


Art therapy as a pediatric oncological therapeutic support

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ABSTRACT

The pediatric cancer treatment process is often invasive and causes several psychosocial losses in the individual's life, bringing major changes in their routine and perception of themselves. Art therapy, in turn, provides a therapeutic environment conducive to a non-verbal externalization of repressed feelings and thoughts, this process works through a creative approach and artistic resources. The objective of the present study is to identify the publications involving Art Therapy, Pediatric Oncology and Psychology, investigating the damage caused by invasive treatment and understanding whether art therapy could be used as a non-pharmacological support. The methodology used was the Integrative Review, having selected at the end of the search 10 articles between 2019 and 2023 that met the necessary criteria. The results show that Art Therapy has the competence to contribute positively to the psychosocial repercussions caused by invasive treatment, using art, creation and creativity as a stimulus, however, it was also evident the little material published in the last five years by the area of psychology.

Keywords: Psycho-oncology, Child and adolescent Oncology, Art Therapy, Hospital Psychology, Psychology.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the National Cancer Institute (INCA), cancer is characterized by the disordered growth of cells, which can result in the invasion of adjacent tissues or distant organs. This process leads to rapid cell division, culminating in the formation of tumors. Cancer treatment may involve different approaches, such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, bone marrow transplantation, or surgery, and it may be necessary to combine these methods (INCA, 2022).

Specifically in cases of tumors in childhood and adolescence, faster growth, shorter latency period, and a generally more invasive presentation are observed. However, it is important to note that these types of cancer tend to respond positively to treatment, which results in a higher probability of a favorable prognosis (Pereira, Nascimento, Cruz, Volc, and Tormen, 2023).

According to Law No. 8069 (1990), a child is considered to be an individual up to 12 years of age, while the adolescence phase comprises from 12 to 18 years of age. In this sense, the context after the diagnosis of a disease intensifies even more when it comes to pediatric oncology, as this can confront the patient with something unusual and feared.

The process of cancer treatment is often invasive and painful, causing a great emotional and psychological burden for the patient. This is due to the social and cultural symbology associated with the diagnosis, hormonal and body changes, exposure, alteration of routine, and several other aspects that negatively impact the life of the person undergoing treatment. This context can lead to a loss of identity, psychological distress, and damage to their interpersonal relationships and self-esteem. In this sense, it is essential to have a multidisciplinary and specialized team, whose objective is to reduce the impacts caused by prolonged treatment and minimize as much as possible the possible damage to the patient's mental and emotional health, consequently providing a better quality of life.

The pathology is culturally associated with pain, suffering and mourning, unexpected definitions that children and adolescents face, impacting all aspects of their lives. This brings with it the fear of the unknown and the frustration of not being able to fully experience their age group. Just as there is pain and suffering, there are also a variety of traditional and alternative treatments. Among them, psychotherapy, occupational therapy and art therapy stand out, which are the focus of this work.

Art therapy is a therapeutic process that uses artistic language as a means of communication and expression, focusing on aesthetic creation and artistic elaboration to promote the health of the individual (Brazilian Union of Art Therapy Association, 2019). Although it is a specialization aimed at health professionals, there is recognition of its practice in non-clinical environments by professionals in the areas of arts and pedagogy (Brazilian Union of Art Therapy Association).

It can be used as one of the therapeutic supports to cope with the disease and assist in the patient's recovery, highlighting the emotional and social aspects. It creates a playful environment that



encourages and guides individuals to deal with the condition in a more peaceful and dignified manner. This space provides security to express internal issues verbally or non-verbally, also contributing to strengthen the bonds between the patient, their family, friends and professionals involved in the process. The approach is humanized and individualized, taking into account the subjectivity and individual experiences of the subject.

Art therapy had its bases initially developed from the theories of Freud and Jung in the 20s and 30s. In Brazil, its introduction occurred at the beginning of the 20th century, being strongly influenced by the work of the two authors and by psychiatry. In this context of contribution, Osório César (1895 – 1979) and Nise da Silveira (1905 – 1999) stand out, both psychiatrists who incorporated art as part of the treatment of their patients in mental health institutions (Psicologia, Ciência e Profissão. 2014, p. 142-157). This approach built a new perspective on madness, emphasizing humanized care that is sensitive to the individual's subjectivity. This allowed people to create and elaborate their thoughts and feelings, resulting in a visible improvement in quality of life.

According to Monteiro (2018), it is necessary to combine exciting, inhibiting activities and regulation through the creation of new natural chains or by strengthening or weakening pre-existing circuits for learning to occur. According to the same author, who cites Hass Cohen and Findlay, the use of artistic resources and the establishment of a welcoming environment affect the brain regions related to cognition, emotion and sensation, which are fundamental to trigger psychological changes. These practices are linked to a state of adaptability and resilience achieved by the brain during art therapy (Monteiro, 2018, p. 11).

In Psychology, art presents itself as a strong mechanism of self-knowledge, strengthening human development skills such as communication. It also develops creativity to help the individual achieve their internal issues without them going through the process of rationalization. In other words, it is through creativity that a more direct contact is achieved to express emotional factors, building an interaction with subjective issues of the being without the need for verbal communication (Reis, 2014).

Considering the significant role of art therapy in promoting self-knowledge and emotional expression, as discussed in the psychological literature, there is a need to investigate its specific application in the context of pediatric oncology. Given that art is recognized as an effective vehicle to strengthen communication skills and explore internal issues in a non-rationalized way, it becomes relevant to understand how this therapeutic approach can contribute to the well-being and quality of life of children and adolescents undergoing cancer treatment.

In this sense, this article proposes an integrative review of intersectional studies between art therapy, pediatric oncology, and psychology, with the aim of evaluating the description of this therapy as a non-pharmacological support for pediatric cancer patients.



MATERIAL AND METHODS

For the elaboration of this article, the method of Integrative Literature Review (Souza, Silva & Carvalho, 2010) was adopted, under the guidance of the guiding question "What is the use of art therapy as a therapeutic support in pediatric cancer treatment?". The choice of this type of study is justified by its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of current knowledge on the subject based on evidence. Integrative review allows for the identification, analysis and synthesis of the results of independent studies that address the same subject (Souza, Silva & Carvalho, 2010).

The bibliographic survey began in October 2023 and concluded in March 2024, carried out in the SciELO, PePsic, LILACS and VHL databases, using the selected descriptors in Portuguese in order to direct the research accurately. Terms such as psycho-oncology, art therapy, oncology, pediatrics, art, and psychology were included. The data presented in this study refer to publications found up to March 2024, according to pre-established criteria.

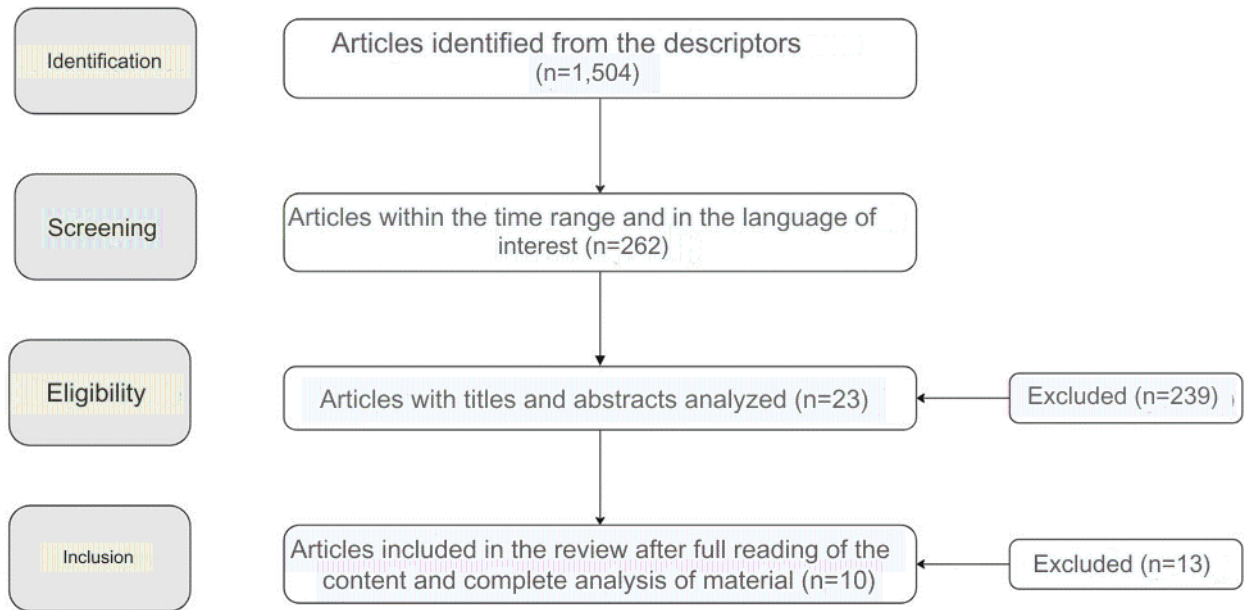
Articles published in the last five years (2019 to 2023) and exclusively in Portuguese were included in this search. Studies that did not address child and adolescent development during hospitalization, the impacts of cancer diagnosis, or that did not involve drawing and painting activities were excluded. For the analysis, adherence to the proposed theme and aspects such as the methodology used, the objectives and the clarity of the results presented were considered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At first, a total of 1,504 articles corresponding to the descriptors used were found, adding up the results of all the databases searched, however, only 262 fit the time interval and the language of interest.

The selection of articles followed in 2 stages, the first being the reading of the titles and abstracts, where 23 pre-selected articles remained, in sequence these publications were read in full, finally resulting in 10 studies that contemplate the necessary criteria for the present review, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Flowchart of the process of identification and selection of studies integrated into the review.



Source: Rosa and Schliemann (2024)

The articles identified at the end of the selection were organized in a spreadsheet, containing information such as their authorship, year of publication, title, types of study, sampling, objective and main results found, as shown in Table 1.

Tabela 1: Panorama descritivo dos dados coletados

Análise Bibliométrica			Análise de Conteúdo	
AUTORIA, ANO E TÍTULO	TIPO DE ESTUDO	AMOSTRAGEM	OBJETIVO	PRINCIPAIS RESULTADOS
Figueira, S. M. M., & Gameiro, M. G. H. (2020). Vivências dos adolescentes com doença hemato-oncológica na fase diagnóstica: estudo de cariz fenomenológico.	Investigação empírica de tipo qualitativo	9 adolescentes em tratamento na unidade de oncologia	Compreender as vivências dos adolescentes com doença hemato-oncológica na fase diagnóstica	Vivência particular da doença oncológica. Perceberam o diagnóstico como uma ameaça aos seus planos e sonhos.
Fonseca, L. G. A., Panciera, S. D. P., & Zihlmann, K. F. (2021). Hospitalização em Oncologia Pediátrica e Desenvolvimento Infantil: Interfaces entre Aspectos Cognitivos e Afetivos.	Pesquisa qualitativa	5 crianças entre 4 a 9 anos de idade diagnosticados com leucemia e em acompanhamento em um ambulatório especializado em oncologia	Compreender de que maneira o processo de adoecimento por neoplasia infantil, hospitalização e tratamento são compreendidos pelas crianças, considerando sua etapa de desenvolvimento cognitivo de acordo com a perspectiva piagetiana	Todas as crianças participantes mostraram compreensão de sua situação de adoecimento e tratamento, apresentando diferentes formas de enfrentamento. Além disso, todas ressaltaram uma posição otimista em relação às perspectivas de cura, independentemente do momento do desenvolvimento cognitivo
Silva, T., Foger, D., & Santos, P. (2019). Despersonalização do Paciente Oncológico Hospitalizado: Uma Revisão Integrativa.	Revisão Integrativa da literatura	Não se aplica	Identificar alguns fatores que promovem a despersonalização durante a hospitalização	Identificou-se a perda de autonomia, a falta de comunicação e a fragilidade do relacionamento dos profissionais da saúde como alguns dos motivos que promovem a despersonalização
Pelisson, G. S., & Sei, M. B. (2023) Grupo com crianças e o uso de recursos artístico-expressivos: um estudo qualitativo Vínculo	Estudo Qualitativo	Não se aplica	Investigar o uso de recursos artísticos-expressivos em um grupo terapêutico que visava a expressão e compreensão das emoções	Os resultados indicam que o uso de recursos artístico-expressivos possibilitou a expressão de emoções, elaboração de vivências e melhora na comunicação, além de promover melhorias nas relações familiares e interpessoais
Costa VC, Melo NRM, Nascimento MML, Leão DBM, Nascimento CAD, Bushatsky M. Percepção do Adolescente frente à sua Condição de Adoecimento Oncológico. (2021)	Pesquisa exploratória e descritiva de abordagem qualitativa	13 pacientes oncológico na faixa etária de 12 a <18 anos de idade	Compreender a percepção do adolescente frente à sua condição de adoecimento oncológico	Os sentimentos vivenciados com olhar do adolescente, próprios da faixa etária, muitas vezes diferem do sofrimento da família e da equipe de saúde
Pereira CIP, Nascimento IB, Cruz AS, Volc SM, Tormen TH. (2023). Impactos Psicossociais e na Qualidade de Vida do Tratamento Oncológico em Crianças e	Estudo transversal e descritivo	25 pacientes pediátricos oncológicos de 8 a 18 ano	Avaliar em crianças e adolescentes com diagnóstico de câncer os impactos psicossociais, de qualidade de vida e da presença de acompanhante durante	O impacto psicossocial e na qualidade de vida é razoavelmente grande em pacientes pediátricos oncológicos. Além disso, os mais jovens parecem sofrer um impacto psicossocial maior. Os pacientes se dizem mais felizes com a presença de acompanhante, e mais ansiosos na sua

Adolescentes.			os procedimentos	ausência
Lopes NCB, Viana ACG, Félix ZC, Santana JS, Lima PT, Cabral ALM. Abordagens lúdicas e tratamento oncológico infantil (2020).	Estudo qualitativo, descritivo e exploratório	10 crianças com idades entre 6 e 12 anos acolhidas em uma casa de apoio	Demonstrar como, na percepção da criança acometida por câncer, as abordagens lúdicas contribuem para que ela enfrente o tratamento oncológico	As crianças disseram que acham importante brincar durante o tratamento e reconhecem que, ao brincar, vivenciam uma variedade de sentimentos, como felicidade e bem-estar, mas também raiva por sentir dor devido à condição de estar doente
Magalhães DMA, Magalhães GA, Grigorovski N, Figueiredo Junior I. (2022). Dinâmica da Implantação de Humanização no Serviço de Radioterapia Pediátrica Instituto Nacional de Câncer José Alencar Gomes da Silva, Brasil.	Estudo descritivo	Não se aplica	Descrever a dinâmica do processo de humanização utilizado	Uma relação de confiança foi estabelecida entre a criança, sua família e a equipe profissional. Maior adesão, redução do absenteísmo e aparente redução de anestesia para o tratamento foram os resultados constatados.
Campos, E. M. P; Rodrigues, A. L. & Castanho, P. (2021). Intervenções Psicológicas na Psico-Oncologia.	Revisão de Literatura	Não se aplica	Divulgar a Psico-Oncologia como área de conhecimento que ampliou as possibilidades de atendimento ao portador de câncer seu familiar e equipe de saúde	A psicologia vem ao longo dos anos criando e desenvolvendo vértices de observação e compreensão, bem como técnicas de intervenção para lidar da forma mais efetiva com esta realidade tão complexa que é a doença oncológicas e suas consequências
Pereira CIP, Nascimento IB, Cruz AS, Volc SM, Tormen TH. (2023). Impactos Psicossociais e na Qualidade de Vida do Tratamento Oncológico em Crianças e Adolescentes.	Pesquisa de delineamento transversal e descritivo	pacientes de 8 a 18 anos e diagnóstico de neoplasia maligna.	Avaliar em crianças e adolescentes com diagnóstico de câncer os impactos psicossociais, de qualidade de vida e da presença de acompanhante durante os procedimentos.	O impacto psicossocial e na qualidade de vida é razoavelmente grande em pacientes pediátricos oncológicos. Além disso, os mais jovens parecem sofrer um impacto psicossocial maior. Os pacientes se dizem mais felizes com a presença de acompanhante, e mais ansiosos na sua ausência

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The ten selected studies reveal a varied distribution of publications over the years, with emphasis on 2023 and 2021, which feature three articles each. On the other hand, 2020 has two articles, while 2022 and 2019 registered only one publication each. In addition, among the articles chosen, six of them provide samples of individuals undergoing cancer treatment.

Regarding the stage of the individual's development addressed, we observed an equitable distribution: 33.3% of the studies focus on adolescence, another 33.3% focus on childhood, and the remaining 33.3% cover both stages of development.

The research methods used in the selected studies show a significant diversification, especially the qualitative studies, which seek to investigate the psychosocial impacts of treatment on the individual experiences of hospitalized children and adolescents, totaling five hospitalized articles



(five articles). In sequence, the presence of quantitative studies (three articles) is observed, with the literature reviews having the lowest representativeness (two articles).

The articles complement each other by addressing the psychosocial repercussions of treatment, emphasizing the sudden change in routine after diagnosis, which results in withdrawal from school, friends, home and family. It becomes evident that this context impacts not only the biological aspect of the individual, but also their social and emotional aspects (Pereira, Nascimento, Cruz, Volc, and Tormen, 2023). During hospitalization, the depersonalization of the diagnosed subject occurs, being reduced to a number of beds and, often, only to the disease they have, with their individual characteristics made invisible (Silva, Foger and Santos, 2019).

Fonseca, Panciera, and Zhilmann (2021) mention the reflections of Araújo (2004) to discuss aspects related to progress in pediatric psycho-oncology, highlighting that this advance goes beyond medical improvements to face cancer. However, there is a consensus among researchers on the need for further investigations into the psychosocial aspects involved in the treatment of childhood cancer, as highlighted by Menezes, Passareli, Drude, Santos, and Valle (2007, Apud Fonseca, Panciera, and Zihlmann, 2021). Regarding Art Therapy, only one article was found, evidencing the scarcity of studies on this theme.

Pelisson and Se (2023) refer to Sei (2011) to highlight the role of art therapy. The authors argue that this process facilitates the expression of feelings and emotions through artistic resources, serving as a non-verbal communication channel. This perspective is in line with the definition of the Brazilian Union of Art Therapy Associations (UBAAT, 2019), which conceptualizes art therapy as a therapeutic approach that values creativity and artistic expression. This practice helps in the promotion, rehabilitation and recovery of health, in addition to preventing injuries, enabling the non-verbal communication of feelings and conflicts.

Despite having been published after the deadline established for the analysis of this study, the article by Junior (2012), which is based on Sei's 2011 book, highlights the potential of art therapy as a therapeutic intervention strategy. The goal of this approach is to promote a better quality of life by utilizing artistic materials to achieve this end. The text especially highlights the resources of the visual arts, describing this practice as "artistic-expressive". In addition, Junior (2012) emphasizes that Art Therapy facilitates the understanding of the individual and family dynamics of the subject, establishing itself as a valuable technique for treatment in institutions. These ideas corroborate the perspectives presented by Sei (2011).

In general, the studies analyzed point to a low number of articles that deal with art therapy as an integral part of therapeutic support, along with other multidisciplinary approaches. Even among the few materials found, a limited connection with psychology was observed in the synthesis of evidence, and this theme was predominantly addressed in the context of nursing.



CONCLUSION

Pediatric cancer treatment is not restricted to the biological aspect, but also significantly impacts the social, emotional, and identity aspects of patients. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a multidisciplinary approach that takes into account these different aspects, aiming to mitigate the damage caused by hospitalization and invasive treatments. This implies looking at the patient in an integral way, not only focusing on the disease, but providing resources that allow them to understand and validate their experience.

In this context, art therapy emerges as a technique recognized in the classic and reference literature, offering a form of communication that enables expression even without the individual's verbalization. By establishing an environment conducive to the externalization of feelings and thoughts, art therapy becomes a specialized resource for therapeutic support.

However, it is important to note that, as a therapeutic support in the pediatric oncology context, art therapy has been little explored in the last five years by the scientific literature in Portuguese. This raises pertinent questions, such as: Would art therapy be an underused technique? Could the fact that art therapy is not taught in psychology courses influence its use? Has pediatric oncology already recognized the potential of art therapy? These questions highlight the importance of periodic reviews of the material and an active search for articles in other languages, aiming to expand knowledge about the role of art therapy in the treatment of pediatric cancer.



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