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Effects of Clay Art Therapy on Adults Outpatients with Major Depressive Disorder: A Randomized Controlled Trial

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Abstract

Background:
Depression has become a critical global health problem, affecting millions of people. Cost-effective nonpharmacological treatment in community settings has been proposed to complement medical treatment. Short-term clay art therapy (CAT) is an alternative treatment that promotes the enhancement of various aspects of mental health for depressed individuals.

Methods:
One-hundred and six adults with depression were randomized into a CAT group or visual art (VA) control group for six 2.5-h weekly sessions. Intervention effects were measured using the Beck Depression Inventory, 12-Item General Health Questionnaire (Chinese version), Body–Mind–Spirit Well-Being Inventory, and 20-Item Toronto Alexithymia Scale (Chinese version) at baseline, immediately postintervention (T1), and 3-weeks postintervention (T2).

Result:
Multivariate analysis of covariance results indicated a more significant time × group effect for CAT than for VA on depressive signs, general health, and body–mind–spirit well-being (all $p < 0.05$). Significant within-groups changes were observed in these three aspects after treatment and at T2 (all $p < 0.001$) and in alexithymia at T2 ($p < 0.01$) in the CAT group, but the change was nonsignificant in the VA group at T1 and T2.

Limitations:
The homogeneity of the participants affected the generalizability of the study findings. The short-term postintervention follow-up (3 weeks) presented difficulties in demonstrating the long-term effects of CAT.
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