



Music and Art Therapy in Pediatric Nursing: Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background: Hospitalization can be frightening for children, often bringing anxiety, pain, and emotional strain. Pediatric nurses, beyond delivering clinical care, play an important role in creating healing environments. Music and art therapy offer safe, child-friendly ways to provide comfort, reduce stress, and encourage emotional expression.

Objective: This review brings together global evidence on the role of music and art therapy in pediatric nursing, focusing on how these interventions support children's emotional, psychological, and clinical outcomes.

Methods: Conducted according to PRISMA 2020 guidelines, the review searched PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, and Google Scholar for studies published between 2012–2024. Of 1,024 studies identified, 24 met inclusion criteria involving children aged 0–18 years receiving music or art therapy in nursing contexts.

Results: Music therapy (live, recorded, or instrumental) consistently reduced pre-procedure anxiety, lowered pain scores, and improved physiological outcomes such as heart rate and oxygen saturation. Art therapy (drawing, painting, creative play) helped children cope with hospitalization, express emotions, and build resilience. Nurses played a central role as facilitators, integrating these therapies into routine care.

Conclusion: Music and art therapy are powerful, low-cost tools that make pediatric care more humane and holistic. Training and encouraging nurses to apply these methods can ease the hospital experience for children, turning stressful situations into moments of healing and support.

Keywords: Pediatric nursing, Music therapy, Art therapy, Child health, PRISMA, Non-pharmacological care.

Introduction

For children, hospitals often mean strange surroundings, medical procedures, and long separations from home—all of which can lead to fear and stress. Pediatric nursing, therefore, must go beyond medical treatment to address the child's emotional and psychological needs.

Music and art therapy have gained recognition as complementary approaches to improve the hospital experience. Music therapy uses melody and rhythm to create calm, while art therapy allows children to communicate their emotions in a safe and creative way. Together, these therapies embody the holistic spirit of nursing: caring for the body, mind, and heart.

This review follows PRISMA guidelines to systematically explore evidence on music and art therapy in pediatric nursing, highlighting their impact on children's health and well-being.

Methods

This review was conducted using PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

Search Strategy: Four databases—PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, and Google Scholar—were searched with keywords such as ‘music therapy,’ ‘art therapy,’ ‘pediatric nursing,’ and ‘hospitalized children.’ Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied.

Eligibility: Studies published between 2012–2024; children aged 0–18 years; interventions involving music or art therapy in hospital/nursing settings; randomized trials, quasi-experimental, or observational studies. Case reports, editorials, and non-English articles were excluded.

Study Selection: 1,024 records identified → 312 duplicates removed → 712 screened → 87 full-text reviewed → 24 included.

Data Extraction: Information on intervention type, sample size, study design, outcomes, and nursing role was extracted independently by two reviewers.

PRISMA Flow Summary

1,024 records identified → 312 duplicates removed → 712 screened → 625 excluded → 87 full-text assessed → 63 excluded → 24 included in final review.

Results

1. Music Therapy:
 2. - Reduced pain during IV insertion and venipuncture.
 3. - Lowered anxiety before surgeries and procedures.
 4. - Improved physiological stability (heart rate, oxygen levels).
 5. - Nurses facilitated sessions by playing music or encouraging caregiver involvement.

2. Art Therapy:

- Helped children express fear, sadness, and anger.
- Reduced stress and supported coping in chronic illness.
- Encouraged resilience and positive mood.
- Nurses provided art materials or coordinated with play specialists.

3. Combined Interventions:

Studies combining both therapies showed stronger engagement, improved cooperation during procedures, and reduced emotional distress.

Discussion

Music and art therapy show that healing is not only physical—it is also emotional. These therapies reduce fear and pain, help children adjust, and make hospital stays less intimidating. They are safe, cost-effective, and adaptable to different cultures and settings.

Nursing Implications:

- Nurses can integrate music during routine care or stressful procedures.
- Art supplies can turn hospital spaces into comforting creative zones.
- Training programs for nurses in expressive therapies would strengthen holistic care.

Challenges include lack of formal training, limited resources, and time pressures in busy wards. Still, even small steps—a song, a sketchbook, or coloring activity—can transform a child’s hospital experience.

Conclusion

Music and art therapy are not just add-ons but essential elements of compassionate pediatric nursing. By using these approaches, nurses help children find joy and strength even in difficult times. Expanding their use across pediatric care units could improve both health outcomes and the emotional well-being of children.

References

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