

# Anger Among Adolescents in Juvenile Detention Centre: Art Therapy and Its Effects

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**Abstract**— Anger is a natural humane reaction when faced by an unwanted condition. Anger has a close relation with negative emotion. In the juvenile detention centre, there are many potential causes of anger such as lack of freedom and a very controlled environment. One of the solutions suggested to reduce anger is through art therapy. Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy using art as its main media to express and communicate a person's feeling. In this research, art therapy is used so that the subject could express and reduce their anger. The participants of this research are eight male adolescents with the age range between 15 to 18. The methodology of this research is quasi-experiment with one group pretest-posttest design. The art therapy intervention is conducted in six sessions with one session per week. Based on the result of the intervention for six sessions, art therapy could reduce the six out of eight participants' anger. There are no significant changes in anger expression

**Keywords:** anger, art therapy, adolescent, juvenile detention centre

## I. INTRODUCTION

Criminal activity today is not only conducted by adults, but also by adolescents. According to statistics, the number of crimes conducted by adolescents has significantly increased from 730 cases in 2015 to 1851 cases in 2016 [1]. A juvenile detention centre officer says that the number of adolescents in 2017 in the said centre is about 70. In the following year, the number increase to almost 100 adolescent inmates

In the juvenile detention centre, there are strict rules and regulations that restrict the inmates' freedom. They are not allowed to move around the area freely without the officer's permission.

The officers keep a keen eye on the inmate's every movement when they are in the common area. The adolescent inmates also need to adjust to the new environment, new rules, and friends. Communication with family and friends outside the centre are also restricted to visiting hours. If the inmate is affiliated with a rule-

breaking incident such as fights, he/she would be confined in the isolation room and would be forbidden to take part in any activity. Their visitation rights would also be taken away. These rules and regulations which restrict the inmates' freedom cause anger and boredom. However, they are powerless to do anything against the rule as they fear to receive even worse punishment. In addition, the inmates should learn to put up with other inmate's teasing/taunting or forced to accept everything as a joke no matter how angry they feel. Some adolescent inmates admit that they have a huge urge to punch his friends but did not execute the thought for fear of the isolation room punishment. They would try to ignore and distract their mind from the incident

A study by Howell, Day, Buhner, Jauncey, Parker, and Heseltine [2] found that being in a detention centre is highly correlated with anger. This anger is highly related to problems such as aggression, violence, and indiscipline. Other studies also show that anger is the root of aggressive and/or violent behaviour [3]; [4]; [2].

Full self-control is required to stop one-self from executing aggressive and/or violent behaviour under the influence of anger [5]. An adolescent is more likely to give in to aggressive and/or violence drive than adults. First, the amygdala in adolescent is highly reactive compared to an adult. Adolescence is more likely to make an emotional decision rather than a rational one. This means that adolescents are more likely to behave based on their surging emotion before carefully weigh their judgements. The frontal lobe responsible for rational decision making has yet to fully develop, this shows that adolescent is more likely to engage in irrational behaviour based on impulse/drive, such as anger [6]; [7]; [8].

There are various intervention methods to reduce anger, one of which is art therapy. In 2011, the Florida Department of Corrections, an intern in the Florida State University Graduate Art Therapy Program, and the Wakulla Correctional Institution develop the Art Therapy Anger Management Protocol. There are several ways where art therapy is incorporated with a cognitive behaviour approach in managing anger such as the choices cycle. The purpose of art therapy is to allow inmates to express anger in the form of art so that inmates have a better understanding of their

aggressive thoughts and its behavioural expression and how others influence their behaviours. The process of art making promotes relaxation and sublimates the negative emotion [9].

A study conducted by Alavinezhad, Mousavi, and Sohrabi [10] showed that art therapy is effective to improve self-esteem and reduce anger in aggressive children ageing 7 – 11 years old. Art therapy provides a safe space for children to express their anger, allowing children to communicate their feeling in a non-threatening way. In the study, children were asked to express the impact of their anger and aggression through drawing, and comment on their work. The process of drawing involves both imagination and art making which helps to transform destructive aggression into constructive strength. During the intervention, children learn new skills and problem-solving techniques. There is no right or wrong way of drawing, children are free to use their creativity to express themselves. This helps to improve self-assertiveness in children which in turn improve their self-esteem. This study aims to explore the impact of art therapy in reducing anger among adolescent inmates

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

### A. Research Participants

The participants of this study are 8 male adolescent inmates ageing 15 – 18 years old, currently serving time in a juvenile detention centre in Jakarta. The sampling method used is non-probability purposive sampling.

### B. Measures

Anger Expression Scale for Children (AESC) is a 26-item self-report inventory to measure anger among children and adolescent. This questionnaire is developed by Steele, Legerski, Nelson, and Phipps [11]. It is made up of four constructs, i.e. trait anger, anger out, anger in, and anger control. In this study, we focus on the trait anger, i.e. measuring how often participant experience feeling of anger and drive to express anger. This scale is developed for children and adolescent ageing 7 to 17-year old, rating each item in the 4-point scale from almost never to almost always. It comprises of items such as 'I feel angry'. A higher score indicates higher anger whilst lower score indicates lower anger.

### C. Art Therapy Intervention

The art therapy intervention is conducted in 6 sessions, conducted twice a week. The art activities are designed to train inmates to express and reduce anger. First, participants would be asked to do free-drawing as an introduction to art activities. The purpose of this step is to build rapport and adapting to the method of intervention. Second, the participant is asked to explore their emotion in the form of art. The purpose of this step is to increase participant's awareness of his own emotion and learn to express them, especially the negative emotions such as anger. Third, to explore the bodily sensation through art. The purpose of this step is to increase awareness of the problem, and hence able to attempt to solve it. Fourth, the participant expresses their 'new self'. The purpose of

this step is to gain insight into themselves and their potentials [12].

### D. Statistical Analysis

Collected data are processed by SPSS software. Non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Test is used to measure the significance of the pre-test and post-test differences.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After 6 sessions of art therapy intervention, there is an overall decrease in anger score of 2.38 point, i.e. from 20.38 to 18.00. Six out of 8 participant shows a decrease in anger score from the Anger Expression Scale for Children. 1 participant shows no difference in anger score and 1 participant shows a 1-point increase in anger score. Non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test shows that the difference between the pre-test and post-test anger score is significant. This indicates that art therapy can significantly reduce anger among 8 participating adolescent inmates ( $Z = -2.124$ ,  $p = .034$ ).

Table 1: Anger pre-test post-test result

No	Participant	Pre-test	Post-test
1	AJ	20	18
2	DK	19	19
3	AG	24	15
4	VK	17	14
5	RW	19	18
6	FA	14	15
7	AL	27	25
8	RF	23	20
<i>mean</i>		20.38	18.00

Drawing activity could act as a stress reliever and helps the individual to understand themselves better and prepare themselves in facing possible conflicts [13]. During the session, the participants are guided to identify their anger and the way to cope with it. The process of drawing comforts and gives a relaxing experience [9]. Art therapy facilitates anger expression in a different way, which is by creating an art product. The drawing wasn't necessarily needed to be good aesthetically but emphasize more on the expression of anger. Painting serves as media to safely express anger. The anger could be expressed in a more constructive and productive way in the form of art [10]; [9]; [14]; [15]; [16]. Expression emotion through drawing allows the creator to freely explore their feeling without any barrier such as language and words, which could lead to insight [14]; [15]; [16].

Among the eight participants, AG showed the most reduction of anger (9 points). Among the eight participants, AG showed great interest in the activity. AG stated that he liked to draw, but do not have the proper skill in the field. AG said that he often practice drawing during his free time in the centre (personal communication, 2018). His interest in drawing could be a reason why drawing activity suits him as a media to express anger. This could explain the significantly higher reduction of anger in AG compared to

other participants. Among eight participants, anger score of DK didn't change and FA increased by 1 point. One of the reasons is the external factor, that is the occurrence of conflict just before the post-test is conducted.

An interesting fact found in this study was all six subjects have a poor relationship with their family, especially with the father figure. The issues related to the participant's father involves: (a) grudge against father who mistreat mother, (b) conflict with father who physically and verbally abuse participant and other family member, (c) neglected by father since mother passed away, (d) avoiding abusive, drunk father, and (e) father busy working and has no time to communicate with participant. Studies show that lack of parental involvement in the child's life is one of the risk factors for juvenile delinquency [17]. The absence of a father figure is also highly correlated with involvement in groups/gangs. Children with no proper father figure tend to join groups/gangs for a sense of belonging and acceptance. The presence of a father figure is found to significantly reduce the risk of a child's involvement in gangs/groups engaging in delinquency [18]. In this study, all 8 participants admit that their first encounter with law-breaking activities is due to conforming with their gang/group. Initially, the participants are invited and eventually, the participant takes a turn to invite other members in their gang. Conflict with the father figure is also expressed through the participant's art. Philosophically, the sun is a symbol of a figure of authority or father figure [19]. Many of the drawings involve sun(s), especially when they are asked to express their negative feelings.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The overall decrease in the participant's anger after 6 sessions of art therapy is significant. This indicates that art therapy is an effective media of intervention to express and reduce anger. Out of 8 participants, 6 participants show a decrease in anger, 1 participant shows no change in anger score, and 1 participant shows a 1-point increase in anger score.

This study has several limitations. First, the intervention setting was not conducive to conduct a counselling session which causes the process to be interrupted by an external factor. Second, some sessions are interrupted or postponed due to clash in schedule with the juvenile detention centre's activity. If there is a clash in the schedule, participants should prioritise the activities conducted by the detention centre. Third, during the intervention session, some of the participants were transferred to another detention centre. The transfer hinders the intervention session and also affect the participant's psychological state.

Future studies can further develop this study by taking samples from a different detention centre, gender, and age group. Control group can also be used to compare the impact of the therapy with those without structured intervention. Future studies can explore different media of art intervention such as clay, dance, music, or drama.

Juvenile detention centre could utilise drawing activities as a means to facilitate adolescent inmates in expressing their anger. Art therapy is a flexible method of

intervention; it can be conducted not only individually but also as a group. Group art session between inmates and officers can increase bond and communication by engaging in the same activity in the same room. One of the sources of anger among inmates is boredom and feeling isolated. Juvenile detention centre could provide more activities which could be accessed by all inmates equally. Activities are not restricted to only art activities. The activities may be skill-related such as automobile-repair or recreation such as playing soccer together.

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