

Art therapy with prison inmates: a pilot study

David Gussak, PhD, ATR-BC

The Florida State University, MCH 126, Tallahassee, FL 3230 64480, USA

There are major obstacles for providing therapeutic services in correctional settings. Many inmates have an inherent mistrust for verbal disclosure, and a well-grounded fear of other prisoners taking advantage of voiced vulnerabilities. Rigid defenses are developed for basic survival. Despite these obstacles there has been some support for art therapy as a means to allow needed expression in such a non-therapeutic environment. Unfortunately, there has been little structured and quantitative research to actually measure the benefits of art therapy in prison. A quantitative research pilot study was initiated in the summer of 2003 to measure the effectiveness of art therapy with prison inmates. This pilot study presents the methods established, including the use of the Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (Gantt & Tabone, 1998) and a pre- and post-survey designed by the investigator, the results and future plans for studying the effects of art therapy with prison inmates.

Literature review

In correctional settings, rigid defenses, manifested through silence, lies and aggressive acts, are used for basic survival against those that may take advantage of others' weaknesses. These create seemingly insurmountable obstacles for therapists. As well, increased illiteracy, organicity and inability to verbally communicate make it difficult for prison inmates to give voice to the mental, emotional and/or physical problems they experience (Gussak, 1997a). Concurrently, there seems to be a natural tendency for artistic and creative expression in prison settings (Gussak, 1997b; Kornfeld, 1997; Ursprung, 1997). It is understood that such expression allows for the sublimation of libidinal and aggressive impulses (Dissanayake, 1992; Kramer, 1993; Rank, 1932) and provides a means for escape (Gussak, 1997a; Gussak & Cohen-Liebman, 2001), natural instinctual impulses for many prison inmates (Fox, 1997). It has also been demonstrated that the act of art making can decrease the number of disciplinary reports written on inmates who participated

E-mail address: dgussak@mailers.fsu.edu (D. Gussak).

in the program (Brewster, 1983), and can help decrease depressive symptoms, a condition that is pervasive in this environment (Diamond, Wang, & Giles, 1996; Morgan, 1981). Thus, art therapy can be one of the more beneficial treatments in such a non-therapeutic environment.

The advantages for art therapy in prison have been explored, and Gussak and Virshup (1997) introduced a number of benefits for art therapy in prison. Such benefits included taking advantage of the creativity inherent in the prison society, allowing diversion and escape; promoting inadvertent unconscious disclosure, even while the client is not compelled to discuss therapeutic issues verbally, which might leave him/her vulnerable; and bypassing rigid defenses, including pervasive dishonesty.

Yet another major benefit is its ability to utilize tasks whose simplicity result in the expression of "...complex material which would not be available for communication in any other form..." (Kramer, 1958, pp. 12–6). It is also believed that the art therapy helps alleviate mental health issues that are exacerbated in such an unhealthy environment (Fox, 1997; Woodall, Diamond, & Howe, 1997), such as major depression and schizophrenia, without the inmate and his/her peers even being aware that these issues are being addressed (Gussak, 1997b; Gussak & Cohen-Liebman, 2001).

These advantages have been expanded to include other correctional environments, including juvenile justice settings (Bennink, Gussak, & Skowran, 2003; Gussak & Ploumis-Devick, 2004). However, these sources, although enlightening, presented the benefits of art therapy on prison populations through anecdotal vignettes, and the conclusions on its effects are generally obtained through case studies (Day & Onorato, 1989; Liebmann, 1994). Unlike previous publications, this study attempted to verify some advantages of art therapy with correctional populations through quantitative approaches.

Method

A quasi-experimental, single group pre-test/post-test design was implemented for this study. It was hypothesized that if prison inmates receive art therapy services, then they will exhibit marked change in their behavior and attitude, and an improvement in their mood, socialization and problem-solving abilities within the correctional environment.

Participants

This pilot study was conducted in a medium to maximum-security male adult correctional institution in a rural section in Florida's panhandle. Forty-eight male inmates were provided art therapy services. The age range for these participants was from 21 to 63 years old. Seventy-eight percent of the participants were white, 16% were black and 7% were Hispanic. A majority of them (53%) had completed high school or an equivalent (GED) while 7% had attended some college. Eleven percent never attended high school. For 44% of the participants, this was their first prison sentence. Their crimes ranged from possession and grand larceny to murder. They all had an Axis I diagnosis such as major depression or bipolar disorder, manic type, and attended sessions on the day-treatment unit, and 51% were on some form of psychotropic medication.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات