

A Systematic Review of Group Art Therapy for Korean College Students: Articles Published in Korea

¹Wei Sun, ²Bo-ram Park*

¹Lecture, Dept. of Fine Arts, JinZhong Univ., China
Ph.D. student, Dept. of Creative Arts Psychotherapy, Jeonju Univ., Korea
²Prof., Dept. of Creative Arts Psychotherapy, Jeonju Univ., Korea*
sunwei4120312@gmail.com, bb4013@hanmail.net*

Abstract

This study aimed to guide the practice of group art therapy among Korean college students through a systematic review. Therefore, 164 studies relevant to group art therapy for Korean undergraduate students published in Korea from January 2001 to June 2021 were selected. This systematic review included 46 publications based on the PICO standards. The author systematically reviewed the included studies, summarized the characteristics and therapy effectiveness, and analyzed the overall research trends.

The primary findings were as follows:

First, the number of publications on group art therapy among Korean college students has significantly increased. According to a review of group art therapy characteristics, the majority of studies enrolled 6–10 participants (32 studies, 66.7%), applied 6–10 sessions (23 studies, 47.9%), and had an intervention time for each session of 90 minutes (25 studies, 53.2%). Second, research outcomes of group art therapy among Korean college students were grouped into self-related, society-related, emotion-related, and career-related outcomes. Regarding career-related outcomes, all studies found that group art therapy had a statistically significant impact on career-related outcomes, particularly on the levels of career decision-making and maturity. Most studies suggested that group art therapy had a positive effect on self-related, society-related, and emotion-related outcomes, with 6 studies finding no statistically significant effect of group art therapy on college students. Third, the most effective intervention for college students was the media-based group art therapy. In particular, college students had the most effective performance in career-related outcomes. This study is significant in that it uses a systematic review to integrate and summarize research results on group art therapy among college students over the last 20 years. This study revealed that group art therapy could positively and effectively affect Korean college students. Based on this systematic review, we expect to practice and develop group art therapy in Chinese college students with comprehensive guidance and convincing data.

Keywords: Korean College Students; Group Art Therapy; Therapy's Characteristics; Therapy's Effectiveness; Systematic Review

1. INTRODUCTION

College life is a critical transition period for people, from youth to adulthood. In contrast to high school life, where students rely on their parents, college students must leave their familiar environment and immediate family and become independent by adapting to college life. Consequently, they are likely to experience great pressure when dealing with interpersonal relationships, daily life, future development, and job-seeking issues [1]. According to Chung (2008), college students are physically and psychologically different from adults. College students who fail to become independent, develop self-identity, and adapt to interpersonal relationships or academic difficulties face stress and psychological burdens [2], and if they are unable to handle stress appropriately, their mental health can be negatively affected.

Post-secondary education is a major concern in South Korean society. Education is regarded as a high priority for South Korean families because academic success is vital for improving the socioeconomic status of South Korean culture [3]. Many South Korean parents have high educational expectations for their children and emphasize academic achievement. In addition, they actively monitor their children's academic progress by ensuring that they receive top grades in school and have the opportunity to enroll in the nation's most prestigious universities. Therefore, South Korean students face immense pressure from their parents, teachers, peers, and society to succeed academically. Their lifestyles change dramatically when they pass the university entrance exam and become undergraduates. They enter a relatively open and flexible study environment that is exceedingly different from their high school life experience. They are likely to be confused about themselves and their future lives [4]. South Korean college students are at increased risk of mental health issues.

Despite the availability of effective treatment options, most college students who experience mental health issues do not receive mental health services (Blanco et al., 2008; Eisenberg et al., 2007). Therefore, universities worldwide have set up counseling centers with different services, such as individual counseling, group therapy, art therapy, biofeedback therapy, peer education, outreach, and online self-help services, to support college students experiencing mental health problems [1]. These non-pharmacological treatments have had a low impact on college students' physical health [5]. Among these therapies, art therapy has widely been applied in different settings, including in self-related, social, emotional, adaptive, and occupational aspects of college students [6].

Group art therapy has previously been studied in children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. However, only one systematic review conducted five years ago, studied the trend in group art therapy among college students. Lee and Yoo [7] included 19 dissertations published between 2005 and 2016 in the Research Information Service for Scholarship (RISS) Database. The author reviewed the included studies from five perspectives of group art therapy: diagnostic and assessment tools of group art therapy, experimental design, analysis methodology, operation, and context. Usually, the number of students involved in treatment is 6–10. The most commonly used total treatment sessions and treatment time for each session were 13–17 min and 90 min, respectively. The limitations in their study included that they included only dissertations in their literature review and used only one database for the literature search.

Therefore, an updated systematic review of group art therapy for college students in recent 5-year published studies is necessary.

2. METHODS

This systematic review analyzed studies that applied group art therapy to Korean college students from 2001 to 2021. This review was performed in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement [8].

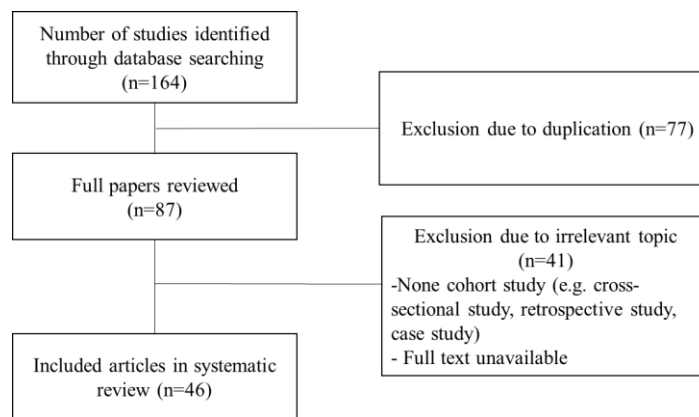


Figure 1. Literature search procedure

A literature search was conducted using the keywords proposed in the databases (Figure 1). The titles, keywords, and abstracts of the identified articles were screened to eliminate irrelevant studies. Next, I read the full text of the articles to select research articles that met the inclusion criteria and removed

duplications. The final included studies were selected after consulting my supervisor. Endnotes were used to manage the references.

This study included the Korean Academic Research Information Service (<http://www.riss.net>), National Assembly Electronic Library (www.nanet.go.kr), National Center for Science and Technology Information (<http://scholar.ndsl.kr>), and Korean Academic Journal Citation Index (<http://www.kci.go.kr>). RISS was the largest and most comprehensive database; therefore, it was the main resource used for the literature search.

The core concepts elicited by the research topic were used as keywords for the literature search. The core concepts were “Korean college students” and “group art therapy,” and the following variations were included: “group art therapy” or “art therapy” or “collage group therapy” or “drawing group therapy” or “clay group therapy” or “paper group art therapy” or “pottery group art therapy” and “Korean university students” or “national university students” or “college students” or “undergraduates.”

Following data for all included studies were extracted: 1) title; 2) author; 3) year of publication; 4) issuing institution; 5) publication type; 6) types of participants; 7) sample size; 8) number of participants in the experimental and control group; 9) intervention duration; 10) experimental design; 11) outcome groups; and 12) intervention methods. All information was extracted and stored in Microsoft Excel.

To better understand published research on group art therapy among Korean college students, the research characteristics from different perspectives were summarized based on prior studies [9]. The general characteristics of the publications were summarized by publication year and analyzed based on participants’ type, characteristics of group art therapy (type of intervention, group size, total treatment sessions, and intervention time for each session), and research outcomes (self-related, emotion-related, society-related, and career-related outcomes).

3. RESULTS

The number of papers published from 2001 to 2021 demonstrated a significantly increasing tendency to investigate group art therapy among college students. In particular, 30 (65.3%) articles were published in the recent five years, including 17 peer-reviewed journal papers and 14 dissertations. 10 articles (21.7 %) were published between 2011 and 2015. 4 articles (8.7 %) were published between 2006 and 2010. Two articles (4.3 %) were published between 2001 and 2005 (1 peer-reviewed journal article and 1 dissertation). There were 25 (54.3%) peer-reviewed journal articles, 16 (34.8%) master’s theses, and 5 (10.9%) doctoral dissertations. The above trends

suggest that the interest in and application of group art therapy among Korean college students increased significantly from 2015 onwards.

3.1 Characteristics of Participants

Type of Participants. A total of 935 participants (464 in the experimental group and 471 in the control group) were included in the 46 studies. The participants in all the included studies were college students. More than half (54.3%) of the included articles (25 papers) recruited the general population, while the rest (21, 45.7%) examined special college students, including physically disabled college students (2 articles), junior or residential students with adaptation issues (3 articles), senior college students with career issues (7 articles), female college students with interpersonal difficulties (3 articles), and college students experiencing various health problems, such as psychological disorders (6 articles).

Sample Size. The sample size was categorized as 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, and >15 participants, with 4 (8.5%), 32 (68.1%), 7 (14.9%), and 4 (8.5%) publications, respectively. Most of the studies recruited 6–10 participants.

3.2 Characteristics of Therapy

Total Intervention Sessions. The intervention sessions were divided into 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, and 16–20 sessions. Most articles applied 6–10 sessions (23, 48.9%), followed by 11–15 sessions (15, 31.9%), 16–20 sessions (7, 16.9%), and 1–5 sessions (2, 4.3%).

Intervention Time for Each Session. The intervention time for each session was divided into 10-minute intervals from 60 to 120 min. The number of publications was 3 (6.5%), 3 (6.5%), 2 (4.4%), 25 (52.2%), 3 (6.5%), 0 (0%), and 11 (23.9%). The most frequently applied duration was 90 min, followed by two hours.

3.3 Effects by Therapy Types

Different intervention methods of group art therapy were applied in the included articles. Based on the previous intervention methods introduced in the Methods section, the number of studies was divided into unspecified general group art therapy, media-based group art therapy, and theory-based group art therapy, with 19 (41.3%), 9 (19.6%), and 18 (39.1%) articles, respectively.

The media used in media-based group art therapy were textile craft, paper, collage, Korean painting, ceramics, forest art experience, and picture book creation. The most commonly used medium was collage (3 studies, 6.5%). There was one research in each other media.

Positive psychology was the most commonly used theory-based group art therapy (5 articles, 10.8%), followed by solution-focused (3 studies, 6.5%), PMAT (3 studies, 6.5%), cognitive-behavioral (2 studies, 4.3%), and color psychology (2 studies, 4.3%). One study was conducted on each of the other theories.

Six articles reported no statistically significant effects of group art therapy on Korean college students. Among these 6 articles, 5 applied a general group art therapy method [2, 10-13], and 1 [14] applied theory-based group art therapy.

Studies using college as a medium in group art therapy had positive effects on college students. Lee and Jang [15] suggested that collage group art therapy could positively affect college students' prospective identity formation and subordinate factors; namely, prospective emotions, prospective cognitions, and prospective behaviors. Lee, et al. [16] demonstrated that college group art therapy played a meaningful role in the

intervention of overall career development skills on college students with disabilities. Son [17] suggested that college group art therapy increased levels of career identity and career decisions among college students.

Five studies applied positive psychology-based group art therapy in college students. Choi [14] findings did not support the hypothesis that group art therapy could reduce stress and increase self-resilience in college students. Kim [18] found a statistically significant effect of positive psychology-focused group art therapy on stress among college students. According to three other studies [19-21], group art therapy did not have a statistically significant effect on interpersonal relationships, self-identity, or subjective well-being among Korean college students.

Kim and Lee [10], Kim [11], Yoo [12], Han, et al. [2], and Lee [13] used general group art therapy for Korean college students for self-motivation, academic stress coping, sense of self-esteem, life satisfaction, meaningfulness of life, and well-being. However, the results showed that group art therapy did not significantly affect these factors.

3.4 Effects by Research Outcome

Thirty-eight studies investigated the multiple outcomes. Thus, 46 included articles contained 92 research outcomes. After grouping outcomes as self-related, emotion-related, society-related, and career-related, the number of publications was 24 (52.2%), 16 (34.8%), 18 (39.1%), and 17 (37%).

Many studies focused on the effects of group art therapy on self-related outcomes among Korean college students. 10 (10.9%) studies focused on ego identity [12, 17, 20, 22-28], and 8 (8.7%) studies focused on interpersonal relationships [19, 20, 27, 29-33]. There were 5 articles on each of the following topics: ego resilience, stress, and career decision self-efficacy. There were 3 articles on each of the following topics: self-esteem, self-expression, employment self-efficacy, stress-coping ability, satisfaction with life, career decision level, and career maturity. There were 2 articles on each of the following outcomes: emotional expression, adaptation to college life, and career preparation behavior.

Kim and Lee [10] demonstrated that group art therapy had no statistically significant effect on self-motivation among Korean college students. Yoo [12] found no significant effect on self-respectfulness. Choi [14] found no significant effect on self-resilience.

Kim and Lee [10] found no statistically significant effect on cognitive and behavioral self-motivation. Jung [34] suggested that group art therapy has no statistically significant effect on nonverbal expressions. Lee [30] revealed no statistically significant influence on physical and ability self-perception. Jeong [35] and Choi and Paeng [36] demonstrated that group art therapy did not positively affect self-efficacy. Choi [20] found that group art therapy might have a positive effect on future certainty ($z=-.81$, $p<.05$), goal orientation ($z=-1.82$, $p<.05$), and intimacy ($z=-.73$, $p<.05$) due to a positive change between before and after the intervention.

In emotion-related outcomes, Kim [11] found no statistically significant effect of group art therapy on academic stress coping when experimental and control groups were compared. Choi [14] found that group art therapy did not positively reduce stress among Korean college students.

Lee [37] found that group art therapy significantly increased emotion regulation, especially in regulating one's emotions. In addition, there was a tendency for group art therapy to help Korean college students regulate others' emotions. There were no statistically significant effects on reducing employment stress [38] and employment anxiety [36]. However, Jung [34] suggested that group art therapy could help college students cope with their stress. Although Jung [34] revealed no statistically significant effects on coping with problems and gaining social support, the results indicated positive trends, suggesting that group art therapy might be useful in these fields. In general, group art therapy had a statistically significant effect on most emotion-related issues in Korean college students.

Table 1. Summary of Study Characteristics

Variables	Groups	Number of article (%)
Published year	2001-2005	2(4.3%)
	2006-2010	4(8.7%)
	2011-2015	10(21.7%)
	2016-2021	30(65.3%)
Participant types	Typical college students	25(54.3%)
	College student with health issues	21(45.7%)
Total intervention sessions	1-5 sessions	2(4.3%)
	6-10 sessions	23(48.9%)
	11-15 sessions	15(31.9%)
	16-20 sessions	7(16.9%)
Weekly intervention frequency	1	27(58.7%)
	2	13(28.3%)
	1-2	4(8.7%)
	>2	2(4.3%)
Intervention time for each session	60 minutes	3(6.5%)
	70 minutes	3(6.5%)
	80 minutes	2(4.4%)
	90 minutes	24(52.2%)
	100 minutes	3(6.5%)
	120 minutes	11(23.9%)
Number of participants	1-5	4(32%)
	6-10	32(68.1%)
	11-15	7(14.9%)
	>15	4(8.5%)
Therapy stage type	3	19(41.3%)
	4	16(34.8%)
	5	3(6.5%)
	6	1(2.2%)
	Unspecified	7(15.2%)
Intervention methods	Media-based group art therapy	9(19.6%)
	Theory-based group art therapy	18(39.1%)
	Unspecified group art therapy	19(41.3%)
Research outcomes	Self-related outcomes	24(52.2%)
	Emotion-related outcomes	16(34.8%)
	Society-related outcomes	18(39.1%)
	Career-related outcomes	17(37%)

Regarding society-related outcomes, Han, et al. [2] suggested no statistically significant effect on life satisfaction. Lee [13] showed that group art therapy might bring happiness and meaning in life to college students, although there was no statistically significant effect.

Among the eight studies that explored the effect of group art therapy on interpersonal relationships, Hong [19] and Shin [32] found no significant effects on satisfaction, sensitivity, and understanding. However, other studies have indicated that group art therapy had a significantly positive impact on interpersonal relationships.

In studying how group art therapy contributed to adaptation, Yu [39] and Han, et al. [2] showed no statistically significant impact on social adaptation and environmental adaptation. Lee and Kim [21] indicated that group art therapy might have a positive impact on subjective well-being ($t=-1.07$, $p>0.01$).

Regarding career-related outcomes, Lee, et al. [16] suggested a positive tendency, indicating that group art therapy might contribute to career exploration, planning, and preparation, although there were no statistically significant correlations. All other studies found that group art therapy had a statistically significant effect on

career-related outcomes.

4. DISCUSSION

Modern society is paying increasing attention to college students. Parents' expectations, the outside world, and students' own expectations make many college students bear enormous learning and employment pressures during campus life. If college students fail to cope with stress and challenges, they may experience mental health issues. To address this issue, society has strengthened research on the mental health of college students and the exploration of effective treatment methods. Through practice and research, it has been found that group art therapy has apparent advantages in intervening in the mental health of college students, which can effectively regulate their psychological state and improve various psychological disorders. This study aimed to understand the effectiveness of group art therapy on Korean college students and provide comprehensive, scientifically based underlying evidence for practicing group art therapy.

Research on group art therapy in college students showed a clear growth trend after 2016, indicating that the application and research on group art therapy for Korean college students have become more popular.

The most commonly used total treatment sessions and treatment time for each session were 6–10 times (23 studies, 47.4%), and 90 minutes per time (25 studies, 53.7%). Only 2 studies had less than five group art therapy sessions. Some studies used therapy twice per week or 120 min per session. Most of the included studies used three-stage group art therapy.

As for the participant type, 25 (54.3%) studies were conducted on typical college students. The remaining 21 studies (45.7 %) included special groups of college students. This situation may be related to Korean group art therapy being more concerned with typical people, for whom its effectiveness has been proven.

Group art therapy is a technique that combines art and group therapy. Research on group art therapy has elucidated the treatment effects through pathological objects. The results indicated more studies on typical college students than on undergraduate students in special situations. The significant effect of group art therapy on both typical and special college students suggests that it would be worthwhile to conduct more studies on college students with special conditions. Furthermore, the results indicated that college students living in a complex modern society appeared to be typical. However, owing to various stress and pathological risk factors, college students are at a high risk of experiencing mental health illnesses. Therefore, group art therapy may be a practical method for preventing and reducing mental disorders in college students.

Most group art therapies combine a variety of media and technological methods, which aim to motivate and intrigue participants through multiple activity methods and apply the method that best fits the goals of the therapy. Therefore, the main goal of the therapy may be neglected. The results indicated that the choice of method in group art therapy for college students is important. Therapists should select treatments that college students can accept easily.

The research outcomes were divided into self-related, emotion-related, society-related, and career-related. Regarding self-related outcomes, 3 studies showed no statistically significant effects on self-motivation, sense of self-respect, and self-resilience. However, other studies have found a positive impact of group art therapy on self-efficacy, self-identity, and self-expression. In general, group art therapy can be an effective program to help college students establish a sense of self-identity, which is an important developmental task.

Emotion-related fields are the most popular topics, with various research outcomes. Two studies suggested that group art therapy had no statistically significant effect on stress among college students. This result was inconsistent with other studies that indicated that group art therapy helped special populations reduce academic stress and learn to cope with academic stress, focusing on secondary school students [40], medical school students [41], and athletic college students [11]. However, other studies have suggested that group art therapy

significantly affected emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, and emotional expression in college students.

Society-related outcomes included social behavior and emotional issues. Society-related outcomes were influenced by interpersonal skills, interactions between group members, and consequently, by the individual's inner self and ego [42]. One of the main challenges for college students is maintaining interpersonal relationships and sociability. The included studies generally suggest that group art therapy effectively helped college students solve society-related problems.

Sixteen studies explored the effects of group art therapy on career-related outcomes among Korean college students. The results suggest that group art therapy generally helped college students confront career-related problems, which is in line with Kim [43]. College students consider their careers and future development. They encounter many challenges and have a higher risk of experiencing mental health issues in this condition [44]. Therefore, group art therapy could be an effective method to help college students improve their performance.

5. CONCLUSION

This study indicated that group art therapy is suitable for all college students, including typical students and those with special conditions. Individual circumstances limit traditional psychological counseling. Conversely, group art therapy uses techniques such as painting and collaging. Furthermore, specific therapeutic methods can be designed based on the characteristics of the participants and the purpose of treatment. This study suggests that the design of a particular art of group therapy should consider the population type. When designing group art therapy, the intervention method, total number of intervention sessions, and intervention time for each session should be considered. This study suggested that media-based group art therapy, a group size of 6–10 participants, and an intervention time for each session of 90 min might improve the efficiency of group art therapy for college students. However, this procedure may change when designing group art therapy for other populations. For future study, it is it would be worthwhile to include foreign research.

* This thesis is summarized from Sun Wei's 2022 doctoral thesis.

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