish better living conditions and to find meaning in life inside and outside the health service (A7). 	
Personality Disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provided greater integration of traumatic and positive memories, greater self-compassion and creation of meaning; - Developed self-reflection and integration of internal conflicts that was led to better emotional balance and self-understanding (A2). 	
General Mental Disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stimulated the expression of feelings, emotions and perception of their reality (A9); - It enabled direct interaction between a therapeutic group and professionals, a more humanized and holistic look at the singularities of each participant and their type of mental disorder (A9); - Facilitated clarifications, reduced concerns, and stimulated self-reflection and autonomy in the face of their condition of mental suffering (A9); - Created dialogical and solidary spaces that involved active and qualified listening and approximation between participants (A9); - Provided expectations of fun, usefulness, feeling of ability, impact on mood and social interaction (A10). 	

Legend: BMI: Body Mass Index; GIArt: Art Therapy Intervention Group; CG: Control Group; PTS: Singular Therapeutic Project.

Source: Survey data, 2025

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study presented research evidence on the use of Art Therapy aimed at adults with severe mental disorders. Art Therapy helped users to share their feelings and experiences, as well as reduce negative symptoms in a more creative way and complementary to other traditional and verbal interventions. These results offered a comprehensive perspective and a better understanding of the effectiveness of Art Therapy in reducing or managing severe mental disorders and contributed to the applicability of Art Therapy as one of the complementary intervention methods in the psychosocial rehabilitation of this public.

In the studies identified with users with different clinical profiles, Art Therapy was reported, in most of these findings, as having positive effects on their therapeutic performance. Thus, these findings suggest that Art Therapy can be applied as a psychosocial rehabilitation program in adults with severe mental disorders.

Among the limitations of this review, the heterogeneity of the data in relation to the varied number of methods, participants, types of interventions analyzed, as well as the

frequency, duration of application, duration, and combination of the interventions presented can be mentioned. These aspects made the analyses difficult and may generate bias in the trials. However, the heterogeneity of the studies investigated also indicates that Art Therapy is a therapeutic approach that can be adapted to different clinical situations. It is believed that Art Therapy interventions are more explored in the daily life of mental health scenarios and it is suggested that new Art Therapy research be expanded in the clinical and community scope of mental disorders.

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