

**THE EFFECT OF ART THERAPY ON DEPRESSION LEVELS IN PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH CANCER****Dian Nur Wulanningrum\*, Dewi Suryandari, Diyanah Syolihan Rinjani Putri, Irvan Wydias Saputra**

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\*[diannwulan@ukh.ac.id](mailto:diannwulan@ukh.ac.id)**ABSTRACT**

Childhood cancer is a serious condition characterized by the abnormal growth of cells in children. Treatment for children with cancer, both through medical and psychological therapies, can affect mental health, including stress, anxiety, and the risk of depression in parents. Mental health issues in parents of children with cancer can impact the caregiving process. One approach to reduce the risk of depression in these parents is art therapy. Objective to determine the effect of art therapy on depression levels in parents of children with cancer. This study used a quasi-experimental approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group. The sampling technique used was accidental sampling, with total of 39 respondents. The data analysis used the Wilcoxon test. Data analysis showed a p-value of 0.000. This study indicates that art therapy has a significant effect on reducing depression levels in parents.

Keywords: art therapy; childhood cancer; parental depression

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**INTRODUCTION**

Childhood cancer is a type of disease that occurs when abnormal cells grow and divide uncontrollably in specific tissues or organs in children's bodies. The most common types of childhood cancer are leukemia, brain tumors, lymphoma, and neuroblastoma (Steliarova-Foucher, *et al.*, 2017). According to data from the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), approximately 176,000 children are diagnosed with cancer each year. In Indonesia, according to the health statistics center data for 2023, 11,000 children are diagnosed with cancer. Treatment for childhood cancer involves more than one discipline, including medical, psychological, and social support. Medical treatments include chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and surgery, alongside psychological support for both the child and the family (Kaatsch, 2022). Childhood cancer has an impact on both the physical and psychological well-being of the child, as well as the parents and family (Feki, *et al.*, 2021). Parents of children diagnosed with cancer may experience severe stress, anxiety, and despair due to the fear of loss and financial-emotional pressure. Parents frequently undergoing such conditions may develop depression (Kaimal & Menon, 2022).

Depression is an emotional change characterized by negative thoughts, sadness, low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, withdrawal, lack of energy, and a lack of interest in activities (Suwistianisa, *et al.*, 2015). Parents of children with cancer who experience depression may have difficulty caring for their child and addressing emotional needs (Evans, *et al.*, 2021). One

way to address depression in parents is through art therapy. Art therapy is a form of psychological therapy that uses art media to help individuals express emotions that are difficult to verbalize, through drawing, painting, or crafting (Malchiodi, 2019). Art therapy has positive effects, such as helping parents of children with cancer process negative emotions, improve mental health, and strengthen psychological needs (Betancourt, et al., 2020). Art therapy can provide a space for parents of children with cancer to express and process emotions, which can help reduce anxiety levels and symptoms of depression (Gerdner & Goldstein, 2022). Based on the background above, the purpose of this study is: 'Is there an effect of Art Therapy on the level of depression in parents of children with cancer r?'

## METHOD

This study is a quantitative research using a quasi-experimental design. The research design employed is a One-Group Pre and Post Test without control design approach. The sampling technique used in this study is non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling, also known as accidental sampling (Nursalam, 2020). This study has received ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of Dr. Moewardi Regional General Hospital, with Approval Number: 927 / IV / HREC / 2024. The sample in this study consists of 39 parents of children with cancer. The study was conducted from May 25 to June 20, 2024, in the Flamboyan Ward 9 at RSUD Dr. Moewardi. To measure art therapy, the researcher used drawing as the medium, with participants engaging in three sessions of drawing, each session focusing on a different theme, conducted over a single day. Each session included a warming-up phase, an art-making phase, and an art-sharing phase (Kartina, 2021). To assess depression levels, this study utilized the BDI-II questionnaire, which consists of 21 questions with response options ranging from 0 to 3, where a score of 0 indicates a better mental state, and a score of 3 indicates a worse mental state (Ginting et al., 2013).

## RESULT

Table 1.  
Frequency Distribution Based on Respondents Age (n=39)

Age (years)	f	%
<25	3	7,7
26-35	11	28,2
36-45	14	35,9
46-55	10	25,6
>56	1	2,6

Table 1, it shows that the majority of patients are in the Late Adulthood age range (36-45 years), with a total of 14 individuals (35.9%).

Table 2.  
Frequency Distribution Based on Respondent's Gender (n=39)

Gender	f	%
Male	15	38,5
Female	24	61,5

Table 3.  
Frequency Distribution Based on Respondents' Education Level (n=39)

Education	f	%
Elementary school	4	10,3
Junior high school	9	23,1
Senior high school	24	61,5
Bachelor's degree	2	5,1

Table 2, the distribution of gender is as follows: 24 females (61.5%) and 15 males. (38,5%). Table 3, it is known that the distribution of most respondents' education level is senior high school s with a total of 24 individuals. (61,5%).

Table 4.

Frequency Distribution based on Respondents' Occupation (n=39)

Occupation	f	%
Entrepreneur	14	35,9
Housewife	17	43,6
Laborer	4	10,3
Farmer	3	7,7
Therapist	1	2,6

Table 4, it is known that the distribution of housewives is 17 people (43.6%).

Tabel 5.

Depression Level before Receiving Art Therapy (n=39)

Depression Level	f	%
No Depression	18	46,2
Borderline Depression	3	7,7
Mild Depression	11	28,2
Moderate Depression	4	10,3
Severe Depression	3	7,7

Table 5, it is known that the depression of parents with children with cancer before receiving art therapy at RSUD Dr. Moewardi, the majority of respondents did not have depression, with 18 respondents (46.2%).

Tabel 6.

Depression Level after Receiving Art Therapy (n=39)

Depression Level	f	%
No Depression	32	82,1
Borderline Depression	2	5,1
Mild Depression	3	7,7
Moderate Depression	2	5,1
Moderate Depression	0	0

Table 6, it is known that the depression levels of parents with children with cancer after receiving Art Therapy at RSUD Dr. Moewardi show that the majority did not experience depression, with 32 respondents (81.2%). Bivariate analysis in this study is conducted to determine the effect of Art Therapy on the level of depression in parents of children with cancer at Dr. Moewardi General Hospital. The bivariate analysis in this study uses the Wilcoxon test, and the results are as follows:

Tabel 7. Uji Wilcoxon

	Post-test- Pre-test
Z	-4.943 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Table 7, the data analysis results show a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that art therapy has a significant effect on the level of depression in parents of children with cancer.

## DISCUSSION

### Resonden characteristic

Based on the results of this study, it shows that most respondents are in the age range of 36-45 years or are in late adulthood. Parents who are in late adulthood will be more susceptible to health problems and psychological problems in their lives (Litz, et al., 2018). Parents with children with cancer at this age will face emotional and physical challenges when caring for their children (Schwartz, 2021). The results of the study showed that the majority of

respondents were female, in this case mothers with children with cancer. Syifa's research (2023) shows that mothers will have a more active role when caring for and accompanying children during treatment. The results of the study showed that the highest level of education of respondents was high school. This is in line with the results of the study by Pusmaika, et.al (2020), that the higher a person's education level, the lower the level of depression. The results of the study showed that the majority of respondents' jobs were housewives. This is in line with the research of Kumar & Singh (2018), showing that housewives in the family will have an impact on the welfare and health of family members.

#### **Depression level before being given art therapy**

The results of the study found that 18 respondents did not have depression before art therapy was carried out. This is in line with the results of the study by Mess, et al (2022), that many parents with children with cancer can manage their emotions and receive family support so that they do not cause significant anxiety and depression. The results of this study are also supported by the results of the characteristics of the respondents, namely the level of education. This is in line with the research of Al-Maliki, et al (2016), that parents who have more knowledge about treating the disease can control stress levels so as to reduce symptoms of depression. Research by Tan, et al. (2020) shows that the mental health of parents with children with cancer can be minimized with psychological interventions, providing social support, and coping strategies and involving parents in child care. Parents with children with cancer have a greater potential to experience depression, because feelings of fear, sadness, confusion are always on their minds (Misgiyanto & Susilawati, 2014).

#### **Depression level after being given art therapy**

The results of the study showed that there were 32 respondents who were not depressed after art therapy. Research according to Gerdner & Goldstein (2022) shows that art therapy is effective in helping parents with children with cancer in managing negative emotions. Research by Betancourt, et al. (2020) shows that art therapy can improve the mental health of parents with children with cancer because parents can express their feelings through drawing art. Art therapy is a drawing therapy that can improve cognitive skills so that it can balance skills in coping mechanisms and reduce depression (Yosep, 2016).

#### **The influence of art therapy on the level of depression in parents with children with cancer**

The results of the study showed that the p-value test results were 0.000, so art therapy can reduce the level of depression in parents with children with cancer. Depression is a mood disorder characterized by deep feelings, loss of interest in activities, and feelings of worthlessness that can affect a person's balance of brain neurotransmitters (serotonin and dopamine) (Kopala-Sibley, et.al., 2021). Art therapy is an art activity that can activate the parasympathetic nervous system which can reduce stress hormones, namely the hormone cortisol (Rosenberg, et al., 2013). According to Hirawan (2014), art therapy is a means of expressing feelings and emotions through image media so that it can reduce anxiety problems. Research by Abbing, et.al (2018) shows that art therapy is a treatment for depression, to improve cognitive and sensory motor functions, foster self-esteem and self-awareness, and foster emotional resilience. Research by Adriani & Satiadarma (2011) shows that Art Therapy given to mothers with children with cancer can provide insight to overcome the problems they have and help them make peace with their condition, so that they can direct themselves to change to be more positive in facing problems (Adriani & Satiadarma, 2011).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that art therapy can reduce anxiety levels in parents with children with cancer.

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