

Creative arts therapies in the treatment of mental disorders in children and adolescents

Summary

According to the World Health Organization, one in seven young people between the ages of 10 and 19 has a mental health disorder. Mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression affect children and adolescents' participation in daily activities, school attendance and academic performance. Anxiety disorder and depression are among the most frequently occurring health conditions in Estonia. Creative arts therapies offer a complementary approach to treating mental health disorders. The purpose of this report was to evaluate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of creative arts therapies in the treatment of mental disorders in children and adolescents.

Creative arts therapies are evidence-based creativity and art-based methods and techniques used in psychotherapeutic intervention. Creative arts therapies include art therapy, music therapy, dance and movement therapy, and drama therapy, all of which can be individual or group therapies. This report covered art, music, and dance and movement therapy.

Estonian and international clinical guidelines do not address the application of creative arts therapies in the treatment of mental disorders in children and adolescents. However, according to scientific literature, creative arts therapies are widely used in the treatment of children with autism spectrum disorder, for example. Cross-nationally, creative arts therapies vary in professional recognition and service reimbursement practices. Among creative arts therapies, art and music therapy are the most commonly employed.

In Estonia, creative arts therapists work at healthcare and rehabilitation service providers, social and educational institutions, and private practices. Within social and occupational rehabilitation services, creative arts therapies are reimbursed. Creative arts therapies are currently not in the Health Insurance Fund's benefits list. Nevertheless, the service is available in the health care institutions.

There is little scientific research on the effectiveness of creative arts therapies in the treatment of mental disorders in children and adolescents. Based on very low-quality evidence, music

therapy may be effective in developing communication skills in children with autism spectrum disorder. No conclusions can be drawn about the health benefits of art and dance and movement therapy. The included studies are characterized by high heterogeneity.

There is limited scientific literature on the cost-effectiveness of creative arts therapies. One study evaluating the cost-effectiveness of art therapy and one study of dance and movement therapy was included in the review presented in the report. The results showed that in the treatment of non-psychotic mental health disorders, group art therapy resulted in more quality-adjusted life-years compared to no treatment. Based on the incremental cost-effectiveness ratio, group art therapy was cost-effective compared to no treatment. Compared to psychodynamic group therapy, art therapy was dominated, resulting in fewer quality-adjusted life-years at higher costs. A study comparing group dance therapy with no treatment in teenagers with internalizing problems found that dance therapy was associated with higher costs and more quality-adjusted life-years. Group dance therapy was evaluated as cost-effective in the study.

Due to insufficient and low-quality evidence on the health benefits of creative arts therapies, no cost-effectiveness or budget impact analysis was performed. The service is used in Estonia, including in the healthcare system. Adherence to professional standards ensures that the service is provided by trained professionals.

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