

# Art therapy in psychiatric treatment with special focus on schizophrenia

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## ABSTRACT

The research was carried out at Centre of Psychiatric Research and Dept. Syd at Psychiatric Hospital of Aarhus University. The aim of the study was to determine whether art therapy has beneficial effects in the treatment of psychiatric illness with a main focus on schizophrenia, and how eventual effects can be understood.

The method of the project was an empirically founded qualitative research based on hermeneutics and phenomenology. Art therapy was offered during one year to two groups of patients in a psychiatric centre. One group consisted of five patients with severe schizophrenia and the other group had five patients with depression and/or personality disorders. This was to determine eventual differences in patients with schizophrenia and patients with non-psychotic psychiatric disorders in their use of the art therapy. The course of therapy was registered systematically, and the experience of each patient was examined using interviews and written evaluations before and after therapy and at one-year follow-up.

All patients were able to follow the treatment and to produce pictures, and all patients reported a good or a very good outcome. No differences were found in artistic productivity or subjective outcome between patients with schizophrenia and non-psychotic patients. However, the patients used the art therapy in different ways according to their psychopathology. The most important benefit of art therapy for all patients seems to be a strengthening of their sense-of-self. This was accomplished mainly by the patient's engagement in the artistic processes and the aesthetic reflections in the process of painting. The stronger sense-of-self appears to have helped especially patients with schizophrenia in relating with other people, and thereby improving their social competences. The art therapy seems also to have reduced psychopathology broadly in sense of increased emotional capacity, reduction of experienced anxiety and increased sense of joy and capacity of problem solving.

A main conclusion of the study is, therefore, that art therapy can profitably be implemented in psychiatric treatment, but we need to know more of how the therapy should be carried out and for which patients, and we still do not know the effect size of the art therapy.

Conclusively, the dissertation opens new avenues in the treatment of schizophrenia, and point to a need of further research in art therapy as treatment in psychiatry.