

THE CLINICAL EFFECTIVENESS AND CURRENT PRACTICE OF ART THERAPY FOR TRAUMA



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and Recovery Research

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research summary provides an overview of a research project completed through the Institute for Safety, Compensation and Recovery Research (ISCRR). For more information, visit the ISCRR website at www.iscrr.com.au

Art therapy is a psychological treatment involving creative visual art making as a form of non-verbal expression. Clients use art materials to express, explore, externalise, process and resolve negative thoughts and feelings associated with physical or psychological trauma. Art therapy may be of particular benefit for individuals for whom verbal expression is difficult, including children or individuals with acquired brain injury.

An evidence review on the clinical effectiveness of art therapy following physical trauma was conducted in 2012. The review concluded there was insufficient evidence to determine whether art therapy was a useful treatment for individuals who had experienced trauma.* The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) commissioned an update of the evidence review in 2018. This update examined the contemporary scientific evidence of the clinical effectiveness of art therapy and identified the current practice of art therapy in Victoria, Australia.

WHAT WAS DONE IN THIS STUDY?

Evidence review

A systematic search of the scientific literature for evaluation studies of the clinical effectiveness of art therapy published since 2012 was conducted in January 2018. Studies eligible for inclusion in the review were art therapy interventions delivered to individuals following any trauma, injury or condition and evaluated with mental health outcomes reported.

Environmental scan

A targeted desktop scan was conducted in January–February 2018 to identify publicly available electronic sources of information about the current practice of art therapy in Victoria.

WHAT WAS FOUND?

Evidence review

The search identified nine primary studies and six systematic review studies published since 2012 that have evaluated the clinical effectiveness of art therapy. These new studies were synthesised with the four studies in the original evidence review and the evidence was graded based on study design and scientific quality.

The studies were conducted in eight countries (two in Australia) and the art therapy interventions that have been evaluated for psychological trauma and physical trauma conditions were delivered weekly for up to 16 weeks.

*Donoghue E and Piccenna L. Art therapy Evidence review. Report no. 0312-002-R9. Institute for Safety Compensation and Recovery Research and National Trauma Research Institute. 2012 Feb.

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Based on these studies, the following key findings were made:

- There is moderate evidence that art therapy can significantly reduce depression and anxiety symptoms associated with psychological trauma based on four primary and one systematic review study.
- There is very limited evidence that art therapy can significantly reduce depression symptoms for individuals with physical trauma based on one study.
- The long-term effectiveness of art therapy is unclear.

Environmental Scan

The practice of art therapy in Australia is governed by the Professional Association for Arts Therapy in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore (ANZATA) and the Australian Creative Arts Therapies Association (ACATA). Therapist accreditation by the ANZATA requires a Masters level qualification in art therapy. In Victoria, two accredited training institutions offer Master of Art Therapy courses. At the time of undertaking the scan there were 56 registered art therapists in the Melbourne area. Public and private health institutions in Victoria offer art therapy for mental health and medical conditions. Psychologists, counsellors and social workers work with qualified art therapists to provide interdisciplinary therapy.

Road Trauma Support Services Victoria (RTSSV) currently offer services across Victoria to individuals affected by trauma, which is particularly relevant for the TAC. RTSSV established an Art Therapy Group in 2012 targeting mothers bereaved by road trauma. The program has expanded to include any individual directly or indirectly affected by road trauma. Monthly facilitated sessions are offered at the Surrey Hills Community Centre in Melbourne. The effectiveness of this program has not been evaluated.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH?

The evidence base in support of art therapy has grown since 2012 and now provides a moderate level of support for the effectiveness of art therapy to treat psychological trauma. Art therapy professional training, registration and practice is currently available in Victoria and is a growing area.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Report title** The clinical effectiveness and current practice of art therapy for trauma (ISCR Project 212)
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