

## EXPLORING EFFECTIVE ART THERAPY PRACTICES IN INDIA FOR ADOLESCENTS WELL-BEING: A SCOPING REVIEW

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### Summary

Adolescents in India face a high burden of mental health challenges like anxiety, depression, and emotional distress, with limited access to culturally sensitive therapeutic interventions. Ahmad (2023) noted that talk therapies often fail to engage younger people. As a result, it is important to explore newer, more creative approaches like art therapy that rely less on verbal communication. This scoping review explores the landscape of art therapy interventions used among adolescents in India and evaluates their effectiveness in enhancing well-being and positive emotions. The search identified 52 relevant studies published between 2000 and 2025 using the PCC (Population–Concept–Context) criteria. The data underwent thematic synthesis to reveal common art therapy modalities, key outcomes, and existing research gaps. Visual arts – Mandala making, self-portrait making, and drawing, along with expressive arts therapy, music, dance/movement, and drama, emerged as prominent modalities. According to Akila (2012), these interventions helped improve emotional expression, boost self-esteem, improve emotional regulation, and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. However, many studies lacked methodological rigour, cultural contextualisation, and long-term follow-up. Art therapy is a culturally adaptable and non-stigmatising treatment for adolescent psychological health in India (Gaiha, 2022). It improves emotional regulation and self-expression, and overcomes treatment gaps in underserved populations. However, further longitudinal, culturally grounded research with standardised assessment tools is necessary to substantiate its efficacy and scalability in the Indian context.

**Key words:** art therapy, adolescents, psychological well-being, expressive arts therapy, emotional regulation, India, positive emotions.

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### 1. Introduction

#### Importance of Adolescent Mental Health in India

The World Health Organisation has defined adolescence as the period between 10 and 19, a critical developmental phase in human beings, with significant physical, emotional, and psychological changes (WHO, 2025). In India, adolescents constitute approximately 21% of the population, amounting to over 253 million individuals (Rajkumar et al., 2022).

Recent research has highlighted an alarming prevalence of mental health issues among Indian adolescents (Balamuragan, 2024). A meta-analysis reported that 6.5% of

community samples and 23.3% of school samples experienced significant mental health morbidity (Malhotra, 2014). Moreover, suicide has emerged as the leading cause of death among older adolescents in the country (Roy et al., 2019).

Despite the alarming statistics, there exists a substantial treatment gap in addressing adolescent mental health in India (Rizvi, 2024). The National Mental Health Survey (2015–2016) reported a 7% prevalence of psychiatric disorders in the 13–17 age group, with an overall treatment gap of 83% for any mental health problem (Gururaj et al., 2016). Some reported that, reasons for such a treatment gap could be a negative mindset towards mental illness, lack of knowledge, and less availability of psychological help (Mehra et al., 2022).

### **Emerging interest in Non-Pharmacological Interventions**

Traditional approaches to mental health treatment have predominantly focused on pharmacological interventions and talk therapies. However, these approaches observed noticeable challenges, especially for adolescents who struggle to convey their emotions verbally. Hence, there has always been a need to develop other types of treatment methods, such as Expressive art therapy, which, on the contrary, has various benefits as compared to the latter methods (Stein et al., 2022).

Art therapy is a form of intervention that incorporates creative ways of dealing with feelings, reconciling emotional conflicts, fostering self-awareness, and managing and regulating behaviours among adolescents (Cherry, 2024). Trained professionals facilitate it by guiding individuals through creative activities that help them express and understand their emotions. It uses creative art making, the creative process, and applied psychological theory within a psycho-therapeutic relationship to improve individual lives, communities, and family (AATA, 2022). The idea is that the creative process of making art is life-enhancing and therapeutic. AATA (1996) suggested art therapy as a medium to communicate feelings and thoughts non-verbally. It encompasses various modalities, including drawing, painting, music, dance, and drama, providing a non-verbal medium for individuals to express themselves. As a therapeutic method, it is comprehensive in terms of its application as it uses various mediums like Psychotherapy, artistic creation processes like drama, music, movement, dance, painting, and drawing to promote well-being among people (Gruber & Weis, 2010). It involves creative pursuits as it taps into psychological mechanisms such as positive focus, flow, and authentic self, which is important in promoting mental well-being (Zhao et al., 2022).

This approach is particularly beneficial for adolescents, who may be more inclined to engage in creative activities than traditional talk therapies. Art therapy interventions are less structure-based and allow clients to express themselves creatively, facilitating changes in behaviour and emotions (Koch & Fuchs, 2011). Other therapies have intense pressure to complete a treatment in a limited time and a limited number of sessions. However, art therapy helps people express relevant issues and problems relatively quickly, accelerating assessments and interventions (Hu, 2021).

Researchers have found that art therapy not only works in treating mental disorders and illness, but it also helps in promoting positive emotions, encourages communication, promotes emotional catharsis, and helps in enhancing positive behaviours and improving an individual's quality of life (Boudebza et al., 2006). It has been found beneficial in treating psychological symptoms. It helps in alleviating various physical and mental health conditions associated with PTSD (Linda, 2011), internalising and externalising symptoms such as depression, aggression, anxiety, and various other psychological problems (Bazargan, 2016). It effectively develops important social skills for survival among children with autism spectrum disorder; children develop the ability to engage in social interactions (Miranda, 2017). It

is effective with Asthma, ODD disorder, learning disorders, behavioural problems, disruptive behaviours, separation anxiety disorders, and socio-emotional difficulties (Baasgraff, 2020). Various researchers have found Art Therapy effective in enhancing young people's self-esteem and helping them learn stress management techniques (Wakqas, 2018). Hanevik (2013) conducted a study to explore the effect of expressive art therapy for people diagnosed with a psychotic illness, schizophrenia. After interventions, participants reported an improvement in psychotic symptoms, felt more valued and loved and developed coping and problem-solving skills. A study, done to explore the effectiveness of art therapy modalities with stress, reported that patients diagnosed with cancer showed reduced levels of stress and anxiety (Akila, 2012). In another study (Shukla et al., 2022), it was found helpful in controlling manifestations correlated with slowing cognitive decline, improving interpersonal relationships and free expression, and helping in improving mental health. These studies show evidence of how this therapy is effective in dealing with negative symptoms, illness, and disorders among people. Being healthy does not only mean the absence of illness but also having the capability to enhance the positive aspects of life, and this is why it is essential to establish that Art Therapy not only reduces negative aspects but also enhances the positive aspects. Positive emotions, including serenity, hope, interest, joy, inspiration, love, and gratitude, are essential to well-being. The broaden-and-build theory posits that positive emotions broaden an individual's thought-action repertoire and build enduring personal resources, contributing to overall well-being (Fredrickson, 2004).

Studies have found that art therapy has improved young people's self-esteem and efficacy because it is a non-judgmental and experiential way of self-expression (Duberg, 2019). Liu et al. (2023) found that group art therapy sessions are beneficial in improving and enhancing self-acceptance among them. Nyasinga et al. (2022) established that play therapy, an alternative modality of expressive art therapy, was found beneficial in enhancing the psychological well-being of children and youth who experienced sexual abuse. It has been found effective in improving identity formation. It provides a non-judgmental environment where young people can express and explore themselves freely and build their personality to find purpose in life (Ding, 2024). In the Indian context, the application of art therapy is still emerging. While some studies have explored its potential, there remains a paucity of comprehensive research examining its effectiveness among Indian adolescents. A scoping review of mental health interventions among adolescents in India highlighted the need for more diverse and culturally sensitive approaches, including creative therapies, in order to overcome the problems faced by adolescents (Mehra et al., 2022).

Existing studies are limited in number, scope, and methodological rigour, making it challenging to draw definitive conclusions about the efficacy of various art therapy modalities in this context. Moreover, India is a diverse land with various distinctive languages used and different cultures and religions followed, making it all the more important to explore how art therapy would meet the diverse needs of adolescents living in different backgrounds in India. Hence, a scoping analysis is required to map available data to bridge these gaps.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

The prime aim of this review is to examine the available research on art therapy modalities used in India for adolescents and assess their effectiveness in enhancing well-being and positive emotions. The specific research questions are:

1. What art therapy modalities do therapists widely use for adolescents in India?
2. How effective are these modalities in improving well-being and fostering positive emotions among Indian adolescents?

## 2. Methodology

A scoping review methodology has been adopted in this study to map and synthesise existing literature on art therapy interventions in India targeted at adolescents, with a specific focus on their effectiveness in enhancing well-being and positive emotions. PRISMA-ScR was used in the current study, which provides a structured and transparent approach to scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018).

### *Eligibility Criteria*

The PCC framework (Population, Concept, Context) guided the decision on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. These criteria were recommended and developed by the Joanna Briggs Institute for scoping review (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2024).

**Population:** Adolescents aged 10–19 years, in alignment with the WHO definition of adolescence, residing in India.

**Concept:** Art therapy interventions, including but not limited to music therapy, dance/movement therapy, visual arts therapy, drama therapy, or integrated expressive art therapy approaches.

**Context:** Studies conducted in India and any setting (schools, community programs, hospitals, NGOs, etc.).

### *Inclusion Criteria:*

- Peer-reviewed studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods).
- Studies published between January 2000 and March 2025.
- Studies explicitly focused on well-being, positive emotions, and mental health outcomes.
- Studies available in English.
- Research conducted within the Indian context.

### *Exclusion Criteria:*

- Studies focusing on adults or Western populations.
- Theoretical papers, editorials, opinion pieces, or policy briefs without empirical data.
- Art-based interventions that do not show therapeutic outcomes (e.g., pure art education programs).
- Studies without sufficient outcome reporting on emotional or psychological impact.

### *Information Sources and Search Strategy*

The literature search focused on four primary databases: PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Shodhganga, chosen for their broad coverage of peer-reviewed studies in psychology, health sciences, education, and social work. The search strategy combined controlled vocabulary (MeSH terms) with relevant keywords, using Boolean operators (AND/OR) to refine and expand the results.

Search string example:

("Art therapy" OR "expressive arts therapy" OR "music therapy" OR "dance therapy" OR "drama therapy") AND ("adolescents" OR "teenagers" OR "youth") AND ("India") AND ("psychological well-being" OR "positive emotions" OR "mental health" OR "emotional regulation").

The search included papers published between 2000 and 2025, written in English. In addition to searching PubMed, the reference lists of the selected papers were manually checked to identify any relevant articles not captured in the initial database search. The review also incorporated grey literature to broaden the scope of available data.

### *Study Selection*

All search results were imported into an Excel sheet with relevant information, and duplicates were removed. The study selection process followed title screening, abstract screening, and outcomes that were relevant for inclusion by the author. A PRISMA-ScR flow diagram was used to document the selection process.

### *Data Extraction*

A structured data extraction form was developed by the university using Microsoft Excel. All relevant information was extracted from that sheet. The following data were extracted from each included study:

- Author(s), year of publication
- Study location (state/city)
- Study design and methodology
- Participant characteristics (age, gender, sample size)
- Setting (school, community centre, hospital, etc.)
- Type of art therapy modality used
- Duration and frequency of the intervention
- Outcomes assessed (well-being, emotional regulation, self-esteem, stress, etc.)
- Main findings
- Strengths and limitations
- Data Analysis and Synthesis

The dataset used for the present study was filtered, and 52 articles were selected that were detailed and relevant to Art Therapy in India, especially for adolescents. After reviewing the articles in detail concerning the aim and objective of the study, Descriptive Qualitative Synthesis was done, and themes were extracted to achieve and map the breadth of literature available on the study (Figure 1).

### *The themes identified after reviewing the articles are as follows:*

**Common Goals and Purpose:** This theme would highlight the primary developmental or psychological goals used by researchers while working with adolescents, like: emotional regulation, supporting trauma recovery, improving self-esteem, and helping in social development.

**Therapeutic Approaches and Modalities especially effective for Adolescents:** This theme would highlight the most widely used art therapy modality with adolescents, such as drawing, painting, clay, EAT, structured, unstructured, group-based, or individual-based.

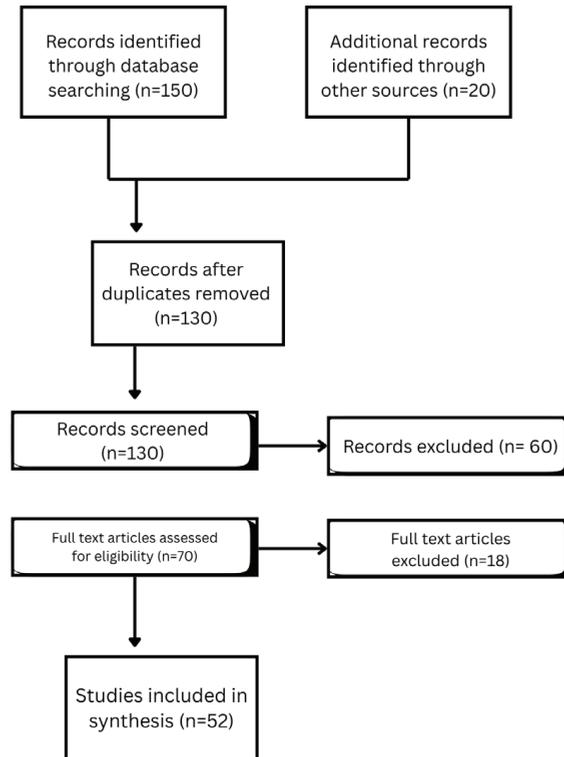
**Outcomes and Effectiveness:** This theme would highlight evidence for the effectiveness of art therapy according to the previous research, such as reduced anxiety, depression, behavioural issues, improved resilience, self-expression, and improved social functioning.

**Challenges & Research gaps:** This theme would help identify significant gaps in data available for art therapy and its effectiveness with well-being, so that after identifying the gaps, proper intervention modules could be made.

**Cultural and Contextual Consideration:** This would focus on how culturally grounded the approaches are concerning the Indian context.

**Future Direction:** Where should the field go from here?

**Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations:** Which focuses on the psychological background required for developing interventions, needs of the participants.



**Fig. 1. Flowchart showing the synthesis of data**

### 3. Results/Findings

The results of the selected sources are presented thematically to help understand the wide range of databases used.

#### **Theme 1: Goals of Art Therapy**

The primary objectives of art therapy interventions in the Indian context centre on promoting emotional expression, enhancing psychological well-being, and supporting mental health in adolescents. Multiple studies emphasise the use of art as a medium for self-reflection and emotional regulation, especially among populations experiencing learning disabilities, trauma, or stress (Kumar & Menon, 2022; Sharma, 2020). Various researchers in the database aimed at exploring the effectiveness of Art Therapy for addressing Mental Health concerns such as PTSD, Anxiety, Depression (Husamuddin, 2024), severe psychological conditions such as Schizophrenia (Shukla et al., 2022), autism spectrum disorder & neurodivergence (Kurland, 2025) and to enhance the treatment outcomes of conditions such as cancer (Akila, 2019). Art Therapy has also been found to serve as a channel for increasing self-awareness and facilitating communication among adolescents who struggle with verbal expression (Rao et al., 2021). While exploring its effectiveness, researchers also aimed to see if expressive art therapy (EAT) would resolve adolescent psychosocial problems (Baral et al., 2024). A wide range of studies aimed at improving psychological well-being (Khosla, 2025), emotional

regulation (Domingo et al., 2022), and identity development (King, 2016). Across these studies, a consistent therapeutic goal was the enhancement of inner resilience, improving emotional well-being, and nurturing a positive self-concept through creative processes.

### **Theme 2: Art Therapy Modalities**

The reviewed studies demonstrated a wide range of art-based modalities, out of which the most widely used modality with an adolescent population in the Indian context is as follows:

**Expressive Arts Therapy (Multimodal):** It combines multiple art forms like drawing, painting, movement, music, drama, and writing integratively (Sajani, 2000). Participants were asked to play with paints while thinking about their feelings, where they were given the liberty to use paints according to their emotional moods (Sajani, 2000). Many programs incorporated music, dance, drama, and movement as complementary forms of expression, reflecting a multi-disciplinary approach to art therapy (McLellan, 2022).

**Visual Art-Based Therapy:** In the reviewed articles, drawing as a modality was widely used with adolescents to improve emotional regulation and self-compassion (Sane, 2024). Different drawing techniques were administered to the population, and their effects were noted.

*Mandala making:* In previous studies, this modality was found to be very effective for adolescents. Dating back to the early 20th century, Carl Jung, a renowned Neo-Freudian, introduced Mandala Art. He began drawing mandalas in 1916 during his period of inner exploration and later incorporated them into his therapeutic work (Jung, 1959). The word mandala means circle or centre, and it is used in the Buddhist and Hindu cultures for sacred performance and meditation. Mandala art usually includes geometric patterns that radiate from the centre outward, and the intricate details in the drawing can range from flowers to birds, promising to promote mindfulness and spirituality (Thapa, 2024).

Researchers specifically used Mandala drawing for mindfulness and well-being, showing participants tutorials on creating a mandala and colouring it by their choice. These activities were repeated weekly, and results like improved self-expression were noted (Shah, 2021). In another article by Bhatt et al. (2025), mandala therapy was administered as a medium to enhance self-expression, where they asked adolescents to colour intricate mandala designs. The process involved focused, mindful engagement with patterns, allowing emotional expression without words.

*Self-portraits* are compelling even with online and unstructured setups where participants are asked to create their image and share their experience with others. Envisioning oneself and reflecting have been effective in improving adolescents' body image (Mittal, 2020). In another study, the authors used self-portraits as an art therapy modality with adolescents to explore emotions and identity. Participants were asked to create symbolic self-images using different media, which was followed by reflective dialogues (Singh, 2013).

*Painting:* Painting as a modality offers adolescents more liberty and freedom regarding expression, where their sensory and tactile organs are touched upon. In one of the studies, adolescents were asked to choose their preferred colours and asked to paint their minds (Shukla, 2022). In another study the author gave adolescents free rein in choosing what to paint after asking them to think about four emotions that they were feeling at the moment. It shows how painting promotes spontaneity and expression among adolescents (Khosla, 2025). In their study, McLellan et al. (2025) used various structured approaches to painting, such as emotion-focused painting, thematic assignments, free expression, group painting activities, painting integrated with verbal reflection, and third-hand technique. These techniques were found to be effective with adolescents.

**Music Therapy:** It enhances self-esteem and promotes relaxation, where participants were asked to close their eyes and meditate on the music played (*Sharma, 2012*). In a structured setup music therapy was used with adolescents aged 15–18, where they were asked to listen and engage with music alongside their routine care (*Wang, 2012*). Interventions were delivered through both structured and unstructured formats, often in group settings (*Mehta & Jain, 2021; Thomas & D'Souza, 2020*). In structured group sessions, adolescents were engaged in activities where they were asked to listen to music, express emotions through music, and share their musical experiences, enhancing communication and emotional regulation (*Noronha, 2024*). While some studies adhered to manualised protocols, others were exploratory or experiential, emphasising participant-led creativity (*Das et al., 2020*). This variety reflects the adaptability of art therapy across diverse psychological needs and cultural settings.

### **Theme 3: Effectiveness and Outcomes**

#### ***Mood enhancement & Emotional Expression***

Art therapy has been found effective with adolescents because of its flexible, non-judgmental nature, which helps develop rapport, enhancing self-awareness and expression (*Prakashan, 2024*). Adolescence is the age group that finds difficulty in expressing their emotions. Hence, art therapy has also shown positive results in reducing loneliness and hopelessness (*Aydin, 2021*). Talking about aggression and negative emotions, it was found that art therapy shows positive change in adolescents who found difficulty in expressing themselves (*Kar, 2024*).

#### ***Self-esteem improvement***

Art therapy intervention was found effective in reducing symptoms of PTSD, aggression, and self-esteem (*Bosgraaf, 2020*). Several studies documented improvements in self-esteem, emotional literacy, and coping skills, especially among adolescents from vulnerable or marginalised backgrounds (*Sahitya, 2024*). Outcomes were typically assessed through pre- and post-intervention measures, qualitative interviews, or therapist observations.

#### ***Reduction in anxiety/depression***

The majority of the studies reported positive psychological outcomes resulting from art therapy interventions, particularly reductions in anxiety, depression, and emotional distress (*Kavitha et al., 2021; Pillai & Raj, 2022*). It has been found effective in clinical as well as non-clinical settings (*Prakashan, 2024*). Despite the general effectiveness, some studies highlighted the need for long-term follow-ups to assess the sustainability of benefits over time. According to Khani (2023) art therapy helps in a visible decrease in anxiety symptoms among adolescents as it activates brain areas associated with emotion regulation and pleasure and develops better emotional resilience against anxiety.

### **Theme 4: Theoretical Frameworks**

Art therapy practices in India combine Western psychological theories and Indian cultural values. Some studies referenced psychodynamic and humanistic frameworks to explain therapeutic mechanisms, such as projection, catharsis, and self-actualisation (*Singh & Bose, 2021*). Others integrated a biopsychosocial model, emphasising holistic healing that incorporates emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. However, applying theory was often implicit or underdeveloped, suggesting the need for more substantial conceptual alignment between intervention design and psychological models relevant to the Indian context (*Patel & Chatterjee, 2020*).

### **Theme 5: Cultural Context and Relevance**

While a few studies deliberately tried to integrate traditional Indian art forms (e.g., Mandala art, tribal painting), most adapted Western art therapy techniques with minimal

cultural contextualisation. Some researchers acknowledged the therapeutic value of culturally rooted practices and advocated for their inclusion to enhance relevance and acceptance (Iyer & Menon, 2022). However, the lack of deeply embedded cultural frameworks remains a gap. The limited engagement with indigenous philosophies, languages, and community-based practices indicates a missed opportunity for culturally sensitive therapy models.

### **Theme 6: Research Gaps, Limitations & Future Research Directions**

Many studies in this review were characterised by small sample sizes, short intervention durations, and the absence of control groups, limiting the generalizability of findings (Desai, 2019; Fernandes & Shah, 2021). Methodological inconsistencies, such as a lack of standardised outcome measures and weak theoretical grounding, were typical. Some studies were descriptive or anecdotal and lacked rigorous evaluation frameworks. Furthermore, limited documentation on facilitator training and ethical considerations raises concerns about implementation fidelity.

Authors consistently called for more robust, longitudinal studies that examine the long-term impact of art therapy interventions on adolescent well-being (Kumar et al., 2021; Bhatia, 2022). There was a strong recommendation to develop culturally grounded models that incorporate indigenous art forms and reflect the psychosocial realities of Indian youth. Additionally, future research should explore the scalability of art therapy programs in schools, juvenile care homes, and community mental health settings. Standardising outcome tools and improving training for facilitators were also suggested as priorities.

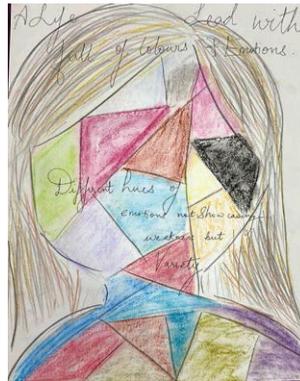
### **Ethical Considerations**

As this study involved a review of published literature, no ethical approval was required. However, care was taken to represent and credit all original authors accurately through proper citation and referencing. Informed consent to use and publish the artworks (pictures) created during the sessions was obtained from all participants.

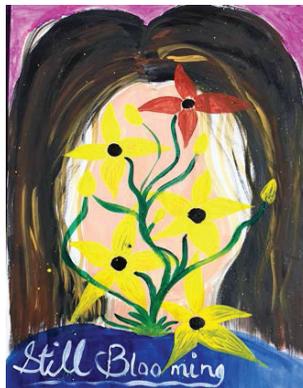
## **4. Discussion**

This scoping review synthesises emerging patterns from studies conducted in India on applying art therapy to promote adolescent well-being. Among the wide-ranging modalities, visual arts, especially drawing, painting, and collage work, emerged as the most commonly used form of intervention. As reported in multiple studies, including those by Bhowmik & Banerjee (2020) and Sheela & Kiran (2018), visual art modalities effectively fostered emotional expression and enhanced adolescent self-esteem. This prevalence is likely due to these forms' approachability and cultural acceptability across Indian settings.

The findings of this review resonate with our own practice-based observations that visual art therapy modalities promise extreme breakthroughs when it comes to non-verbal expression of emotions and thoughts. One of such instances was observed in a case, where self-portrait activity was done with participant X. A one-to-one session was organised for the participant who complained of being socially distant, had few friends and was living alone. The participant reported having difficulty in managing and regulating her emotions lately with a complaint of being aggressive with people when it came to socialisation. Hence, self-portrait as an activity was conducted with the participant to know her better and understand what view she holds of herself. Figure 2 and Figure 3 depict how self-portraits are used to develop understanding of oneself.



**Fig. 2. Self-portrait made by the participant in session 1**



**Fig. 3. Self-portrait made by the participant after 20 days into the sessions**

The above figures draw a comparison between the two portraits made by the participant. The first portrait showcases the dominance of the participant's cognitive side with the usage of clear restrictive mediums like pencil whereas, 20 days into the therapy, the portrait shows that the participant has evolved and is into the sensory and affective side where she has used more intuitive processes in creating art. The type of mediums used here were fluid, which were less restrictive and more unstructured. This comparison can be viewed from a theoretical model i.e. Expressive Art Therapies Continuum (ETC). It shows a hierarchy of processing information while being in the creative process, the goal of an individual in art therapy is to reach the creative level and achieve growth (Hinz, 2021).

This paper also highlights the use of painting as a modality and its promising effectiveness with adolescents. This evidence may be traced through a case of the participant Y, who attended art therapy workshops to know herself better. Figure 4 showcases the artwork of the participant, who was given a task of creating a piece of art using paints. Special instructions were given to the participant. Music and painting were combined and the participant was asked to close her eyes and use bare hands to paint on the sheet of paper to the sound of music.

The participant reported that she made a self-discovery during the creative process, wherein she observed that while being eyes closed she tried to maintain the boundaries of the

paper. She felt an excessive need to stay on the paper and not create any chaos on the sheet. She wished her artwork turned out good as she could not see what was happening. She also reported that, in life, she faces these challenges of being perfect in everything, she wants everything in her control and things getting out of hand make her feel anxious. And through this creative process she explored that sometimes losing control may result in beautiful discoveries.



**Fig. 4. Representing artwork of the participant with closed eyes**

Modalities such as Performing arts, including dance movement therapy (DMT) and drama-based interventions, were featured prominently, with studies like Sen et al. (2021) indicating improvements in self-awareness and body image through DMT. Play/Drama therapy was often employed in school settings to improve social interaction and empathy, especially in groups. Performance-based therapies were used less frequently than visual arts because their logistical and facilitation challenges made them harder to implement. The challenges faced by Indian therapists because of performance based modalities like dance, movement and drama are six-fold. Firstly, performance-based therapies require a dedicated space such as auditorium, large open rooms, or stages that support movement, group interaction and sound projection. Indian organisations lack such infrastructure. Secondly, this modality demands highly trained professionals and facilitators with skills in dance/movement/drama or music and this training demands time and money which is not affordable by all (Banerjee et al., 2021). Thirdly, the challenge with performance-based therapy are the cultural norms and stereotypes associated with movement and dance – adolescents might feel discomfort or fear of being judged while performing in front of their peers (Sajani et al., 2019). Moreover, measuring and documenting the outcomes of these modalities becomes a little challenging as compared to visual art modalities (Kaimal, 2020).

Regarding the effectiveness of art therapy with adolescents, the review suggests that integrated and multimodal interventions, combining visual arts, movement, and storytelling, show more consistent results across emotional, cognitive, and social domains. For instance, a mixed-methods study by Krishnamurthy & Abraham (2022) showed that combining drawing with reflective dialogue improved adolescents' emotional regulation and peer relationships.

A significant pattern emerged in terms of population subgroup differences. Urban adolescents showed greater responsiveness to individualised and expressive art forms such as abstract painting and journaling. In contrast, rural adolescents benefited more from structured group activities like mural creation or folk-art-based interventions (e.g., Warli or Madhubani

art forms). These results reflect the influence of cultural context and available resources on therapy outcomes. The present study failed to establish any evidence for the effectiveness of Eco Art Therapy, one of a widely used modality globally, in the Indian population due to lack of research. This study also could not find satisfactory evidence for other modality such as clay therapy, which is quite famous among adolescents these days. Furthermore, interventions conducted in government schools and NGOs in low-resource settings had higher participation and community engagement when art therapy was adapted to local idioms and traditions (Roy & Sharma, 2019). When art therapy is aligned with local traditions, it makes it more relatable to the participants (Kalmanowitz, 2005). These amendments reduce the perception of therapy as a westernised concept and make it more community friendly and inclusive (Kapitan, 2010). Roy & Sharma (2019) emphasised that when therapy is adapted to local traditions, it becomes more accepted and celebrated. Out of all these findings there were some gaps observed in the applications and acceptance of art therapy in the Indian context, especially with adolescent population.

## 5. Future Implications

*Schools and Educational Counsellors:* Incorporating structured art therapy sessions within school mental health programs could offer a cost-effective and non-stigmatising avenue to promote emotional well-being. Given the evidence for group-based interventions enhancing peer bonding and self-confidence, schools, particularly in urban areas, should consider integrating visual and performing arts into their life skills curricula (Sheela & Kiran, 2018).

*Counsellors and Clinical Practitioners:* The success of art therapy in eliciting deep emotional responses without the need for verbal articulation makes it particularly suitable for adolescents struggling with trauma, social withdrawal, or language barriers. Practitioners can use art-based diagnostic tools and intervention models as culturally congruent complements conventional talk therapy (Bhowmik & Banerjee, 2020).

*NGOs and Community Health Workers:* Community organisations would be important in promoting mental health in resource-constrained settings. Trained community workers can make resources available from local areas and use them during interventions to promote sustainability.

*Policy Implications:* The review suggests an urgent need to integrate art therapy practices into the curriculum devised for adolescents. Specialised modules must be developed for teachers and other frontline workers to use during a crisis as psychological first aid.

### *Comparison with Global Literature*

Compared with global studies, the Indian findings show both consistencies and unique divergences. Internationally, art therapy has been validated for reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD in adolescents, with evidence from countries such as the USA, UK, and South Korea emphasising the role of expressive arts in trauma recovery and emotional regulation (Malchiodi, 2012; Lee et al., 2020).

Indian studies support these trends, especially in emotional expression and improved self-worth. A unique aspect of Indian literature is its adaptation of interventions to traditional art forms and collectivist cultural values, such as community murals and festival-themed storytelling. These results contrast Western models, which often emphasise individual expression and introspection.

Global literature highlights the emphasis on digital art therapy and virtual platforms, a modality that is notably absent in India. These findings suggest a gap in infrastructure or digital literacy but also present an opportunity for growth, particularly in the post-pandemic era.

Another key difference is India's focus on community involvement and the use of art therapy in group settings, while many Western models prioritise one-on-one. This aligns with the collectivist values in many Indian communities, indicating that culturally responsive frameworks may lead to better outcomes than imported models.

## 6. Limitations of the Review

Despite adopting a broader approach, this paper faces several setbacks:

*Limited number of studies:* Research on art therapy for adolescents in India remains sparse, limiting the ability to draw generalisable conclusions.

*Variability in outcome measures:* Studies varied significantly in how they measured outcomes. Some used standardised psychological scales, while others relied on qualitative interviews, making it difficult to systematically compare the effectiveness of different modalities and populations.

*Language and Publication Bias:* Most included studies were published in English and appeared in peer-reviewed journals, potentially overlooking valuable work published in regional languages or documented in grey literature, such as NGO reports and theses. This may have skewed the representation of interventions toward urban or institutional contexts.

*Short Duration of Studies:* Many interventions were short-term, ranging from a few weeks to a few months, with limited follow-up. This constrains understanding of the long-term benefits and sustainability of art therapy outcomes.

## 7. Recommendations for Future Research

To strengthen the evidence base for art therapy in India, this review recommends the following actions: conducting longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of art therapy in addressing adolescents' behavioural, academic, and emotional needs; exploring region-specific interventions by examining local art forms and their potential therapeutic value, such as integrating tribal art traditions in central India or classical dance forms in the south; including digital modalities. With ongoing emphasis on online platforms, future studies should focus on developing virtual modes of conducting art therapy sessions.

## 8. Conclusions

This scoping review, titled "Exploring Effective Art Therapy Practices in India for Adolescent Well-Being" examines how art therapy interventions have been used to support the well-being of adolescents in India. Following the PRISMA-ScR framework, the review identifies various therapeutic modalities, including visual arts, expressive arts therapy, and music therapy, that have shown promise in improving emotional regulation, self-management, self-expression, and self-esteem. This review highlights the effectiveness of art therapy but also identifies significant inconsistencies in methodologies, settings, delivery methods, and outcome assessments. It underscores art therapy's potential as an inclusive, non-stigmatising adolescent mental health intervention. It calls for future research to utilise rigorous longitudinal designs, standardised and customised outcome measures, and to incorporate indigenous artistic practices. This review aims to assist future researchers and therapists in India in promoting art therapy as a viable treatment modality.

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