

ROLE OF EXPRESSIVE ART THERAPIES IN ALEXITHYMIC INDIVIDUALS

Abstract

Alexithymia is one of the most commonly found condition nowadays it's also associated with number of mental illnesses and issues where one finds it difficult to express their emotions and thoughts. This condition has become one of the major concern of the professionals. As this not only hamper an individuals way of expression but it also interferes with their personal lives, social relations, interpersonal relationships and professional lives. With this thought the chapter aimed at studying the role of Expressive Art Therapies in Alexithymic Individuals. To serve the purpose number of studies were collected and reviewed based on which it was found that expressive arts plays a major role in overcoming the challenges of alexithymia as it also contributes in enhancing the emotional expression which in turn contributes in increasing the satisfaction and enhancement of personal and professional relationships

Keywords: Alexithymia, expressive arts therapies, personal life, professional life.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The inability to recognize, express, or describe one's feelings is known as alexithymia. **Alexithymia** patients frequently lack the ability to think creatively, struggle to discern between emotions and physical experiences and think logically from the outside in. To put it another way, people with high levels of alexithymia are typically aware of their emotional arousal but have trouble identifying and verbalizing emotions.

A general word used to describe issues with sensing emotions is alexithymia. The approximate translation of this Greek phrase employed in Freudian psychodynamic theories is "no words for emotion." Freudian views are usually regarded as outdated, yet there seems to be more awareness of this illness. It is frequently used as a secondary diagnostic for various disabilities and mental health issues that are already present, such as autism and depression.

People who do have alexithymia may say that they find it difficult to express feelings that are considered socially acceptable, such as happiness during a happy occasion. Others could additionally struggle to recognize their feelings. These people may not always be apathetic. Instead, they might not experience emotions as strongly as their peers do and could find it difficult to empathize.

Its potential **causes** are not fully known. There is a chance that it could be genetic. Since the insula damage may potentially be the cause of the condition. Associating insula lesions with apathy and anxiety, this area of the brain is renowned for its function in social skills, empathy, and emotions.

Additionally, those with autism, depression, and trauma, particularly in early life, may also exhibit this syndrome. At this age, trauma and neglect may alter the brain in ways that make it challenging later in life to feel and recognize emotions. Additionally, according to research, this condition may be present in several neurological conditions and injuries. Alzheimer's disease, dystonia, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, stroke, and traumatic brain injury are a few of them.

There is no specific treatment for alexithymia at this time. The precise course of treatment is determined by the needs of the individual's overall health. The condition might benefit from **therapies** as well. These enable individuals to engage in mental health exercises. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), group therapy, psychotherapy (often called "talk therapy"), and expressive art therapies are all possible forms of therapy.

Expressive arts therapy is a multimodal, integrative approach that uses a number of techniques, including writing, music, visual arts, drama, and dance, to aid in the personal development of its clients. In this kind of therapy, patients interact with a qualified therapist who assists them in exploring and comprehending their feelings in response to their involvement with various expressive art forms. In order to achieve emotional release, it has been described as a process of self-discovery that relies on artistic self-expression.

The focus on the creative process itself, the use of a variety of materials, and the examination of numerous therapeutic techniques set this type of treatment apart. It may be

difficult for people who are struggling with mental health disorders to understand or express their emotions. Expressive arts can help people share their experiences and learn more about themselves in a therapeutic setting. It can therefore greatly help people who have alexithymia.

Expressive arts therapy is a multimodal therapy that incorporates a number of single-modal treatment modalities. The following are some of the major creative art forms that are frequently employed in expressive arts therapy:

1. **Art Therapy:** This method entails using the visual arts—such as painting, sculpture, and drawing—to process feelings, ideas, or experiences.
2. **Dance Therapy:** This form of treatment uses dance and physical activity to help patients manage symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression.
3. **Music Therapy:** This method employs the creation or listening to music to enhance mood and reduce anxiety.
4. **Writing Therapy:** This method uses writing to explore feelings and thoughts. People might, for instance, write in a journal about their lives or produce expressive works like poems or made-up stories.
5. **Drama Therapy:** An active strategy that makes use of drama/theatre processes systematically and purposefully through role-play, associations, and other means to attain the therapeutic objectives of symptom relief, emotional and physical integration, and personal growth.
6. **Play Therapy:** The methodical use of a theoretical framework, particularly among children, to build an interpersonal process as a means of assisting youngsters in preventing or resolving psychosocial challenges and achieving optimal growth and development.
 - **Sandplay Therapy:** An imaginative type of play therapy that makes use of a sandbox and a sizable assortment of dolls, toys, and/or other items to let a child discover their deeper psychological layers.
 - **Waterplay Therapy:** This type of play therapy uses water to help children develop and thrive in important ways. Water is a significant natural resource that offers a wide range of fantastic chances for growth and education.

It is crucial to remember that the expressive art forms mentioned above are instances of standalone therapeutic approaches. Expressive arts therapy differs from other forms of treatment because it combines several of these strategies and uses a variety of instruments rather than sticking to one method. This method of treatment can produce distinctive experiences that help individuals better comprehend their emotions, ideas, memories, and experiences by pulling from several modalities and integrating them in ways that are advantageous to each individual's requirements.

The key distinction between expressive arts therapy and art therapy is that the former uses a variety of art forms, while the latter is based on one specific art form, including writing, psychodrama, dance, movement, painting, drawing, sculpting, play, and music.

Expressive art therapists may use a wide range of strategies to design a course of action that best meets the needs of the patient. These methods can include acrylic or watercolor painting or finger painting, clay sculpting, mask building, dancing, journal writing, psychodrama, role-playing, improvisation, sketching, coloring Mandalas, and more.

Professionals use psychotherapy methods such as psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, and mindfulness-based techniques in addition to the therapeutic benefits of self-expression through expressive art.

Expressive arts therapy might be helpful for a variety of mental health issues. It can be applied to both youngsters and adults. Anxiety, ADHD, interpersonal issues, emotional issues, alexithymic conditions, and more are a few conditions or issues it may aid. When treating children who may not yet be able to express their thoughts or feelings, this method may also be helpful.

By giving people the chance to use the techniques that are most effective for them, expressive arts can enhance the advantages of talk therapy. Some people may find that discussing their experiences is their favorite method of introspection. However, some people could profit more from pursuits like journaling or creating pictures. The International Expressive Arts Therapy Association (IEATA) states that this entails fusing psychology, community education, and artistic processes to aid in the improvement of creativity, clarity, and profound healing by fostering appropriate emotional understanding and expression.

In addition to this, it has a number of other **advantages**, such as improving communication, personal growth, symptom reduction, and the ability to make sense of one's own experiences.

Because of all the aforementioned factors, expressive art therapies are one of the best approaches to treat alexithymia. People can gradually learn how to express their emotions and feelings with the aid of these therapies and strategies.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As we know some people find it difficult to express their emotions and they find it even harder to put meaning and words to their feelings and emotions. These people are not able to tell other people what they are going through at the emotional level. This may lead them towards trouble and fluctuations in their life be it personal, professional, or social. All these can also hamper one's mental and physical health as this can also interfere with individuals' efficiency and capabilities over time. Here comes the role of psychology, as with the help of various therapies this issue can be dealt with easily. So, if there's a therapy that is very generalized and effective with least or no money and time consumption will be greater

acceptance, which has led our focus toward the use of expressive art therapies. Expressive art therapies are widely in use nowadays. It can be done by using dance movement, doodling, drawing, writing, and more. These can be done with a little guidance. When one is made able to express their emotions while using some specific skills or techniques then that can help them overcome the issues one encounters while expressing their emotions. So, the more effective the therapies will be, the better the individual will become with their expression of emotions. The study is quite significant in the present scenario as people tend to have a lot of fluctuation in their personal life and various aspects of life, but when the individual will be able to express their emotions and become more vigilant, then most of the problems will be decreased or can be minimized. So, because of all these reasons, I believe that the topic is more relevant and important for the study.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Akram & Arshad (2022) undertook an experimental investigation to determine how to treat alexithymia and its consequences for college students' overall mental health. With the aid of statistical analysis, it was revealed that the treatment group's alexithymia, as well as their levels of despair and anxiety, had significantly decreased. They also discovered that ART was effective in lowering alexithymia. They discovered through the study that the therapeutic approach had helped the individuals' overall psychological discomfort (symptoms of anxiety and depression) to improve.

Ashori & Shamsi (2022) have investigated how Adlerian play therapy affects the social isolation and alexithymia of deaf students. The intervention had a significant and positive impact on people with alexithymia and social isolation among deaf students, according to the findings of a properly conducted study. It was discovered that AdPT improved these conditions, which brought about changes and improvements in the person's life.

Begotaraj, Sambucini, Ciacchella, Pellicano, Pierro, & et.al. (2022) researchers have investigated the effect of expressive writing on migrants' psychological discomfort and traumatic symptoms through a prospective multi-arm randomized controlled experiment. They found that trauma-focused EW was connected to good overall symptoms, an improvement in somatization, a drop in the global severity index, an increase in hope, and an increase in alexithymia, as well as an immediate decrease in phobic anxiety.

Akbari, Amiri, & Mehrabi (2021) analyzed how well music therapy reduced alexithymia symptoms and enhanced peer connections. Researchers discovered that music therapy is a useful method for easing the symptoms of alexithymia in female adolescents.

Renzi, Mariani, Trani, & Tambelli (2020) they investigated the role of alexithymia in an expressive writing intervention using linguistic analysis to give words to emotions, and after the research was finished, they discovered that alexithymia affects the effectiveness of expressive writing by making it difficult to get involved in the writing process and also lacking the symbolizing processes. They came to the conclusion that an expressive writing intervention can assist someone in starting or learning to improve the talent of putting their emotions into words.

Savidaki, Demirtoka & Jiménez (2020) they found that the participants who received dance movement therapy reported improvements in their mood states and an increase in their self-awareness. This study, *Re-inhabiting One's Body*, was a pilot study on the effects of dance movement therapy on body image and alexithymia in eating disorders.

Renzi, Solano, Trani, Ginobbi, Minutolo & Tambelli (2019) during an assisted reproductive treatment, the effects of an expressive writing intervention on pregnancy rates, alexithymia, and psychophysical health were examined. Findings have validated the value of the writing technique used during ART in enhancing treatment effectiveness and suggested that these interventions can significantly help those suffering from alexithymia disorders.

Metzner, Jaeger, Masuhr, Olschewski, Gräfe, & et.al. (2018) investigated the methods of attunement used in the early stages of music therapy for those who were experiencing acute psychosis or alexithymia. The study has provided evidence of meticulously planned rhythmic attunement, which has further suggested the positive effects of improvisational music therapy on patients with psychosis and alexithymic people.

Erkkilä, Punkanen, Fachner, Ruona, Pöntiö, & et.al. (2018) conducted a randomized controlled experiment to examine the effects of individual music therapy on symptoms of depression or alexithymia. As a result, they have discovered that treating working-age individuals with depression or alexithymia with a mix of personalized music therapy and routine treatment is successful. The findings of this study and other studies suggest that music therapy, with its unique characteristics, is an important addition to tried-and-true treatment modalities for a variety of mental health conditions.

Blomdahl, Gunnarsson, Guregård, & Björklund (2013) analyzed numerous studies to determine the effectiveness of art therapies in assisting people with clinical diagnoses and challenges related to mental health. The review concluded that a range of clinical settings can be successfully used for art therapy.

Pykh (2013) undertook a study to determine whether rhythmic movement therapy (RMT) is useful for treating alexithymia patients. Based on these findings, the results showed that the alexithymia level and a number of other personal variables significantly improved in RMT group members compared to the control group's unimproved members, though extraversion and neuroticism did not significantly change between groups.

Ogrodniczuk, Piper, & Joyce (2011) analyzed a study on how alexithymia affects the course and results of psychotherapy. According to the review, alexithymia has little impact on patients' choices for medical care, but there is a trend for alexithymic patients to favor group therapy.

Allen, & Heaton (2010) study of the therapeutic potential of music in alexithymia and autism. They investigated these potential processes for musical mood induction in listeners with the assumption that the simulation theory of empathy would shed light on the ongoing debates regarding the nature of emotion in music. Using these concepts as a foundation, they claim that a straightforward associative learning process between listeners' emotions and cognition was discovered to be strongly associated with the clinical treatment of alexithymia.

Stingla, Bauscha, Walter, Kagerer, Leichsenringa, & Leweke (2008) have attempted to investigate the stability of alexithymia characteristics and the effects of inpatient psychotherapy. The findings show that alexithymia and symptom load in patients are reduced during inpatient multimodal psychodynamic treatment. The high relative stability of alexithymia also supports the idea that alexithymia is a relatively stable personality trait that can be modified or altered with the right methods and therapies.

Degen & Lansen (2006) worked on a case study of a client with alexithymia and applied art therapy to the client to find out the effectiveness of the therapy. Art therapy appears to be a promising type of treatment for traumatized patients with alexithymia, even in cases of severe self-pathology, because they were able to identify and label their emotional reactions as a result of their art therapy sessions.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a type of conceptual research in which a detailed study about alexithymic individuals and the role of expressive art therapies in overcoming the issues or problems faced by alexithymic people. To collect the information qualitative study was done based on the reviews of the previous studies available on PubMed, google scholar, Taylor & Francis, research gate, springer, and various magazine articles. In this case, expressive art therapies work as an independent variable i.e. it can be manipulated and alexithymic individuals are the dependent variable i.e. we tend to see the effect of an independent variable on the dependent. To study these variables review of the research was also done under the guidance of my supervisor on the various research papers and articles on alexithymic individuals, and expressive art therapies respectively, and collectively. Then the conclusion was framed based on the findings of the various studies.

V. DISCUSSION

Lack of expression of emotion is a defining characteristic of alexithymia; therefore, it can be challenging to identify its symptoms. Affected individuals may come across as cold or numb because this disorder is linked to an inability to communicate emotions. A person with alexithymia may nevertheless individually encounter the following in social situations: rage, perplexity, difficulty "reading faces," discomfort, emptiness, elevated heart rate, lack of affection, and fear. A person with this disease may also have trouble interpreting physical changes into emotional responses. This after a time tends to hamper one's personal, professional, and social life to a great extent. This condition can also be associated with various disorders like autism, depression, epilepsy, and more. As this condition is nowadays found to be very prevalent, the treatment for this needs to be figured out. As there's no specific cause to it, this condition can be improved with the use of expressive art therapies. Expressive art therapy is conducted by professional therapists and psychologists in varied combinations of other therapies like drama, play, art, dance, writing, and more. These therapies are used in combination to treat a particular problem or issue.

Studies have shown that expressive art therapies, when used in combination can be better able to make people aware of their emotions and feelings. Many researchers have found that dance therapy, writing therapy, music therapy, or various such therapies can be used to create insight among individuals with alexithymia. As these therapies can contribute a

lot to making people aware of the feelings and emotions they experience and go through in certain situations now and then.

Expressive art therapies can be used to deal with several mental health-related issues be it depression, anxiety, and more. As these therapies contribute a lot to making individuals aware and insightful about their feelings and emotions. As it's known that alexithymic people face difficulties in expressing their emotions and feelings. So, these therapies can be of a lot of use for them to make them aware of their stuff. With proper techniques therapies can make people a lot more independent and confident in expressing their emotions and feelings.

VI. CONCLUSION

Expressive art therapy is a way of creating insight among individuals about their emotions and feelings one is going through. It includes several therapies of a different kinds be it drama, play, music, writing, sketching, and more. These therapies hold some capabilities in terms of enhancing the individuals' lifestyle. It tends to make an individual's life a successful one by contributing their utmost skills under the guidance of a therapist and psychologist to become aware of their feelings and emotions. One can better express their emotions and sentiments when conscious of their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, all of which exist on the same continuum. According to the review, dance movement, art, writing, and drama therapies can all significantly aid an alexithymic person. As individuals with the condition of alexithymia can receive a lot of benefits because of expressive art therapies and related techniques. Subsequently, these help the individual in recognizing, expressing, and analyzing one's emotions and feelings.

So, with this, it can conclude that expressive art therapies are of great use for the recognition, analysis, and expression of emotions effectively.

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