



# The Effect of Creative Arts on Depression and Quality of Life

Anna Livingston, B.S., OTS<sup>1</sup>; Jason Vice, PhD, OTR/L, SCLV<sup>1</sup>, & Lisa Fuller, OT/L<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Occupational Therapy, University of Alabama at Birmingham

<sup>2</sup>Restore Therapy: Jacksonville Health and Rehabilitation

## Introduction

As of 2022, 1.3 million individuals are residing in a skilled nursing facility (SNF)<sup>1</sup>. Of these residents, 46% have a current diagnosis of depression<sup>4</sup>. Creative arts are an effective treatment method that have been proven to lower levels of depression and increase self-esteem in nursing home residents<sup>2</sup>. Creative arts are also effective in addressing and improving various areas of focus in occupational therapy such as mood, quality of life, well-being, communication, and socialization<sup>3</sup>. This study aims to examine the effects of creative arts on depression and quality of life in nursing home residents—specifically, how placing the artwork in their immediate environment where it can be viewed daily affects levels of depression and quality of life.

## Methods

### Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:

- 65 and older with a clinical diagnosis of depression
- Participants were excluded if they had a diagnosis of dementia
- No exclusions were made based on race, gender, ethnicity, etc.
- Informed consent was obtained prior to the enrolling in the study

### Assessments Administered:

- Baseline assessments include:
  - Demographics, the Geriatric Depression Scale: (GDS), and the McGill Quality of Life Questionnaire (MQOL) Part C
- GDS and MQOL Part C re-administered 1-week post-intervention

### Intervention:

- One-hour creative art session, once per week, for 8 weeks
- After each session, the participant's artwork was placed in their immediate environment until the next session, when it was replaced with the most current piece of art

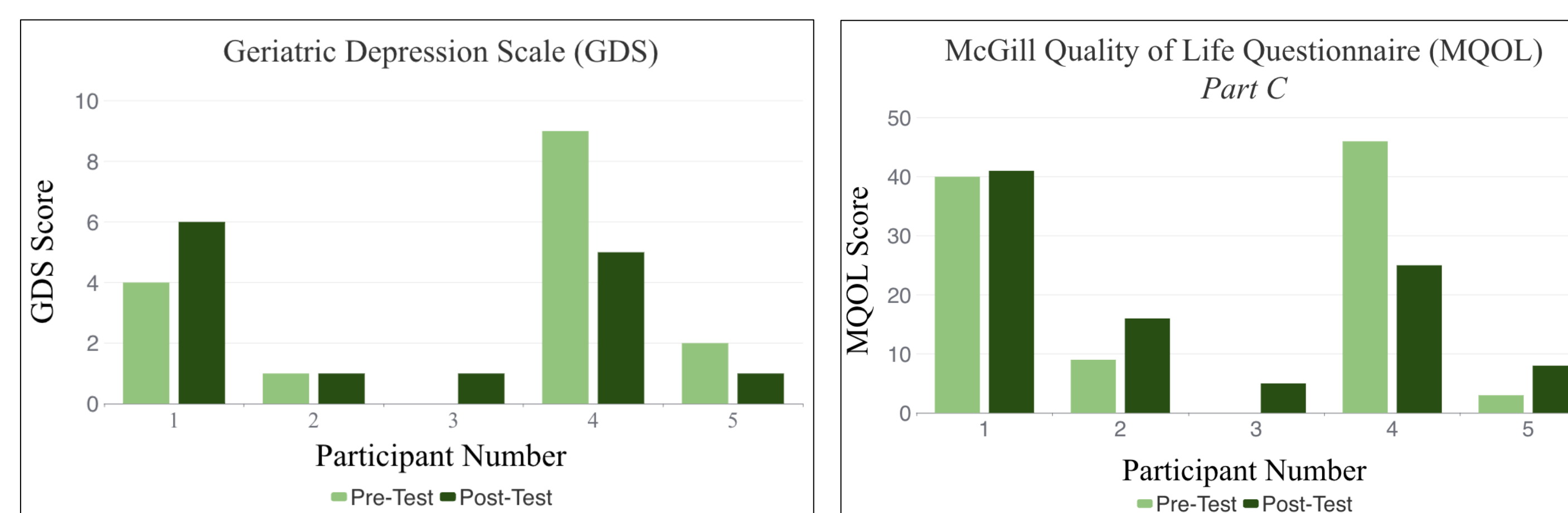
### Weekly Interventions

- Week 1: Painted canvas tote
- Week 2: Beaded bracelet
- Week 3: Tissue paper flowers
- Week 4: Stone photo holders
- Week 5: Dried flower dish
- Week 6: Balloon pumpkins
- Week 7: Pumpkin painting
- Week 8: Christmas ornament



## Results

- 7 participants were enrolled, 5 participants completed the study
- Initial scores from the GDS and MQOL Part C were compared to post-intervention scores
- Lower scores on GDS = lower depression
- Lower scores on MQOL = higher quality of life
- GDS:  $p$ -value = 0.36,  $t$ -value = -0.38
- MQOL:  $p$ -value = 0.46,  $t$ -value = -0.12
- No significant difference was found between pre- and post-intervention scores on either assessment



## Discussion

### Findings

- While there is existing research to support the use of creative arts in treating depression and improving quality of life, there is limited research regarding how strategic placement of artwork affects these variables.
- 2 participants reported decreased depressive symptoms, while another 2 reported an increase in depressive symptoms. 1 participant reported no change at all.
- 80% of participants reported worsening QoL by the end of the study.
- While these results were not statistically significant, more research is recommended to discover the continued therapeutic effects of creative arts.
- Subjectively, participants stated enjoying the study and that they experienced decreased levels of sadness and depression because of the intervention.

## Discussion continued

### Limitations

- Length of stay in long-term care was not considered as part of recruitment. Participants residing at the facility for years may have acclimated to their environment and gained acceptance of their situation. As a result, they may have reported higher quality of life and lower levels of depression as compared with residents who were admitted more recently.
- While participants were instructed to keep their artwork in their immediate environment, there was no way to control where the artwork was placed following the weekly intervention.
- Assessments were administered before a therapeutic relationship was established with the PI; therefore, answers at the beginning of the study may not have been as honest as answers at the end.
- Participants were not excluded based on any physical limitations that prevented them from completing arts and crafts independently; therefore, participants may have benefited more from the study were they able to complete the interventions independently.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, creative arts have been proven to decrease levels of depression and increase quality of life. While the participants appeared to benefit subjectively, more research is needed to support the use of creative arts and strategic art placement in nursing home residents.

## References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, December 15). *FASTSTATS - Nursing Home Care*.
- Ching-Teng, Y., Ya-Ping, Y., & Yu-Chia, C. (2019). Positive effects of art therapy on depression and self-esteem of older adults in nursing homes. *Social Work in Health Care*, 58(3), 324–338.
- Durocher, E., Njelesani, J., & Crosby, E. (2021). Art activities in long-term care: A scoping review. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 89(1), 36–43.
- Harris-Kojetin, L., Sengupta, M., Lendon, J.P., Rome, V., Valverde, R., Caffrey, C. (2019). Long-term care providers and services users in the United States, 2015-2016. *Vital Health Stat. National Center for Health Statistics*, 3(43), p. 76.

## Acknowledgement & Contact Information

For any questions or concerns, please contact Anna Livingston at [abliving@uab.edu](mailto:abliving@uab.edu).