



An overview of historical and contemporary perspectives in art therapy in Spain: A bibliometric analysis of Spanish art therapy research

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Art therapy
Visual art
Intervention
Assessment
Bibliometric analysis
Spanish

ABSTRACT

The present article reviews the Spanish history of the art therapy profession and research. In addition, a contemporary view of current art therapy research is described through a bibliometric analysis of 160 art therapy articles published in the Spanish *Journal of Art Therapy*, *Papers on Art Therapy* and *art Education for Social Inclusion* from 2011 to 2021. The following research indicators were analyzed: authorship, participants, population, artistic discipline, theoretical models of art therapy intervention, nature of the studies, and assessments. Outcomes revealed that Spanish art therapy researchers are mostly women who usually publish on their own. Additionally, many ages, populations and topics are treated. Visual art is the discipline most used in the analyzed research. Gestalt, community-based art programs, and the eclectic approach are the most selected theoretical models. Most of the studies are qualitative and theory building with no assessment. However, when assessment is included, the type most used is the tools made by the researcher. Implications, limitations, and further lines of research are discussed.

Introduction

While the profession of art therapy may have had its roots in the United States and Great Britain, the practice has now spread to every corner of the globe, giving rise to a multitude of programs, research, and art therapy associations. Understanding the complexity and value of art therapy has long been an issue for art therapists and professionals in related fields (Robb, 2016). Nevertheless, each profession tends to be molded in accordance with the uniqueness of the society and culture in which it is embedded. Undoubtedly, the uniqueness of Spain's history and the characteristics of its society have influenced the development of the art therapy profession.

Spain is a country with profound historical roots in Europe. The Iberian Peninsula was the site of multiple successive civilizations of Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Germanic kingdoms and the control of Muslim-ruled states for much of the Early Middle Ages. The dawn of the 20th century was marked by a series of grave social and political problems resulting from Spain's loss of its colonies, and the outbreak of the Civil War (1936–1939). The new regime following the Civil War meant forty years of dictatorship for Spain and isolation from the outside world till the transition to democracy in 1978. Since democracy was

established, thanks to a period of remarkable political stability, it was possible to advance in fields such as education, health, public infrastructures, and extended social services. Consequently, it has been in this last period of Spanish history that a major breakthrough in the art therapy profession and empirical-based research has come about.

Nevertheless, in Spain we found traces of the use of systematic art therapy as early as the Civil War (1936–1939), when teachers conducted programs for exiled children, supported by Quakers and members of the International Brigades, as well as by Aldous Huxley. This experience took place in the school colonies during the civil war. The massive collection of drawings done by children at that time, unfortunately and unlike in other countries such as the UK during the Second World War (see Winnicott, 1971), did not have continuity in the years immediately after the war. Therefore, no research remains into overcoming those traumatic events through the paintings and drawings made by children as a significant artistic creation in the face of war and destruction (Hernández Merino, 2000).

Art therapy emerged initially from apprenticeship practice and experiential learning in medical and psychiatric hospitals (Gerber, 2016). One early research method was to look at art made by patients with mental illness (Robb, 2016). One example, of early art therapy

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2023.102015>

Received 20 September 2022; Received in revised form 2 March 2023; Accepted 2 March 2023

Available online 5 March 2023

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interventions and research was the work done by Nise da Silveira, a Brazilian psychiatrist, who founded the Museum of Images of the Unconscious and created the Palms House a clinic for mentally ill patients (Ministério da Ciência Tecnologia e Inovações, 2021). In this respect, during the first decades of the last century there is a paucity of psychiatric literature in Spain on the pictorial expression of mental health patients, an aspect which contrasts with the references to such activity in other European countries. The first articles published in Spain relating painting by mental health patients to modern art was by Gonzalo R. Lafora between 1915 and 1922, which contributed to the incipient psychiatry and art therapy literature in Spain (Trujillo Arrogante, 2019).

Between 1960 and 1975, there was a significant increase in the number of publications, which were boosted at the beginning by the IV International Congress of Psychotherapy organized in Barcelona in 1958. The use of art as therapy at the psychiatric facility of the Faculty of Medicine of Barcelona is known through the publications by Juan Obiols Vié's (1965) and by Francesc Tosquelles' (1972, 2014), from this time onwards more articles and studies began to appear, especially in the psychiatric and medical fields.

Trends in Training and Practice: Gathering to Organize a Profession.

Political and sociological developments of the 1980s later provided grounds for this new profession. The Faculties of Fine Arts and Education were pioneers in the research and training of art-therapy professionals. This shift in training and professionalization from the medical to educational and art institutions was influenced by the Foundation of ECARTE, the European consortium of Arts Therapies Education, which was founded in 1991 by the Universities of Hertfordshire, Münster, Nijmegen and Paris. Currently comprising thirty-three-member institutions from fifteen European countries seeking to unify standards in the quality of university education. Two ECARTE conferences have been held in Spain. One at the Autonomous University of Madrid in 2003: "Arts Therapies: Recognised Discipline or Soul Graffiti? Approaches, applications, evaluations", and another at the Alcalá University in 2017: "Imagining Windmills – Trust, Truth and the Unknown in the Arts Therapies" (see ECARTE 2022).

In 1999, the Complutense University of Madrid initiated the first contacts with ECARTE, and in 2000, with the master's degree program in art therapy officially regulated, it was the first university to join and be recognized by the consortium. From that moment on, and through a research group at the Faculty of Education, a line of training and research was created which has become the most important in the country.

There are two types of Master's in the Arts Therapies programs in Spain: A professional Master's, delivered by universities but not recognized by the Ministry of Education, and a full Master's, which combines training and research and allows students to progress to doctoral programs. This kind of full Master's is currently offered by the Complutense University of Madrid (CUM) and Autonomous University of Madrid (AUM). The courses are recognized and regulated by the Ministry of Education and are adapted to the European Higher Education Area. They are subject to re-accreditation at 3-yearly intervals. The standards of these master's level programs aligned themselves with the research requirements of psychology and other established methods of conducting mental health research in the number of training hours, internship hours, assessment, supervision, theoretical units, and an art therapy thesis research project.

From a professional point of view, is important to mention that the Spanish art-therapist associations have joined together in a federation, the Spanish Federation of Art Therapy (FEAPA) (see FEAPA, 2022).

Current Issues and Trends in Evidence-Based Research.

Art therapy Research in Spain in the last ten years has been conducted mostly by research groups at CUM and AUM. However, as a new growing field, art therapy research and programs at doctoral level are starting at the Universities of Barcelona, Granada, Huelva, Murcia, Valencia. Research is also being conducted by individual researchers (Klein et al., 2006, 2008, 2017) and from other Spanish institutions such

the Spanish Association of Art Therapy (see ATE, 2023).

The research group at CUM has led the most important financed research projects on art therapy. The first from 2016 to 2019 on *art therapy, trauma, and emotional memory* was a Research Grant funded by the Ministry of Competitiveness. The second one from 2021 to 2025, on *the creative process and art therapy as a path to healing of childhood trauma*, is another funded project with the collaboration of the Save the Children Foundation (see BRUNDIBÁR, 2022).

During the last two decades, a major effort has been made in Spain in the publication of books relating to art therapy intervention and research from a variety of authors (Coll Espinosa, 2006; Domínguez Toscano, 2005; Domínguez Toscano, 2014; Domínguez Toscano et al., 2018; Domínguez Toscano and Montero Domínguez, 2022; Esteban Argues and Domínguez Toscano, 2014; Fernández et al., 2021; López Fdz. Cao, 2011; López Fdz. Cao, 2015; López Fdz. Cao, 2006; López Fdz. Cao, 2018a; López Fdz. Cao, 2018b; López Fdz. Cao and Martínez Díez, 2006; Martínez Díez and López Fdz. Cao., 2004; Martínez Díez and López Fdz. Cao., 2009; Marxen, 2011a; Rico Caballo, 2012; Rueda Cuenca, 2020). All these volumes have provided handy references for art therapy students and individuals interested in conducting research on this topic.

The most important scientific journal on art therapy in Spain is [Arteterapia. Papeles de Arteterapia y Educación Artística para la Inclusión Social]. *Journal of Art Therapy. Papers on Art Therapy and Art Education for Social Inclusion* (JAT). This journal is indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Journal Citation Reports (JCR), Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), Scopus, and others index citation sources. It is published yearly by the CUM, and in its seventeen years has become a benchmark in Latin American countries. The JAT provides research articles mostly in Spanish in the field of creative art therapies and combines works from researchers and clinicians, representing a new generation of art therapy in Spain, where research, theory and practice can co-exist (see JAT, 2022).

One challenge that the field of art therapy faces is the lack of robust research into the profession (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). After a thorough search in the most highly regarded art-therapy journals published in the English language, we found a total of twelve articles in the last ten years on art-therapy by research authors at Spanish universities and other Spanish institutions. Most of them were on dance-therapy (Barnet-López et al., 2016; García-Díaz, 2018; Blázquez et al., 2010; Bräuniger, 2012a, 2012b; Karampoula & Panhofer, 2018; Mateos-Moreno & Atencia-Doña, 2013; Panhofer et al., 2011, 2014). Two of them were on drama-therapy and theater (Fernández-Aguayo & Pino-Juste, 2018; López-i-Martín et al., 2019). One of them was about the transformative and therapeutic aspects within the context of modern and contemporary art through the work of six contemporary and modern female artists (Marxen, 2011b). We also found two articles on an art-therapy instruments of assessment (López Fernández-Cao et al., 2020; Peral Jiménez, 2021). As we can see, little has been published to date on international activities and research into Spanish art therapy. An issue to be considered is the linguistic obstacle. Anglo-American literature is widely studied and some classics have been translated into several European languages, but the reverse does not necessarily apply. Unfortunately, writings in languages other than English remain inaccessible to a wider public (D'Elia, 2016). The present article aims to fill that gap by presenting current research data on art therapy studies published in Spanish. From the last decade, the most accurate accounts of art therapy research in Spain are to be found in the JAT. Therefore, one of the goals of this paper is to perform a bibliometric analysis based on a review of articles published in the aforementioned journal in the last ten years. The bibliometric analysis will provide data on the contemporary views of art therapy research in Spain, including information on authors, participants' ages, populations, art materials, and the most widely used theoretical approaches, research methods, and assessments.

While it is understood that there are significant art therapy contributions by Latin America professionals in the JAT, this article will focus

specifically on the work by Spanish authors.

Method

Procedure and sample

In order to explore art therapy scientific production during the last decade in Spain, this paper presents a bibliometric analysis on art therapy research done from 2010 to 2021. Bibliometric analysis is commonly used to examine the published literature in a particular field, which helps to evaluate the trend and the patterns of research activities over time (Liu et al., 2022). The principle units of measurement in bibliometrics are scientific publications (Debackere et al., 2003). Accordingly, this study aims to critically examine the studies in the field of art therapy based on an analysis of articles published in the JAT from Volume 5 (2010) to Volume 16 (2021) comprising 12 issues one per year and a total of 160 articles were reviewed. As far as we know, there are no systematic analysis studies in the field of art therapy which can provide insights into current research status, limitations and future development trends of art therapy research in Spain.

The bibliometric analysis was carried out on indicators that show data such as author's gender and background, co-authorship, collaboration with other professionals and content and methodological indicators that show data such as participants, population, artistic discipline, theoretical models of interventions, research method, and assessment.

Having selected all the studies constituting the sample, they were read so as to determine the data required for the subsequent analysis. The studies were coded by the two first authors of the present study; 94% interrater agreement was achieved, and discrepancies in coding were resolved via discussion. The content related to the selected variables was imported into a Microsoft Excel document. Lastly, all the data collected was entered in the software IBM SPSS Statistics 27 for further analysis in order to calculate the descriptive statistics needed.

Data analysis

A descriptive analysis focused on frequencies and percentages was used to study the following variables:

Authorship

Including the first author's gender and background, co-authorship, and if there was collaboration between art therapist and other professionals such as psychologists, nurses, social workers, educators, etc.

Participants

Participants were grouped following the classifications into children, adolescents, adults, and older-adults. Articles that do not specify participants were coded as not-specified (N/S).

Population

The following types of population mentioned in the book by Gussak and Rosal (2016) were used to delimit this variable, clustered in the following categories: special needs; aggression (aggression in women and sexual assault); mental health; substance abuse; trauma; eating disorders; at risk of poverty or social exclusion; medical condition; prisoners- and combat-related; near death experiences; therapist and artists-related. Articles that do not specify population were coded as not-specified (N/S).

Artistic discipline

The artistic disciplines according to the Council of Arts and Letters of Quebec (2022) have been clustered in the following categories: arts and crafts; multidisciplinary arts; performing arts (dance, theatre and circus arts), music (music and popular song), visual arts (painting, sculpture, engraving, photography, drawing, illustration, textile arts or mixed

techniques), film and video. Articles that do not specify artistic discipline were coded as not-specified (N/S).

Theoretical models of art therapy interventions

The manner in which art therapy is practiced depends upon the art therapist's theoretical orientation and the institution's specifications. The book by Gussak and Rosal (2016) was used to delimit this variable clustered in the following categories. *Psychoanalytic Art Therapy*: centered on the key ideas of its founder Sigmund Freud: conscious, unconscious, catharsis and free association (Rubin, 2016). *Gestalt Art Therapy*: considered part of the existential-phenomenological school of therapy. The main idea is to work towards constant awareness expansion to facilitate people becoming creators and agents of their own transformation (Ciornai, 2016). *Cognitive-behavioral Art Therapy*: direct interventions towards more adaptive responses in order to better adapt to various situations. Recognizing and disengaging from negative patterns of thinking and behaving and damaging self-talk (Rosal, 2016). *Expressive Therapies Continuum*: with emphasis on the elements specific to art therapy such as expression of sensations, perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas in visual images using art media (Lusebrink, 2016). *Brain-based Art Therapy*: based on neuroplasticity. The use of mental and visual imagery, bilateral stimulation, and communication between the limbic system and cerebral cortex and significant art experiences can change neural pathways, which provide opportunities for rehabilitation and change (King, 2016). *Eclectic Approach to Art Therapy*: Art therapists' unique development of their own approach to the work with major psychological theories such as Freudian, Gestalt, and behavioral theoretical concepts and practices (Wadeson, 2016). We have added *Community based art programs*: This model comes from counselling individuals; it emphasizes active listening, empathy and reflection on feeling. Community-based practices connect multiculturalism, cultural competence, and social justice. Socially committed artistic practices could be performed in museums and public and private institutions with the goal of creating cultural projects in response to community and social demands (Talwar, 2016). Articles that do not specify or describe theoretical models of art therapy intervention were coded as not-specified (N/S). It should be noted that there are other theoretical models of art therapy intervention not included previously in this classification, for example, Marxen (2018, 2020), Sajjani et al. (2017).

Nature of the study

Meaning whether the design of the study was framed by a quantitative, qualitative, theoretical, or mixed methodology.

Assessments

Art therapy assessment may take different forms, from an observational session or an analysis of a simple drawing to a more structured, formal art therapy assessment like for example the Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (FEATS; Gantt, 2001). According to the different assessment types, the categories considered in this variable are standardized art-based assessments, standardized assessments, tools developed by the researcher, and no-assessment. When assessment was not necessary, as in the theoretical research, articles were coded as Not Applicable (N/A).

Results

Authorship indicators

Considering the first author of the 160 reviewed studies and considering that seven first authors wrote two different articles, in total 153 different first authors participated, of which 130 (84.9%) were written by women and 23 (15.1%) by men. Gender was associated with the name chosen by the researchers and made explicit in their papers, respecting their identities. If we look at the background of the authors 72 (47.1%) were art-therapists, 25 (16.3%) were art-therapists and psychologists, 24 (15.7%) artists, 13 (8.5%) psychologists, 18 (11.8%) other

professions, and 1 (0.6%) was not specified. Almost three quarters, 112 (70%) of the 160 documents making up the total were single-authored, and 48 (30%) belonged to two or more authors.

Content and methodological indicators

Participants

The interventions of the studies reviewed were mainly directed at adult participants, in total 85 (53.1%) of the reviewed articles, following by children 26 (16.3%), teenagers 8 (5%), and older-adults 3 (1.9%). Thirty-eight studies (23.7%) do not specify (N/S) the age group of the participants. Most of these studies classified as N/S (thirty-four) involved theory building, defining and expanding knowledge of art-therapy, such as for example, brain-based interventions (Alonso Garrido, 2021), inclusion (Pablos & Fontal, 2018), how to use a specific mandala technique (Riera Ortolá & Llobell, 2017), etc. Four of the studies categorized as N/S presented several case studies with participants of different age groups, as for example in the study by Coca Jiménez (2022).

Population

The art-therapy programs of the articles reviewed were directed at the following populations: poverty and social exclusion, the one with the highest number of art-therapy interventions 20 articles (12.5%) of the total sample was directed at this population. Other population categories such as art-therapist and artist, medical illness, mental health, special needs, aggression, do not represent significant categories in the total number of reviewed articles, ranging from art-therapist and artist with 14 (8.8%) to aggression with a total of 11 articles (6.9%). Finally, just a few articles were published directed at trauma, prisoners and combat, substance abuse, eating disorders, and near-death experience, ranging from trauma with a total of 5 (3.2%) to near death experiences with a total of 4 (2.5%).

There was a large percentage of studies categorized as N/S, a total of 50 (31.3%). Studies were grouped in this category when they did not point to a specific group of population or the intervention was directed at populations with no specific trauma. These studies were mostly related to: cases studies (24), for example family interventions (Hervás Hermida, 2016), or infant interventions (Martínez López de Castro, 2020). Theory building (18), for example on musicotherapy as a way of expression (Agudo Cardoso, 2015). Anecdotal records of working sessions (4 of them), such as sessions of art-therapy in museums (Martín Jiménez & Ledesma Cid, 2020). Finally, four were ethnographic studies, for example, one of community intervention through graffiti (Grané Feliu, 2019) (see Fig. 1).

Artistic disciplines

Visual Arts are the most used artistic discipline 82 (51.2%), followed by Multidisciplinary Arts 28 (17.5%), Performing Arts 14 (8.8%), Film

and Video 8 (5%), Music 3 (1.9%), and Arts and Crafts 3 (1.9%) (see Fig. 2).

There is a number of studies, 22 (13.8%), in which no artistic discipline was described, among them, theory building (16), on topics such as vulnerability and art-therapy (Mayo, 2018), or trauma and art-therapy (Levinton Dolman, 2016). Case studies (3 or them) for example about the importance of observation in art-therapy (Treitas Barrio, 2021), the analysis of good practices (Semova, 2015), and the experience of supervisors during the training period as art therapists (Martín Garrido et al., 2019). Anecdotal records (1). Interview (1) directed at a group or cultural mediators on what they understood by diversity and their profession (Bernárdez Rodal, 2015). Finally, one study used a mixed-methodological research, on the supervision of how students learn to apply art-therapy in a master's degree program (García-Reyna, 2019).

Theoretical models of art therapy interventions

Although in most of the reviewed studies there was a description of the theoretical model of art-therapy interventions they used, only 49 (30.6%) of them explicitly referred or named the theoretical model they were describing or applying. This is a striking finding that should be addressed as an aspect to be improved in the review of future articles submitted to the journal. However, we have classified all the studies on different theoretical models of intervention, when possible, attending to the characteristics of the intervention description they made. Finally, 10 studies out of the 160 couldn't be classified in a specific model of intervention because they were not directed at theoretical models of art therapy intervention.

The theoretical intervention model most used was Gestalt art therapy 41 (25.6%), and the least used was Cognitive-behavioral art therapy 3 (1.9%). See Fig. 3 with the complete data on this category (see Fig. 3).

Nature of the study

Considering the category nature of the study, out of the 160 reviewed studies, 108 (67.5%) were classified as qualitative research studies (93 qualitative case studies, 3 interviews, 3 ethnographic studies, 9 anecdotal records); 40 (25%) theory building; 8 (5%) mixed methodology; 4 (2.5%) quantitative research (2 quantitative case studies, and 2 experimental studies with experimental and control groups) (see Fig. 4).

Assessments

According to the different assessment types, a significant number of articles 70 (43.8%) belonged in the no-assessment category when they did not use any type of assessment to evaluate the applied intervention. Of these 70 articles, most of them, a total of 57, were case studies, the rest of them belonging in the category of qualitative studies (interviews, ethnographic studies, anecdotal records). Forty-four (27.5%) were in the assessment category tools developed by the researcher, 5 (1%)

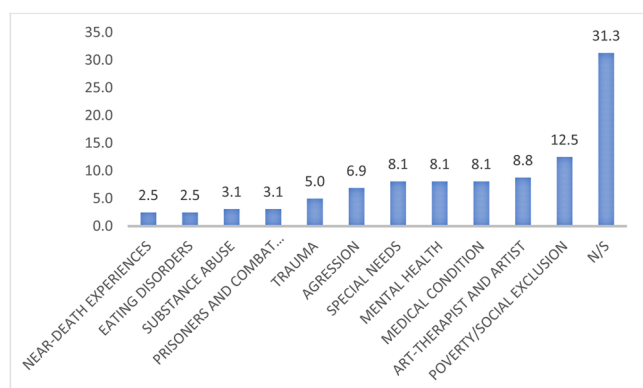


Fig. 1. Percentage of population categories addressed in the articles reviewed.

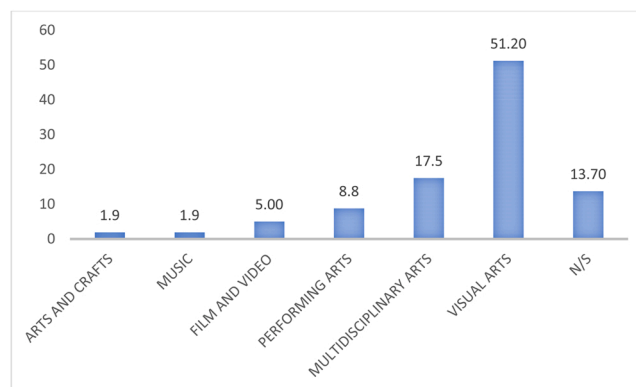


Fig. 2. Percentage of artistic disciplines categories addressed in the articles reviewed.

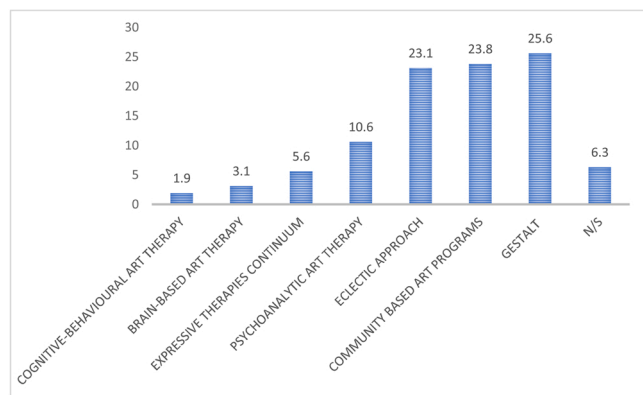


Fig. 3. Percentage of theoretical models of art therapy interventions categories addressed in the articles reviewed.

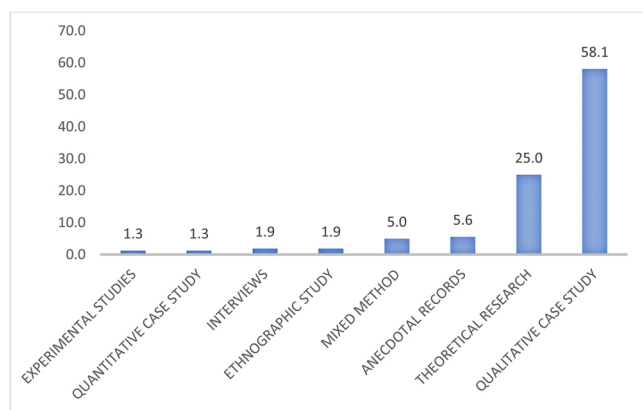


Fig. 4. Percentage of nature of the study addressed in the articles reviewed.

standardized assessments, 1(0.6%) standardized art-based assessments, and 40 (25%) were categorized as not applicable (N/A), these being studies on theory building and no assessments are applicable to this type of article (See Fig. 5).

Discussion

Since its beginnings, as in other countries, art therapy in Spain became established by documenting clinical work. In addition, after 2000, with the master's degree program in art therapy officially regulated, a number of books and articles focusing on populations, special techniques, and specific issues that survey the field have been published.

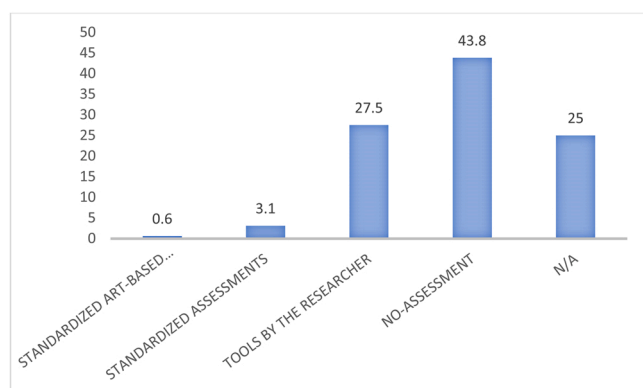


Fig. 5. Percentage of assessment categories addressed in the articles reviewed.

As Borowsky Junge (2016) states and, our review confirms, art therapy's literature reveals the many ages, populations, and problems that are amenable to treatment.

The profile of Spanish researchers on art-therapy corresponds to a female art-therapist that does not usually collaborate with other professionals to publish her work. Similar to other cultures (see Timm--Bottos, 2016), in Spain whereas in the beginning it was men who were first acknowledged for developing and disseminating art therapy, today it is a much larger group of very dedicated female art therapists who support research, many of whom are developing novel ways of thinking and researching on art therapy.

There is little collaboration between professionals in the publications analyzed. Nevertheless, Robb (2016) through interviews with art therapists, researchers and educators, established that collaboration could provide the opportunity to conduct large-scale studies, as well as possible multi-site studies. It may also be a chance to share intervention and research methods between art therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists exploring the power of how art informs clinicians about the needs of the patient rather than using psychological measures as sole data collection. Art therapists working collectively with allied health professionals may be the key to future research (Robb, 2012).

Participants in the studies reviewed were mostly adults followed by children. Only three of the studies reviewed were directed at older adults. This is an interesting finding because Spain is set to become an aging society. In other words, in 2020, Spain had an aging rate of 125%, which increases rapidly every year (Gil, 2020). Consequently, in the years to come older-adults might be a target population for art therapy and will be represented more in research articles.

A large percentage of studies were not directed at a clinical population, for example, studies directed at groups of infants or families or mothers. This finding shows that today art therapy is used not only in mental health or trauma patients. Currently the use of art therapy has extended to vulnerable and minority groups with the goal of promoting health and making individuals more perceptive and reflexive, better able to relate to themselves, others and nature. The most representative clinical subgroup in the articles reviewed was related to poverty and social exclusion.

Art material constitutes the basis for art therapy interventions. Most of the reviewed intervention studies used some form of visual art therapy as a way of communication or expression of conflict. Usually, data can be gathered in the form of visual representations (drawings, painting, sculpture, photography, etc.). Participant-created forms of visual images may be interpreted and this can lead the viewer to question events and to express complex and multiple meanings while empowering participants (Kaiser & Kay, 2016). However, note that researchers in the reviewed articles, although to a lesser extent, used other arts, such as multidisciplinary-arts, performing arts, film and video, music and, arts and crafts.

During the first half of the twentieth century, at the dawn of art therapy, psychoanalysis was the therapy of choice. Art therapy started out as a form of psychoanalysis that used visual imagery (Kaplan, 2016). In a similar way, in art-therapy research in Spain during the last century there was a leaning towards psychoanalysis, influenced by the British school as well as pioneers in South America (e.g. Nise da Silveira). However, in the bibliometric analysis conducted the theoretical intervention models most used were the Gestalt, community-based art programs, and the eclectic approach. Psychoanalytic art therapy was somehow in the middle and the least used were expressive therapy continuum, brain-based, and cognitive-behavioural art therapy. This shift from psychoanalysis to other theoretical models for intervention could be interpreted as a move in training and professionalization in art therapy from medical institutions that in the past used mainly psychoanalytical interventions, to the educational and art institutions with professionals who have a background in education, art, and psychology and who are more familiar with other methods of intervention. In addition, the diversity of Spanish society today requires new ways of

approaching groups and individuals either in distress or just with the goal of creating awareness to facilitate one's own transformation and growth. Another consideration for the new models of intervention is the demand for artistic and cultural projects in response to community needs with the goal of bringing art closer to vulnerable population groups.

Most of the studies reviewed were qualitative (case studies, interviews, ethnographic studies anecdotal records) or theory building. Only 8 (5%) used a mixed methodology and 4 (2.5%) were quantitative research with only two experimental studies. In Spain, where art therapy is quite a young discipline, starting with a master's degree program in art therapy officially regulated in 2000, case histories and theory building stand out in research in a similar way to the beginning of the discipline in other countries (see Robb, 2016). However, in a modest way, quantitative and experimental national and international studies are beginning to be published by Spanish art-therapy researchers. "Although not all art therapists will be inspired to conduct research, reading, evaluating and incorporating research findings in treatment is critical to effective practice of art therapy" (Gussak & Rosal, 2016, p. 608). The publication of systematic studies in alignment with the research standards of other disciplines is needed to maintain the validation of art therapy research with the scientific and clinical communities (Robb, 2016). In this sense, there have been efforts to provide art therapist directions on conducting research. A first major project in this area was the publication of *A Guide to Conducting Art Therapy Research* (Wadeson, 1992). For a decade the *Guide* was a very useful text for art therapy students. Later a series of monographs and user manuals were published, based on this textbook, with the aim of assisting art therapists in becoming confident readers and creative researchers (Vick, 2001). Other manuals published to assist art therapist in their research include Kaplan (2018), Gilroy (2011, 2006), and Kaplan (2000).

A remarkable number of the articles reviewed, almost half, did not use any type of assessment; most in this category were case study narratives or qualitative case studies. If done correctly, case studies can provide valuable exploratory results and can contribute to a variety of other methodological approaches for future research. Regardless of the outcome, case studies can provide valuable information from which future explorations can be drawn. However, a case study may be a combination of methodological qualitative/quantitative approaches. Rather than simply providing a narrative to support a conclusion, a researcher may conduct several qualitative/quantitative studies simultaneously to create a richer reflection of human experiences (see Gussak, 2016).

The assessment of approximately one fourth of the articles consisted in tools developed by the researcher, only five articles of the total used standardized assessments, and just one article used standardized art-based assessments. Psychological standardized tests were used in combination with observation, clinical interviews, and the information provided by drawings made by clients; these elements were the core of assessments in the studies reviewed. Only one study used an art-based assessment test. There is much controversy regarding the type of assessment to be applied in art-therapy. While some art therapists find standardized-art assessment valuable, easy to use and quickly administered, other art therapists find them ineffective, invalid and unreliable (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). One significant deficit of art therapy assessments is the lack of large normative samples, which hinders the possibility of making valid inferences and useful decisions based on the assessments (Deaver, 2016).

The present study highlights the effort made in two decades of art therapy in Spain with the publication of a number of books (Coll Espinosa, 2006; Domínguez Toscano, 2005; Domínguez Toscano et al., 2018; Esteban Argues and Domínguez Toscano, 2014; Fernández et al., 2021; López Fdz. Cao, 2011; López Fdz. Cao, 2015; López Fdz. Cao, 2006; López Fdz. Cao, 2018a; López Fdz. Cao, 2018b; López Fdz. Cao and Martínez Díez, 2006; Martínez Díez and López Fdz. Cao, 2004; Martínez Díez and López Fdz. Cao, 2009; Rico Caballo, 2012; Rueda Cuenca,

2020) that have proven to be very useful field-training manuals for many would-be art therapists. These manuals and the articles published in the JAT are also a source of inspiration for the emerging field of art therapy in Latin America. Additionally, the bibliometric review clearly highlights the strengths –great potential of the human and social approach of art therapy in Spain to a wide variety of current topics and populations with a rich array of methodological models of intervention– and weaknesses –need to collaborate with other professionals nationally, as well as internationally, and to perform more systematic and empirical based research–. International sharing and collaboration to face challenges in art therapy research is much needed in a complex society facing serious challenges –climate change, migrations, pandemic, war tensions–. Very dedicated art therapists, often without receiving the recognition they deserved, are and will be most needed in our society. Through art other ways of communicating and connecting with oneself, with others and with nature are possible. It is important to know where we started from and where we are in order to move forward.

One of the limitations of the present research was the lack of inclusion of articles by Spanish researchers published in other journals. However, a first search indicated that there were not many of them.

Funding

This study was supported by the Ministry of Science and Innovation, Spain, [grant number PID2020–114238RB-I00].

Conflicts of interest

None.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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