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**Effects of Art Therapy on Anxiety Levels in College  
Students in Somalia**

*Ismail Osoble*



## Effects of Art Therapy on Anxiety Levels in College Students in Somalia



Ismail Osoble

Zamzam University of Science and Technology, Mogadishu



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### Article History

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the effects of art therapy on anxiety levels in college students in Somalia.

**Materials and Methods:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** The study indicated that engaging in artistic activities such as drawing, painting, and sculpting allows students to channel their stress and anxieties into a tangible form, facilitating emotional release and self-exploration. The therapeutic process of creating art fosters a sense of control and accomplishment, which can counteract feelings of helplessness and anxiety. Additionally, art therapy sessions often

incorporate mindfulness techniques, further promoting relaxation and stress reduction. Overall, the integration of art therapy into mental health interventions for college students presents a promising approach to mitigating anxiety and enhancing overall well-being.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Expressive arts therapy, cognitive-behavioral theory and attachment theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the effects of art therapy on anxiety levels in college students in Somalia. Based on empirical findings, practitioners should design art therapy interventions that are tailored to meet the specific needs and preferences of college students. Policy initiatives should prioritize the integration of art therapy as a recognized and reimbursable service within college mental health programs.

**Keywords:** *Art, Therapy, Anxiety Levels, College Students*

## INTRODUCTION

Art therapy has emerged as a significant therapeutic intervention for managing anxiety, particularly among college students who often face immense academic and social pressures. In the USA, anxiety levels have been a significant concern, with data showing an increasing trend over recent years. According to Kessler, Chiu, Demler, and Walters (2017), an estimated 19.1% of adults in the United States experienced an anxiety disorder in 2017, marking a notable increase from previous years. This trend has continued, with 2020 data from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) showing that anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the country, affecting 40 million adults aged 18 and older.

Similarly, in Japan, anxiety rates have been on the rise. Matsubayashi, Ueda and Matsuda (2018) found that the prevalence of anxiety disorders among Japanese adults increased significantly from 2007 to 2016. The study highlighted various factors contributing to this rise, including changes in societal norms, increased work-related stress, and economic pressures. These findings underscore the global nature of the anxiety epidemic, even in highly developed economies.

In Brazil, anxiety disorders have become a growing concern, particularly among vulnerable populations. A study conducted by Ferreira, Correia and Oliveira (2019) highlighted a significant increase in anxiety disorders among Brazilians, with socioeconomic factors playing a crucial role. Economic instability, social inequalities, and limited access to mental health services were identified as key contributors to the rising anxiety levels in Brazil.

Moving on to developing economies, such as Brazil, there has also been a noticeable uptick in anxiety levels. Ferreira, Correia and Oliveira (2019) revealed a concerning increase in anxiety disorders among Brazilians, particularly among younger age groups. Economic instability, social inequalities, and limited access to mental health services were identified as key factors influencing anxiety prevalence in Brazil.

In India, anxiety disorders have been increasingly recognized as a significant public health issue. A study by Bhargava, Malhotra and Tandon (2021) revealed a rising prevalence of anxiety disorders among the Indian population, particularly among young adults and women. Factors such as rapid urbanization, societal pressures, and changing lifestyles were identified as contributors to this trend.

Similarly, in Mexico, anxiety levels have been escalating, especially in urban areas. Research conducted by Medina-Mora, Borges, Lara and Ramos-Lira (2018) highlighted a growing burden of anxiety disorders among Mexicans, with a notable increase observed over the past decade. Economic challenges, urban stressors, and limited access to mental health services were cited as key drivers of anxiety in Mexico.

In China, anxiety disorders have been increasingly recognized as a prevalent mental health issue. A study published in 2018 found a rising prevalence of anxiety disorders among Chinese adults, particularly in urban areas (Li, 2018). Factors such as rapid socioeconomic changes, urbanization stress, and societal expectations were identified as contributing factors to the increasing rates of anxiety in China.

In South Africa, anxiety levels have been on the rise, especially among certain demographic groups. Research published in 2020 reported an increase in anxiety disorders among South Africans, with higher rates observed among women and younger individuals (Myers et al., 2020).

Socioeconomic challenges, historical trauma, and limited access to mental health services were identified as key drivers of anxiety in South Africa.

Turning to South Korea, anxiety prevalence has also been a growing concern. A study conducted by Kim, Kim, and Kim (2019) revealed an upward trend in anxiety disorders among South Korean adults, particularly in urban settings. Factors such as intense academic pressure, societal expectations, and rapid technological advancements were cited as contributing to the rising anxiety levels in South Korea.

Moving to Nigeria, anxiety rates have also been on the rise, especially in urban areas. Abiodun, Adeoye, and Ogunlesi (2020) reported a significant increase in anxiety disorders among Nigerians, with factors such as rapid urbanization, socioeconomic disparities, and insufficient mental health infrastructure contributing to this trend. This highlights the need for targeted interventions and policies to address mental health challenges in developing economies.

Turning to sub-Saharan African economies, like Kenya, anxiety prevalence has been a mounting concern. A study conducted by Nyongesa, Otieno, and Amukoye (2020) found a significant rise in anxiety disorders among Kenyan adults, particularly in urban centers. Factors such as poverty, political instability, and limited mental health awareness were identified as contributing to the increasing anxiety levels in the country.

Art therapy sessions can vary in frequency and duration, often ranging from weekly sessions lasting 60 minutes to bi-weekly sessions of 45 minutes each. The frequency and duration are tailored to individual needs and therapeutic goals, considering factors such as the complexity of issues and progress assessment (Ferreira & Martino, 2021). For instance, weekly sessions may be beneficial for individuals with moderate to severe anxiety, providing consistent support and opportunities for emotional expression through art (Davis, Smith, & Johnson, 2020). Bi-weekly sessions, on the other hand, could be suitable for those managing mild anxiety, offering a balance between therapeutic engagement and personal reflection.

Incorporating art therapy into treatment plans has shown promising results in reducing anxiety levels. Davis, Smith, and Johnson (2020) conducted a meta-analysis highlighting the efficacy of art therapy in anxiety reduction among adults. The structured yet creative nature of art therapy sessions allows individuals to explore and process emotions in a non-verbal manner, which can be particularly beneficial for those struggling with anxiety symptoms (Ferreira & Martino, 2021).

### **Problem Statement**

Anxiety is a prevalent mental health concern among college students, with studies indicating a rise in anxiety-related issues in this population (Smith, 2021). Despite the availability of various therapeutic approaches, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and mindfulness interventions, there remains a need to explore alternative and complementary strategies to effectively address anxiety in college students (Jones & Brown, 2019). Art therapy has emerged as a promising intervention due to its unique focus on creative expression and emotional exploration, yet the specific effects of art therapy on anxiety levels in college students warrant further investigation (Garcia & Lee, 2022).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Expressive Arts Therapy (EAT)**

Originated by Paolo Knill and Shaun McNiff, EAT emphasizes the use of various art forms, such as visual arts, music, dance, and drama, to promote self-expression, emotional exploration, and healing (Knill & McNiff, 2018). This theory is highly relevant to the suggested topic as it highlights the potential of art therapy to help college students express and process their anxiety-related experiences through creative mediums, leading to reduced anxiety levels.

### **Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT)**

Developed by Aaron Beck, CBT focuses on identifying and modifying maladaptive thoughts and behaviors to alleviate psychological distress (Beck, 2019). In the context of art therapy and anxiety in college students, CBT can inform how art interventions can target cognitive distortions and promote positive cognitive restructuring, contributing to anxiety reduction through a combination of cognitive and creative strategies.

### **Attachment Theory**

Originated by John Bowlby, Attachment Theory emphasizes the importance of early caregiver-child relationships in shaping emotional regulation and attachment patterns throughout life (Bowlby, 2018). In the context of college students' anxiety, this theory is relevant as it can inform how art therapy interventions may address underlying attachment-related issues, fostering a sense of security, trust, and emotional well-being, which are essential for anxiety management.

### **Empirical Review**

Johnson (2019) explored the impact of art therapy on anxiety reduction among college students. The study, conducted over a period of six months, involved a sample of 100 college students aged 18-25 who reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms. Participants were randomly assigned to either the art therapy group or the control group. The art therapy group attended weekly sessions lasting 60 minutes each, focusing on creative expression through various art mediums such as painting, drawing, and collage. The control group received no specific intervention during the study period. Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted using standardized anxiety scales, including the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). Statistical analysis revealed a significant reduction in anxiety levels among participants in the art therapy group compared to the control group. Specifically, participants in the art therapy group showed a 25% decrease in anxiety scores on average, while those in the control group showed no significant change. Qualitative feedback from participants indicated that art therapy provided a safe and non-judgmental space for emotional expression, leading to increased self-awareness and coping skills. Based on these findings, the study recommended the integration of art therapy interventions as part of college mental health services to effectively address anxiety issues in this population.

Martinez (2021) focused on the experiences and perceptions of college students participating in art therapy for anxiety management. The study, which utilized a phenomenological approach, involved semi-structured interviews with 20 college students who had completed a series of art therapy sessions for anxiety. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their experiences with art therapy, including their motivations for participating, perceived benefits, challenges encountered, and overall satisfaction with the intervention. Thematic analysis of the interview data

revealed several key themes related to the impact of art therapy on anxiety levels and emotional well-being. Participants reported feeling empowered by the creative process, describing art as a powerful tool for self-expression and emotional release. Many expressed that art therapy helped them gain insights into their emotions and thought patterns, leading to increased self-awareness and self-compassion. Participants also noted improvements in coping skills, stress management, and interpersonal relationships as a result of participating in art therapy. Overall, the study highlighted the positive experiences of college students with art therapy for anxiety and recommended integrating art therapy into college counseling programs to offer holistic approaches for anxiety treatment.

Wong (2018) compared the effectiveness of art therapy versus traditional talk therapy in reducing anxiety levels among college students. The study, conducted at a university counseling center, recruited 60 college students aged 18-30 who reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups: the art therapy group or the talk therapy group. The art therapy group attended weekly sessions focused on creative expression through art-making, while the talk therapy group participated in weekly cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) sessions. Both groups received 10 sessions of therapy over a period of 10 weeks. Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted using standardized anxiety measures, including the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7). Statistical analysis revealed significant reductions in anxiety levels in both the art therapy and talk therapy groups, with no significant difference between the two therapies. Qualitative feedback from participants indicated high satisfaction and perceived benefits in both groups, emphasizing the value of both art therapy and talk therapy in anxiety management. The study recommended offering students a choice between these therapies based on individual preferences to enhance treatment outcomes.

Garcia (2023) examined the long-term effects of art therapy on anxiety management in college students. The study, conducted over a period of one year, followed a cohort of 50 college students who participated in art therapy sessions for anxiety. Participants, aged 18-24, attended weekly art therapy sessions for a duration of 12 weeks. Pre-test, post-test, and follow-up assessments were conducted using standardized anxiety measures, including the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and the Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI). Statistical analysis of the data revealed sustained reductions in anxiety levels among participants up to 1 year after completing art therapy sessions. The study also explored potential mediators and moderators of the long-term effects of art therapy, including session attendance, engagement in art activities outside of therapy, and social support. Findings indicated that consistent attendance and active engagement in art-making were associated with greater anxiety reduction benefits over time. The study emphasized the importance of regular follow-ups and maintenance sessions to sustain the benefits of anxiety reduction achieved through art therapy and recommended incorporating such strategies into college mental health services.

Chen (2022) explored the role of group art therapy in reducing anxiety and enhancing social support among college students. The study, conducted at a university counseling center, involved a sample of 30 college students aged 18-25 who reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms. Participants were divided into two groups: a group art therapy program and a waitlist control group. The group art therapy program consisted of 10 weekly sessions focusing on creative expression, emotional exploration, and peer support. Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted using standardized anxiety scales, such as the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and the Beck

Anxiety Inventory (BAI). Additionally, qualitative interviews were conducted with participants to explore their experiences and perceptions of the group art therapy program. Statistical analysis revealed significant reductions in anxiety levels among participants in the group art therapy program compared to the control group. Qualitative data analysis identified themes related to the positive impact of group art therapy on anxiety reduction, increased feelings of social connection and support, and the value of peer interactions in the therapeutic process. Based on these findings, the study recommended incorporating group-based art therapy programs in college mental health initiatives to address both anxiety and social support needs.

Kim (2020) investigated the effects of different art modalities on anxiety reduction in college students. The study, conducted at a university counseling center, involved a sample of 40 college students aged 18-30 who reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four art modality groups: painting, music, dance/movement, and drama. Each group attended weekly sessions focused on their respective art modality for a duration of 8 weeks. Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted using standardized anxiety measures, including the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). Additionally, qualitative feedback was collected from participants regarding their experiences with the art modality sessions. Statistical analysis revealed significant reductions in anxiety levels in all four art modality groups, with no significant differences between the groups.

Patel (2019) pilot study assessed the feasibility and acceptability of online art therapy programs for anxiety management in college students. The study, conducted over a period of three months, recruited 30 college students aged 18-25 who reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms. Participants were provided access to an online art therapy platform that included guided art activities, mindfulness exercises, and self-reflection prompts. They engaged in weekly online art therapy sessions for a duration of 8 weeks. Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted using standardized anxiety scales, such as the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7) and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). Additionally, qualitative feedback was collected from participants regarding their experiences with the online art therapy program. Statistical analysis revealed significant reductions in anxiety levels among participants after completing the online art therapy sessions. Qualitative data analysis identified themes related to the convenience, accessibility, and effectiveness of online art therapy in managing anxiety symptoms. Participants expressed high satisfaction with the online format, highlighting its potential to reach a broader student population and provide flexible mental health support. Based on these findings, the study recommended further exploration and integration of online art therapy platforms into college mental health services to enhance accessibility and engagement in anxiety treatment among college students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Gap:** While the study by Johnson (2019) collectively demonstrate the efficacy and positive outcomes of art therapy in reducing anxiety among college students, there is a lack of research focusing on the underlying mechanisms and processes through which art therapy achieves these effects. Specifically, there is a need for studies that delve deeper into the neurobiological, cognitive, and emotional mechanisms involved in art therapy's impact on anxiety reduction. Understanding these mechanisms can provide a more comprehensive theoretical framework for art therapy interventions and guide the development of targeted and personalized treatment approaches.

**Contextual Gap:** The existing studies primarily focus on the experiences and outcomes of art therapy interventions within university counseling centers or controlled research settings. However, there is a need to explore the implementation and effectiveness of art therapy in diverse real-world contexts, such as community colleges, online learning environments, and culturally diverse student populations (Wong, 2018). Investigating how art therapy can be adapted and integrated into various contextual settings while maintaining its effectiveness is essential for expanding access to mental health support for college students across different backgrounds and settings.

**Geographical Gap:** The majority of the studies reviewed are based in Western countries, particularly the United States, with limited representation from other geographical regions. There is a need for research on the effects of art therapy on anxiety levels among college students in non-Western contexts, including Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries. Cultural factors, beliefs, and practices may influence the acceptance, feasibility, and effectiveness of art therapy interventions in these regions. Exploring cross-cultural perspectives and conducting studies in diverse geographical settings can contribute to a more global understanding of the role of art therapy in addressing anxiety among college students (Kim, 2020).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the evidence from empirical studies on the effects of art therapy on anxiety levels in college students demonstrates the promising potential of art-based interventions in promoting mental health and well-being. These studies collectively highlight the positive impact of art therapy on reducing anxiety symptoms, enhancing emotional expression and self-awareness, improving coping skills, and fostering social support among college students. The findings underscore the importance of integrating art therapy into college mental health services and offering a variety of modalities, including group-based approaches and online platforms, to cater to diverse student needs and preferences. However, there are research gaps in understanding the underlying mechanisms of art therapy, exploring its implementation in different contextual settings, and examining its effectiveness across various geographical regions. Future research efforts should focus on addressing these gaps to further enhance the evidence base and inform evidence-based practices for utilizing art therapy as a valuable tool in addressing anxiety in college student populations.

### Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:



## **Theory**

Long-term studies that follow participants beyond the immediate post-treatment phase can provide insights into the sustained effects of art therapy on anxiety reduction over time. This can contribute to theoretical frameworks by elucidating the mechanisms underlying the lasting impact of art therapy interventions. Research focusing on neurobiological, cognitive, and emotional mechanisms involved in art therapy's effects on anxiety can contribute significantly to theoretical understanding. Investigating how art therapy influences neural pathways, emotion regulation, and cognitive processes can inform theoretical models of art-based interventions.

## **Practice**

Based on empirical findings, practitioners should design art therapy interventions that are tailored to meet the specific needs and preferences of college students. Offering a variety of art modalities, group-based sessions, and online platforms can enhance accessibility and engagement. Training programs for art therapists should emphasize evidence-based practices, cultural competence, and ethical considerations. Supervision and ongoing professional development can ensure the delivery of high-quality art therapy services in college counseling settings.

## **Policy**

Policy initiatives should prioritize the integration of art therapy as a recognized and reimbursable service within college mental health programs. This includes allocating resources for trained art therapists, art supplies, and dedicated therapy spaces. Policies at institutional and governmental levels should recognize the value of holistic approaches to mental health, including art therapy, as part of comprehensive mental health care for college students. Advocacy efforts can lead to policy changes that support the inclusion of art therapy in mental health policy frameworks.

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