

**A SAMPLING OF EVIDENCE-BASED PUBLICATIONS THAT  
DEMONSTRATE THE BREADTH OF ART THERAPY RESEARCH**

“Research in art therapy is critical in order to inform our clinical practice, and to communicate to employers and other decision makers that art therapy is evidence-based. I am energized by this study because it’s the first known randomized controlled trial of art therapy and combat PTSD and lends support to the efficacy of art therapy as benefiting the mental health of veterans. We found that participants who received art therapy in addition to the verbal therapy didn’t drop out of the study, showed improvements in PTSD symptoms and depression, and reported that seeing portrayals of their own trauma was helpful in thinking through and processing trauma – and then consigning it to the past. They were excited about art therapy.”

Sarah Deaver, PhD, ATR-BC, HLM

**TRAUMA | PTSD**

Campbell, M., Decker, K., \*Kruk, K., & Deaver, S. (2016). [Art therapy and Cognitive Processing Therapy for combat-related PTSD: A randomized, controlled trial.](#) *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 33(4), 169-177.

The addition of art therapy to Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) was more effective than CPT alone in reducing symptoms of combat-related PTSD in veterans.



Example of a Trauma Narrative (printed with permission)

**HIV/AIDS**

Rao, D., Nainis, N., Williams, L., Langner, D., Eisin, A., & Paice, J. (2009). [Art therapy for relief of symptoms associated with HIV/AIDS.](#) *AIDS Care*, 21(1), 64-69.

Patients with a diagnosis of HIV infection (N=79) participated in an hour-long art therapy session or viewed a video about art therapy. Covariance analysis of pre- and posttest measures of psychological and physical symptoms showed better physical symptom mean scores in the art therapy group after adjusting for pretest score, age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

**ALZHEIMER'S | DEMENTIA**

Chancellor, B., Duncan, A., & Chatterjee, A. (2014). [Art therapy for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.](#) *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, 39(1), 1-11.

Given that pharmacologic treatments for dementia are limited in efficacy, treatments that improve neuropsychiatric symptoms and quality of life are needed. This literature review sought to explore the efficacy of art therapy with this diagnosis. The study concluded: “art therapy engages attention, provides pleasure, and improves neuropsychiatric symptoms, social behavior, and self-esteem.” The study also offers a theoretical framework to inform the use of art therapy with this population.

**AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**

Van Lith, T., Stallings, J.W., & Harris, C.E. (2017). [Discovering good practice for art therapy with children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder: The results of a small scale survey.](#) *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 54, 78-84.

Researchers interviewed 14 art therapists who work with children who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to study current practice in the field. Five domains of practice were determined: (1) art therapists’ level of experience and scope, (2) unique aspects of using art therapy with children who have ASD, (3) preferred choice of art materials for children with ASD, (4) primary aims when using art therapy for children with ASD, and (5) preferred theoretical approaches and their practical application. These findings were used to establish practical guidelines to follow when providing art therapy for children who have ASD.

**MEDICAL**

Beebe, A., Gelfand, E. W., & Bender, B. (2010). [A randomized trial to test the effectiveness of art therapy for children with asthma.](#) *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, 126(2), 263-6.

Children with asthma who participated in one hour of art therapy per week showed improvements after six months in measures of quality of life, worry, communication, anxiety, and self-concept relative to the control group of art therapy with this population.

Pielech, M., Sieberg, C.B., Simons, L.E. (2013). [Connecting parents of children with chronic pain through art therapy.](#) *Clinical Practice in Pediatric Psychology*, 1(3), 214-226.

Fifty-three parents of children and adolescents enrolled in an intensive interdisciplinary pediatric pain rehabilitation day hospital program participated in weekly group art therapy sessions. Overall, participants found it to be a supportive and validating experience. Parents agreed that they would try art therapy again and recommend the intervention to other parents of children with chronic pain.

## NEGATIVE MOOD

Kimport, E. R., & Robbins, S.J. (2012). [Efficacy of Creative Clay Work for Reducing Negative Mood: A Randomized Controlled Trial.](#) *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 29(2), 74-79.

Adults (N=102) engaged with a series of negative mood-inducing exercises and were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Two conditions involved art-making with clay, and two involved non-art-based activities utilizing stress balls. Participants in the clay conditions experienced more than 50% greater mood improvement. Further, the clay group with structure (a goal to create a pinch pot) demonstrated greater mood improvement than the group that worked with clay with no structured activity.

“As we discover more about the workings of the human brain, we also have the opportunity to learn more about how art making and art therapy affect brain activity. Art therapists and their clients have long known that creativity and art making have positive effects. New innovations in research allow us to quantify these outcomes in a language that, paired with other research design studies, can demonstrate the benefit of art therapy.”

Girija Kaimal, EdD, MA

## NEUROSCIENCE



A functional near-infrared spectroscopy band monitors activation of the prefrontal cortex at rest and during the participant's engagement in coloring, doodling, and free drawing (printed with permission)

Kaimal, G., Ayaz, H., Herres, J., Dieterich-Hartwell, R., Makwana, B., Kaiser, D. H., & Nasser, (2017). [Functional near-infrared spectroscopy assessment of reward perception based on visual self-expression: Coloring, doodling, and free drawing.](#) *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 55, 85-92.

Functional near-infrared technology (FNIRS) was used to examine blood flow in the medial prefrontal cortex as 26 participants engaged in three discrete drawing conditions: coloring, doodling, and free drawing. All three conditions activated the reward pathway in the brain with doodling resulting in the most activation. Participants reported changes in their self-perceptions of imaginativeness and the ability to generate good ideas after completing all three drawing conditions. The study highlights the potential of artmaking to improve self-perceptions of creativity.

## SOCIAL CHANGE

Sutherland, J., Waldman, G., & Collins, C. (2010). [Art Therapy Connection: Encouraging Troubled Youth to Stay in School and Succeed.](#) *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 27(2), 69-74.

This study tracked the progress of 150 students of inner-city Chicago schools who were identified as being at risk of failing grades 3–12 and were enrolled in a year-long school art therapy program called Art Therapy Connection (ATC). Objectives included exploration of group identity, group cohesion, and cooperation. Students' participation, cooperation, attachment, and trust were measured; all four increased during the second half of the school year in five schools, particularly in student participation and trust. ATC students also showed improvements in school attendance, adjustment, and academic achievement.

Betts, D.J., & Potash, J.S. (2015). [An art therapy study of visitor reactions to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.](#) *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 30 (1), 21-43.

Museum visitors viewed exhibitions on the Holocaust: Nazi Assault and The 'Final Solution.' The group that engaged in art therapy interventions showed increased immediate empathy, and their emotional response was sustained at 2, 7, and 12 months. The art therapy group was also more likely to share with family and friends complex reflections about different aspects of their museum visit, rather than solely their distress or historical information.



Drawings completed by study participants (printed with permission)

### National Office

The American Art Therapy Association  
4875 Eisenhower Ave. Suite 240  
Alexandria, VA 22304

### Phone

888-290-0878 | 703-548-5860

Visit [arttherapy.org](http://arttherapy.org) or email [info@arttherapy.org](mailto:info@arttherapy.org)