

Community Art Therapy and Caribbean Adolescents

Maureen Lorient, Cadin Newby, Dr. Karina Donald

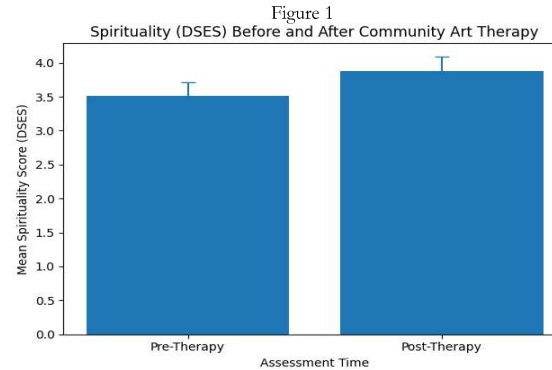
Background & Significance

Community art therapy is a distinct approach in art therapy practice that involves the input of members of a community setting on identifying their internal and external needs for community well-being. Part of the broader art therapy practice seeks to uplift groups of individuals, with data indicating its potential to address communal trauma. (Kapitan et al., 2011) However, much research has been concentrated on the West, with few exceptions such as Huang et al.'s (2021) research on youth in Taiwan. In the Caribbean, despite an extensive history of artistic culture and influences (Griffith, 2005), there has been little research. Youth have also often not been the main focus, with most art therapy research conducted with adults. Existing Caribbean research has emphasized spirituality but focused primarily on the French Caribbean or adults (Valdejuli & Elliot, 2023; 2025). In a culturally, linguistically, and age-diverse region, this study examines how Community art therapy can affect youth self-esteem, religiosity, and **spirituality**.

Methods

- 90 youths from the Anglo-Caribbean nations of St. Lucia and Grenada, between 12-16 years, took part in community art therapy sessions sponsored by a non-profit faith-based organization. The intent was to assess impacts on self-esteem, religiosity, and **spirituality**.
- Participants completed surveys that contained:
 - The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a 10-question survey measuring self-esteem.
 - The Duke Religion Index (DUREL) to analyze organizational, non-organizational, and intrinsic religiosity.
 - The Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES), a 16-item measurement on **spirituality** within participants' environments.
- A repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine the impact of community art therapy on self-esteem, religiosity and spirituality from before and after the study.
- Box's Test of Equality ensured homogeneity of variance.
- Multivariate results were analyzed, followed by univariate follow-up analysis to determine study outcomes.

References



The following chart highlights the spiritual differences before and after the study, using the DSES Scale for reference.



Emotion was emphasized across the artwork of many children. With an emphasis on color and facial expression.



Results

- A univariate follow-up analysis examined self-esteem, religiosity, and spirituality before and after community art therapy.
- All three experienced some change, but only spirituality showed a statistically significant increase.
- **Spirituality increased from 3.51 to 3.88 after the session (figure 1).**
- This indicates spirituality was the only factor to show a direct, statistically significant increase.
- Community art therapy can be an effective way for adolescents to tap into their spiritual awareness and sense of personal meaning.
- While MANOVA showed positive effects across all variables, univariate analysis confirmed spirituality as the only factor with a statistically significant positive impact, with no significant change in self-esteem.

Discussion

Prior studies have also highlighted the spiritual impact of art therapy in the Caribbean. Valdejuli and Evans (2025) found spiritual emphasis induced long-term benefits in participants in the French Caribbean. Anglo-Caribbean nations also hold spirituality closely, which may explain similar results.

Researchers were surprised that self-esteem and religiosity were not significantly affected, especially given coordination with church-affiliated childcare programs. Limitations include data collection through religious organizations and focus on only portions of the Caribbean (St. Lucia and Grenada), which may not reflect the entire region.

Community Art Therapy can be a significant resource for youth in spiritually active regions. The Caribbean demonstrates that engaging with spirituality through community art therapy can have long-term impacts across diverse religious contexts. Future research using different spiritual observation frameworks may provide more conclusive evidence and expand application across diverse settings.

Acknowledgements

The researchers acknowledge the contributions of research assistants Evia Fleming and Cole Lin, as well as all organizations that provided the setting to conduct this study. Acknowledgements also go to all of the Caribbean youth who have participated and have shown their incredible artistic capabilities.