

Creative Art Therapy as an Efficient Way to Improve the Well-Being of People Living with Dementia

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Abstract. Dementia is characterized by a decline in cognition and loss of functional abilities. It is becoming more and more prevalent which places a tremendous strain on the health and social care systems, in parallel the caregivers are under a lot of stress. Engaging in creative activities such as painting, drawing, dance, music, and drama can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, and promote a sense of can be beneficial for patients with dementia as it can help them maintain their cognitive abilities. Educating people with dementia, their relatives, and professionals to improve their quality of life through innovative creative arts therapies such as music, dance, and drama supported by digital tools is an invaluable resource for people and organizations seeking to improve their wellness. Furthermore, it is highlighted the value of involving family members and caregivers in the therapeutic process, recognizing their critical role in supporting the well-being of people with dementia.

Keywords. Alzheimer disease, dementia, creative art therapies, healthcare, well-being

1. Alzheimer's disease and Creative Art Therapies

Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other neurodegenerative disorders are prominent causes of the syndrome known as dementia, which is characterized by a deterioration in cognition and loss of functional abilities. The prevalence of dementia is predicted to increase from 55 million cases that was in 2019 to 139 million cases in 2050 as a result of population expansion and rising life expectancy. During the same period, cases in Europe are anticipated to increase by about 80%, from 14.1 to 25 million cases. People who care for people with dementia (PWD) are under a lot of stress because of the high degree of care that is required. Dementia is becoming more and more common, which places a tremendous strain on the health and social care systems [1]. Engaging in activities can be beneficial for patients with dementia as it can help them maintain their cognitive and physical abilities, enhance their quality of life, and reduce behavioral and psychological symptoms [2].

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Caregivers and healthcare professionals use art therapy as a way to enhance the health and wellness of dementia patients. Art therapy enables AD patients to express themselves in a more creative way, even if many patients with the disease lose some of their communication skills. Creative art therapies (CATs) are a form of therapy that utilizes various forms of art to promote healing, personal growth, and self-expression. The main goal of creative art therapies is to help individuals access and express their emotions and thoughts through the creative process [3]. There are several types of CATs, including art therapy, music therapy, dance/movement therapy, and drama therapy. Each type of therapy uses a different form of art to help individuals express themselves in unique ways. Art therapy, for example, uses painting, drawing, and sculpture to help individuals explore their emotions and feelings. Music therapy, on the other hand, uses music and sound to facilitate healing and promote emotional expression and Dance therapy promotes physical and mental health [4].

CATs have been found to be effective in treating a wide range of mental health conditions. They have been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, improve self-esteem, and promote positive changes in behavior [5]. Additionally, CATs can provide a non-verbal means of communication, which can be especially helpful for those who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally. Overall, they offer a unique and effective approach to healing and personal growth. By encouraging people to express themselves through art, they can help them process and cope with difficult emotions and experiences, leading to improved mental health and well-being as well as to promote a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. They are also versatile and can be used in a variety of settings, including hospitals, schools, and mental health clinics [6,7].

2. Rationale and objectives

Non-pharmacological therapies for dementia are gaining popularity. The aim of this study is to utilize CATs to address various needs and challenges to the health, social, and daily life of AD patients or other types of dementia. In this study, we focus on the effectiveness of art therapy as a non-pharmacological dementia intervention as well as on enhancing the well-being and quality of life for PWD. The study was conducted in 2021 by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki's Medical Physics Laboratory and Digital Innovation (<http://medphys.med.auth.gr/>) in coordination with the Day Care Centers of the Municipality of Thessaloniki in the framework of the Erasmus+ project named AD-ARTS (www.adarts.eu).

AD-ARTS aimed to promote social inclusion of persons with Alzheimer's and other Dementia, through their participation in CATs in cooperation with relatives out of the care centers and through the participation of relatives and professionals in creative arts performances. Also, it aimed to reduce disparities in access to and engagement with digital tools and to extend and develop the competences of relatives and professionals who support people with Alzheimer's and other Dementia, through the transference of knowledge and tools related with the application of CATs supported by digital tools.

3. Methodological Guide and Designed Experiential Training Activities

The utilization of CATs, such as music, dance, art, and drama, in the treatment of dementia is presented in the AD-ARTS project's Methodological Guide. It provides a

comprehensive overview of the latest research on the use of them in the treatment of dementia and explores the ways in which digital tools can be used to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of these therapies. Practical advice and step-by-step instructions provided for the Designed Experiential Training Activities and guidance on identifying appropriate activities as well as strategies for adapting activities to meet the changing needs of individuals as their condition progresses.

In addition to providing guidance on the design and implementation of creative arts therapy programs, it also offering training resources for caregivers, family members, and professionals working with PWD. These resources include instructional videos, lesson plans, and assessment tools to help individuals acquire the skills and knowledge needed to effectively use creative arts therapies and digital tools in their care practices.

Twenty-two (22) participants (older adults and patient relatives, Table 1) were trained in several activities that were developed during the project period. Through their participation they had been contributed to the validation actions of the Training Materials and the Designed Experiential Training Activities oriented to evaluate their quality and effectiveness.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Older Adults	12	72,5	2,844	67	77
Patient Relatives	10	71,1	4,067	64	76

4. Evaluating the use of Creative Arts Therapies

A paper-based questionnaire was distributed to the participants to obtain their impressions about the CATs for AD patients or other dementias and their relatives. More specifically, participants believed in a great degree (3=A lot) that CATs can improve the AD patients' communication and socialization as well as their quality of life (Figure 1).

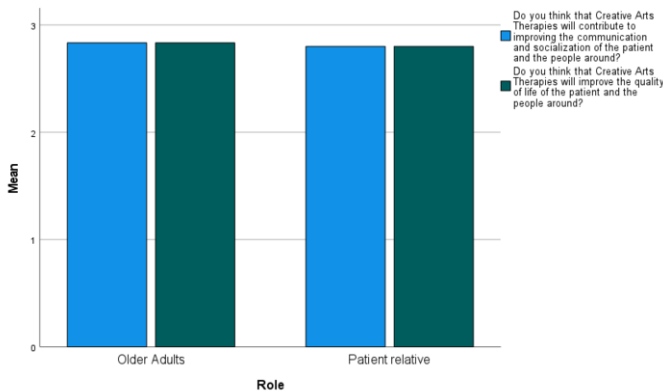


Figure 1. Participants responses about the communication, socialization and Quality of life of AD patients and PWD

When asked if they find the activities useful and helpful, the participants answered, "Very much" (=3) however they were not so sure about using them at home or in the workplace if the actions are not accompanied by professionals (Figure 2). At home,

CATs be able to be a fun and creative way to explore hobbies or improve the living space. Whether a program is useful at home or not depends on the individual's needs and preferences.

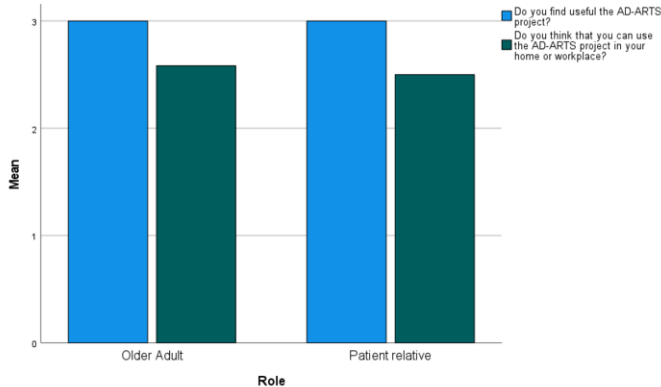


Figure 2. Participants responses about the usefulness of project activities and the use at home or workplace

Also, when asked if they believe that digital tools are easy to use with their own skills, they answered that they can be trained (2= Can be trained, 3=Easy) so then they will be able to use them more easily (Figure 3). Digital tools have become increasingly popular in creative art therapies, providing new ways for therapists to create meaningful experiences in people as well as in PWD [8]. Art therapy is particularly effective, as it allows them to express themselves non-verbally and can improve their mood and well-being.

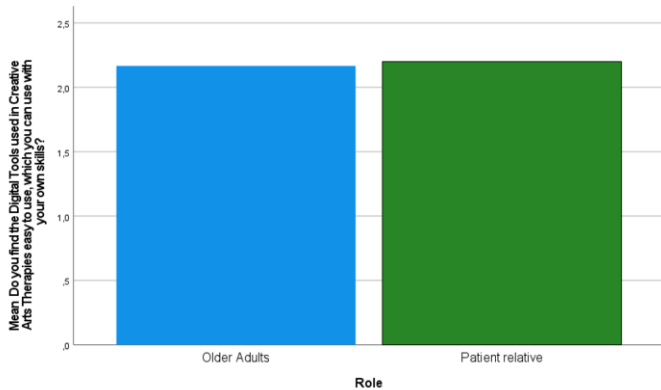


Figure 3. Participants responses about the usefulness of digital tools

To the question "*Which of the Creative Art Therapies do you find easy to implement with your own skills as well?*" there were 10 answers from the older adults for dance and 8 for music, while 7 and 7 respectively from the patients' relatives. Dance and music can improve physical and cognitive function, promote social interaction and emotional well-being, and reduce stress and anxiety. For people who may have limited mobility, dance therapy can offer a low-impact way to exercise and improve coordination. Music therapy can help people with memory loss or cognitive decline by stimulating the brain and promoting emotional connections to familiar songs. Additionally, participating in group

dance or music sessions can provide socialization opportunities, combat loneliness, and foster a sense of community. Overall, dance and music therapy can be an enjoyable and effective way for older adults to improve their quality of life [5,7].

5. Conclusions

Creative Arts Therapies Supported by Digital Tools are an essential tool for anyone seeking to enhance the quality of life of people with dementia through innovative and person-centered approaches to care. Digital tools can also help to stimulate memory, encourage communication, provide a sense of achievement, and improve their quality of life. It is also highlighted the value of involving family members and caregivers in the therapeutic process, recognizing their critical role in supporting the well-being of people with dementia.

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