

## EFFECTIVENESS OF ART THERAPY ON SELF-ESTEEM IN CHILDREN WITH THALASSEMIA

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Art therapy plays a crucial role in determining the self-esteem of children with thalassemia. The study aimed to examine the effectiveness of art therapy in improving self-esteem in children with thalassemia.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** A quasi-experimental pre-and post-test research design was employed using purposive sampling. The study included 20 children aged 6-10 years diagnosed with beta thalassemia. The Self-Esteem Scale for School Children (Sadia and Mahmood, 2011) was administered before and after an eight-week structured art therapy intervention. Descriptive statistics were used for demographic analysis, and paired sample t-tests were conducted to assess pre-and post-intervention differences in self-esteem of children's.

**Findings:** The results demonstrated a significant improvement in self-esteem levels following art therapy. Statistical analysis revealed a substantial difference in pre-and post-intervention scores ( $p < 0.05$ ). Prior research supports the efficacy of art therapy in enhancing self-esteem psychological well-being among children with chronic illnesses.

**Research Limitations/Implications:** The study highlights the effectiveness of art therapy on self-esteem in children with thalassemia. Findings and implications highlight that the healthcare professionals should incorporate art therapy into routine pediatric care. Schools and community centers should offer structured art therapy programs to support children with chronic illnesses. Future research should explore long-term outcomes. Longitudinal approaches and other specific contextual factors and cultural influences must be considered in future studies.

**Originality/Value:** This article contributes to the growing body of research on the effectiveness of art therapy in enhancing self-esteem among children with thalassemia. The findings emphasize the need for policymakers, clinicians, and educators to incorporate art therapy into comprehensive treatment plans for thalassemia patients.

**Keywords:** Art Therapy, Self-Esteem, Thalassemia

### Background

Childhood is a broad term that refers to the period of human life between infancy and adolescence (Montgomery, 2013). It is characterized by significant physical, cognitive, and emotional development (Erikson & Erik, 1993). Childhood is the most carefree time in a child's life during which they grow, enjoy and spend burden free life. Childhood is a phrase in which children's are least bothered about their surrounding and are fully dependant on their parents for needs related to physical, love and belonging, psychological and security. At this moment where the children are living a very care free life and unfortunately diagnosed with a severe illness like thalassemia it leaves a great impact on a child's normal life. Thalassemia remits children ability to play and act like other child and have to suffer from the great pain. This will not only affect children physically but also affect them psychologically.

Thalassemia is a genetic blood disease that is passed on from parents to their children. It results from inadequate hemoglobin synthesis, a protein necessary for the synthesis of red blood cells (Fawdry, 1944). Less healthy red blood cells are present flowing via through the circulatory system when there is insufficient hemoglobin, as a result of which the body's red blood cells malfunction and have a shortened lifespan.

Frequent transfusions can cause iron excess in the body over time, which can harm vital organs including the liver and heart. Patients may thus require therapies to get rid of the extra iron. As a result of the bone marrow's attempt to grow larger in order to create more red blood cells, thalassemia can also result in bone abnormalities, particularly in the face. The particular genetic

abnormalities at play will determine how severe the symptoms are, ranging from mild to severe (Mayo Clinic, n.d.). The different types of thalassemia can refer to either the specific hemoglobin subunit affected, typically 'alpha' or 'beta,' or to the severity of the disease, which is categorized using terms such as trait, carrier, intermediate, or major (Hunt, 1976). All of the body's cells receive oxygen through haemoglobin, which is composed of two distinct components termed beta and alpha. The portion of haemoglobin that is not being formed is discussed to as "alpha" or "beta" in thalassemia (Marengo, McCracken & Flanagan, 1968). When there are mutations in the genes that produce the hemoglobin components known as alpha globin chains, alpha thalassemia results. Alpha thalassemia may be divided into four subgroups based on the quantity of inherited gene mutations: silent carrier, alpha thalassemia trait, haemoglobin illness, and alpha thalassemia major (Fucharoen et al., 2003). Alpha thalassemia trait carriers usually do not exhibit any symptoms, however they may have moderate anemia. The more severe types, such as alpha thalassemia major and hemoglobin H disease, cause moderate to severe anemia, jaundice, and other problems. Mutations in the beta globin genes cause beta thalassemia. Like alpha thalassemia, beta thalassemia can manifest in different degrees of severity. These include beta thalassemia major, also called Cooley's anemia, which is a severe form requiring lifelong blood transfusions and medical management to prevent complications such as organ damage and stunted growth, and beta thalassemia minor (trait), in which individuals may have mild anemia or no symptoms (Cao & Galanello, 2010)

Thalassemia is a chronic condition that requires lifelong medical management, including regular blood transfusions and iron chelation therapy. These medical interventions can be physically exhausting and emotionally draining for children. Additionally, visible symptoms such as pale skin, growth delays, and skeletal abnormalities can lead to self-consciousness and feelings of inferiority among peers. Psychological studies have shown that children with chronic illnesses are more prone to low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. Addressing these emotional and psychological concerns is essential for ensuring a better quality of life for affected children.

Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as the assessment of a person's attitudes and views about their skills and morals. A vital component of psychological health and overall well-being is self-esteem. Children's self-esteem is essential to their general growth and well-being. It has to do with how child's think and appreciate themselves. A strong sense of self-worth serves as a basis for resilient thinking, good mental health, and achievement in a variety of spheres of life. Youngsters that have a strong sense of their own worth and acceptance from others are more inclined to take on difficulties and keep going when they fail (Orth & Robins, 2014). They also tend to have faith in their own skills. (Cameron & Granger, 2019). It is the responsibility of parents, guardians, and teachers to foster children's sense of self-worth. Giving children's affection, support, and encouragement aids in their development of a healthy feeling of self-worth. It's also crucial to provide a secure and encouraging atmosphere where kids may express themselves without worrying about criticism or condemnation.

Art therapy as “a type of psychotherapy in which the principal means of expression and communication are artistic mediums” (British Association of Art Therapists, 2015). Art therapy is a comprehensive and transformational approach to mental health and wellbeing that uses the expressive potential of art to support development, healing, and self-discovery. Numerous emotional, psychological, and social problems, such as stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, bereavement, and issues with relationships, can be addressed with art therapy with the process of

externalizing inner experiences via art (Malchiodi, 2012), clients may cultivate resilience as well as individual growth while gaining fresh insights and coping mechanisms. Through the use of creativity and self-expression, art therapy is a therapeutic technique that supports healing and well-being (Kapitan, 2018). Art-therapy, in contrast to typical talk treatments, uses a variety of artistic materials, including collage, painting, sketching, and sculptures, as a means of communication and discovery (Chiang et al., 2019). Cognitive development is achieved by the creative process to deep self-exploration and understanding due to ability in comprehend and discharge mass and symbolically the concepts, ideas, emotions and experiences.

Merfat et al., (2021) conducted research on thalassemia is to investigate the positive psychotherapy's efficacy on the psychological well-being and self-efficacy of children suffering from thalassemia. Result showed that the psychological wellness of the children under study showed a favourable and statistically significant link with their level of self-efficacy both immediately following and one month after the intervention. Similarly, Ali and Rao (2021) conducted a qualitative study to explore the impact of art therapy on children's self-esteem. Result has shown that parents seen significant increase in their children's confidence and self-esteem after participating in art therapy sessions. Furthermore, Huang and Chen (2020) conducted a study to see the effects of group art therapy on self-concept and peer relationships among adolescents using a mixed-method approach. The research findings demonstrate that group art therapy significantly enhances self-esteem and social skills in children with thalassemia. Participants reported a better understanding of themselves and their emotions, leading to increased positive self-concept and reduced negative self-perception. Moreover, the study of Nguyen et al. (2017) focused on exploring changes in self-esteem and emotional self-regulation of teenage thalassemia patients pursuant to an art therapy program. It was established that the participants' self-esteem and their capacity for emotional regulation did improve. The writers noted that creative work makes people express their feelings and successfully leads to increased self-esteem. All in all, these outcomes showed the 'Severalty of the helpfulness of art therapy. Reviewing the literature, the study aimed to examine the effectiveness of art therapy in improving self-esteem in children with Beta thalassemia.

### **Method**

The current study hypothesized that was likely an effectiveness of art therapy on self-esteem in children with thalassemia. A pre-and post-test quasi-experimental research design was utilized to evaluate the impact of art therapy on self-esteem in children with thalassemia. The study recruited 20 children aged 6-10 years diagnosed with beta thalassemia through purposive sampling. Participants were selected from hospitals and healthcare centre facilities specializing in thalassemia treatment. The Self-Esteem Scale for School Children (Sadia & Mahmood, 2011) was used for pre- and post-assessment. The intervention consisted of structured art therapy sessions held once a week for eight weeks. Session 1 was designed to help children with thalassemia build trust and get to know each other better by sharing their interests, preferences, and accomplishments. Session 2 focused on exploring emotions which according to Malchiodi (2012) is very important to work with children. In this session children created emotion wheels with different feelings, such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, which they could spin to express their current emotional state. Session 3 focused on to improve self-esteem in children by helping them to reflect on their experiences with the condition. This activity allowed participants to process their experiences, express their emotions, and develop a positive self-perception. The

session effectively boosted self-esteem by encouraging self-reflection and providing a supportive environment for children to share their journeys ( as cited by Bansal & Bhatia, 2019). In Session 4 the focus was on to family and support systems. In this session children were supposed to create a family tree that includes not only their relatives, but also their friends and healthcare providers. The focus was to able children to thin from whom they can get help in their daily lives. In Session 5 engrossed on imaginary adventures. Children were supposed to visualize imaginary adventures and this session played a very important role in increasing the children self-esteem. In the next session the researcher focused on children coping strategies. The session introduced developing healthy coping mechanisms in which participants created stress balls by filling balloons with flour and decorating them. This hands-on activity was not only enjoyable but also practical, as the children could use their stress balls to manage anxiety and frustration. Shukla et al., (2022) reported the usefulness of this activity with children suffering from health issues.

Next sessions focused on enhancing strength and resilience, future hopes and dreams through different activities including drawings of superheroes, decorating boxes and writing their aspiration on piece of paper with the help of researcher. All these activities aimed to empowering children to recognize their inner strengths and abilities (McDonald et al., 2021)

Last Session focused on closure and celebration. Children collaboratively created paintings that represented their experiences throughout the sessions. This collective artwork allowed them to reflect on their growth and shared experiences. Following the mural activity, the group engaged in a reflective discussion, sharing final thoughts and celebrating their progress with a small party or special activity. After completing the therapy sessions, participants were reassessed. Descriptive statistics were used for demographic analysis, and paired sample t-tests were conducted to examine differences between pre- and post-test self-esteem scores.

## Results

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statics of Demographic Variables (N = 20)*

Variables	M	SD	Ranges
Age	7.85	1.46	6-10
Year Since Diagnose	4.55	1.91	2-9
Year Since Under Treatment	4.55	1.91	2-9

Note: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation.

**Table 2**

*Mean Differences between Pre-Test and Post-Test of Self-esteem Scale (N = 20)*

Variable	Pre-Test (n = 20)		Post-Test (n = 20)		t(19)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Self-Esteem	112.65	6.49	141.05	12.68	-8.96	.00	2.0

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 2 revealed significant mean difference before the and after the art therapy intervention.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of art therapy on self-esteem in children with thalassemia. The results were analyzed using an independent samples t-test, which revealed a significant difference in self-esteem scores between the pre-test and post-test groups.

Children who suffer from chronic diseases, such as thalassemia, can benefit psychologically from art therapy, according to recent studies. These treatments improve children's mental health by assisting them in expressing their feelings, reducing anxiety, and developing coping skills. The findings from the current study are aligned with previous findings. Tomaj et al. (2016) highlighted the benefits of play therapy for children with thalassemia, demonstrating improvements in self-concept. Similarly, Martinez et al. (2013) also concluded that self-esteem of teenagers with thalassemia was enhanced through art therapy. Moreover, Green and Thomas (2014) employed both qualitative and quantitative method to assess the impact of art therapy techniques on self-esteem of adolescents with thalassemia. The outcomes revealed that the participants perceived being more at ease to talk about the disease/illness and also confirmed increased level of self-efficacy and the scores on self-esteem was further improved as evidenced by the quantitative data collected.

In current study the sessions were communicating, encouraging creativity and cheering children to reflect on their strong point, challenges, and ambitions. The findings established a statistically significant enhancement in self-esteem following the intervention, as indicated by the results of the independent samples t-test comparing pre-test and post-test on self-esteem scale. Children displayed distinguished improvements in self-esteem scores after engaging in planned art therapy sessions, confirming the effectiveness of the art therapy sessions. Lastly, the well-organized nature of the activities in art therapy encourages feelings of achievement, helping children pawn negative self-perceptions often accompanying with chronic complaints like thalassemia. The supportive environment during therapy sessions nurtures emotional safety and self-acceptance.

### **Recommendations, Implications and Conclusion**

Art therapy has been widely recognized as a valuable tool in promoting emotional expression, self-awareness, and positive self-image in children (Kapitan et al., 2011). The current study findings revealed art therapy as an effective intervention for improving self-esteem in children with thalassemia. By offering a non-verbal mode of expression, encouraging self-reflection, and fostering social connections, art therapy helps children develop a more positive self-concept. The results of this study support the integration of art therapy into standard care practices for paediatric patients with chronic illnesses.

Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impact of art therapy on self-esteem, exploring different artistic techniques, and investigating the role of family involvement in therapeutic interventions. Mental health professionals, educators, and caregivers should consider implementing art therapy programs to improve the psychological well-being of children with thalassemia and other chronic conditions.

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