



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Socialization of The Elderly Through Art Therapy in Cultural Institutions: A Practical Aspect

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Art therapy can significantly aid the elderly. It contributes to developing new skills, improving physical and psychological well-being, uncovering creative potential, and enhancing emotional health. The purpose of this article is to establish the necessity of art therapy as a means of socialization for older adults. To analyze personality development characteristics in this age group, a survey was conducted among 20 participants at a rural club in the Belgorod region. The survey revealed that many participants feel isolated and lack social interaction. The work of cultural institutions should focus not only on active leisure but also on the socialization of the elderly. Art therapy creates opportunities for the elderly to engage in cultural activities and realize their creative abilities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, the elderly population is growing, and leisure services for them are expanding to meet the increased demand (Kurgansky, 2024). However, as older adults constitute the fastest-growing demographic and the number of those with disabilities rises, special attention should be given to providing leisure services for seniors with moderate impairments or lower levels of functioning (Khrapylina, 2010, p. 138).

With age, a person's social status changes, as does their health and lifestyle (Kharkovskaya, 2023). The elderly tend to become less active (Kashina, 2023; Zamira, 2024). Social perceptions often paint seniors as people who no longer live fulfilling lives but are simply "waiting out" their time. This viewpoint influences their self-perception and behavior, often resulting in feelings of isolation (Morozova, 2023). In such cases, art therapy can serve as a beneficial outlet (Gasyimova, 2017, p. 285).

The elderly, many of whom live with various health conditions, can benefit from art therapy (Denisova, 2023). It uses creative activities to help maintain mental sharpness and dexterity in a supportive environment. Creative interests can become a hobby, providing the elderly with a sense of accomplishment through art therapy activities.

Art therapy not only prevents negative moods but also builds social networks and teaches communication skills, as group activities foster experience sharing and interaction, which are crucial for older adults. Tailored programs are developed to meet the needs of the elderly, ensuring that leisure activities based on art therapy techniques fully engage all groups in this age category (Naumova, 2015, p. 99).

Developing leisure programs for the elderly is essential. All forms of art therapy, such as music therapy, drama therapy, and dance therapy, have positive impacts. Through these activities, seniors satisfy their needs for communication and participation in cultural activities. Cultural institutions, by organizing leisure, give them a sense of importance and relevance.

Older adults, particularly retirees, need diverse and engaging activities to stay active and mentally alert. This is why cultural institutions create and organize special programs and events for the elderly.

Cultural institutions host themed meetings, concerts, exhibitions, lectures, and workshops for seniors. Here, they can attend theater performances, learn new crafts, participate in art exhibitions, or simply spend time with like-minded individuals. These activities help the elderly feel like integral members of society, preventing social and emotional isolation (Plekhanova, 2012, p. 178).

A rapidly developing area within cultural institutions' services for seniors is interest clubs and hobby groups. These clubs offer not only entertainment but also opportunities for socializing, learning, and self-improvement.

Additionally, excursions and trips for seniors are a significant part of cultural institutions' activities. These excursions allow them to visit various museums, theaters, and other cultural sites, broadening their horizons, providing new experiences, and allowing them to enjoy social interactions.

One of the most effective and popular practices cultural institutions offer for the elderly is art therapy.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Art therapy represents a creative process aimed at assisting individuals with various physical or psychological limitations. The method of actively involving older adults in art and creative activities enables them to reveal their potential, express their feelings and emotions, and strengthen connections and communication with others (Dementyeva, 2005, p. 98).

As a result, elderly participants in art therapy not only gain aesthetic satisfaction but also a range of psychological, emotional, and physical benefits. Art therapy stimulates creative and cognitive thinking in older adults, strengthens memory, supports cognitive functions, and helps prevent intellectual and emotional decline.

Additionally, art therapy promotes social integration among older adults by creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, support, and understanding. Group activities provide opportunities for sharing ideas and emotions, as well as building meaningful relationships with other participants (Smirnova, 2012, p. 76).

Thus, art therapy in cultural institutions gives elderly people the opportunity to enjoy art, develop their creative will, and socialize, which contributes to their overall well-being and improves their quality of life. The creative process associated with expressing one's "self" through art can help individuals address problems, develop and manage their behavior and emotions, reduce stress, and enhance self-esteem and awareness.

Art therapy is based on the belief that creating art heals and enhances life. Originally developed as treatment for emotionally troubled children and adults, it provides a safe and structured environment to help participants express their thoughts or feelings verbally or non-verbally.

Examples of therapeutic interventions include drawing, painting, dancing, music, and art discussions. Individuals are free to choose from various forms to express suppressed thoughts and feelings related to conflicts, traumatic experiences, fantasies, dreams, and self-image (Chernosvitov, 2018, p. 24).

Art therapy is frequently used to treat individuals with dementia—a growing population in need of ongoing creative programming to meet their changing needs. The main focus of creative therapy programs for this demographic is on reducing anxiety and improving focus.

People with dementia often feel isolated due to their condition. This experience can lead to significant anxiety and often results in depression, particularly in the early stages when the individual is aware of their confusion. Communication can also be challenging for someone with dementia, adding to their sense of isolation (Shchanina, 2006, p. 48).

Art therapy can stimulate communication, socialization, and self-expression, especially for clients in the later stages of dementia.

Art therapy is grounded in the belief that self-expression through artistic creativity has therapeutic value for those seeking healing or a deeper understanding of themselves and their personality.

Art therapists understand the role that color, texture, and various artistic mediums can play in the therapeutic process and how these tools can help reveal thoughts, feelings, and psychological states.

Art therapy combines psychotherapy and forms of socio-cultural activity as a unique, independent form of therapy, though it is also used in conjunction with other types of therapy.

The primary goals of cultural institutions in implementing art therapy activities are:

- Overcoming social isolation;
- Increasing self-esteem in the elderly;
- Recognizing the value of older adults through the realization of their creative potential (Socio-cultural activities, 2024).

Art therapy addresses significant social issues:

- Frequent loneliness and isolation among the elderly;
- Feelings of helplessness;
- Limited financial resources.

Creative activities focused on various themes are an effective approach to implementing art therapy activities. These creative expressions can be supplemented by writing or music projects, providing participants with diverse means of self-expression. Materials should be large and easy to handle, and introductory activities should build on existing skills rather than attempting to teach entirely new activities. Once participants are comfortable with the creative process, new techniques can be introduced (Yukhnyak, 2016, p. 240).

Art therapy is a relatively new concept in assisting individuals, based on the positive emotions that arise from engaging in creativity. Art therapy encompasses all forms of art. Today, art therapy is actively evolving, with several effective methods, and leisure center staff select techniques based on the individual characteristics of the elderly person or group.

Well-chosen methods of art therapy allow the elderly to "come back to life," prevent self-isolation, and improve their image and quality of life.

Art therapy can greatly benefit older adults. Through its various forms, individuals can fully immerse themselves in creative activity, acquire new skills and abilities, which positively impact their physical and mental health, unleash their creative potential, form new social connections, and simply improve their emotional state.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to establish the necessity of art therapy as a means of socialization for the elderly.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To determine the characteristics of personal development among the elderly and the need for art therapy technologies in cultural institutions, we conducted a survey at the Galushkov Rural Club in the Veydelevsky District of the Belgorod Region. The control sample consisted of 20 people.

Among the respondents, 30% were men and 70% were women. The participants' ages ranged from approximately 65 to 82 years. The survey was conducted between February and March 2024.

The study focused on elderly individuals who are active visitors and members of club activities at the Galushkov Rural Club.

The survey included the following questions:

1. "What is beauty?" - a creative question without suggested answers;
2. "How many times this year have you attended the theater, museum, exhibition, or concert?"
3. "Do you think this is enough to be considered a cultured person?" - yes/no question
4. "Do you have a hobby?" - yes/no question
5. "Which type of art do you prefer?" - multiple-choice question
6. "Do you enjoy participating in competitions or festivals?" - yes/no question
7. "Are you familiar with the concept of creativity?" - yes/no question
8. Choose a definition for the concept of "creativity" - multiple-choice question
9. "How often do you socialize with your relatives or visit them?"
10. "How do you spend your evenings, and do you feel lonely when doing so?" - multiple-choice question
11. "Would you like to engage in creative activities?" - yes/no question
12. "Are you a member of any communities or interest clubs?" - yes/no question
13. "What types of social and cultural activities in cultural institutions would you like to participate in?" - multiple-choice question
14. "What shortcomings do you see in the activities of the Galushkov Rural Club when organizing leisure activities for the elderly?" - multiple-choice question
15. "What types of activities for the elderly are lacking in the work of the Galushkov Rural Club?"

3 RESULTS

The following data was obtained from the survey:

For the first question, "What is beauty?", participants were asked to creatively reflect on what beauty means to older adults. Many described beauty as a sense of joy and admiration, something priceless and unattainable by material means. A few saw beauty in how we perceive the world, ourselves, and our surroundings—beauty in oneself, in people, in storms, in birdsong, and in smiles.

For the next question, “How many times this year have you visited the theater, museum, exhibition, or concert?”, the responses were as follows: 45% attended 1-2 times, while 55% attended three or more times.

To the question “Do you think this is enough to be considered a cultured person?”, 70% responded affirmatively, while 30% said no.

In response to “Do you have a hobby?”, 69% answered “yes,” while 31% responded “no” (see Fig. 1).

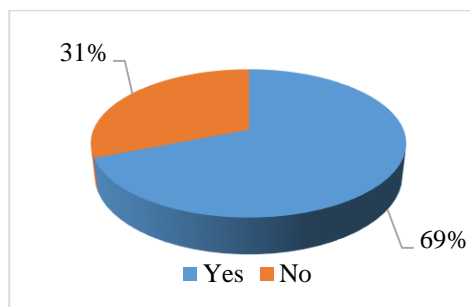


Figure 1: Distribution of Responses to the Question “Do you have a hobby?”

For the question “Which type of art do you prefer?”, the responses were: 45% preferred cinema, 15% theater, 27% enjoyed listening to music (classical or popular), 3% chose painting, 6% selected literature, and 4% chose dance (see Fig. 2).

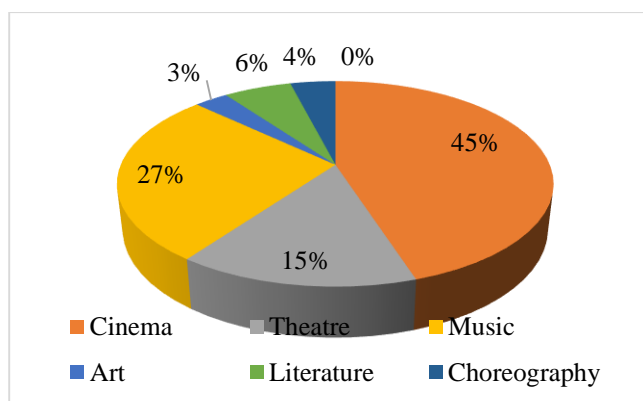


Figure 2: Distribution of Responses to the Question “Which Type of Art Do You Prefer?”

Regarding the question “Do you enjoy participating in competitions or festivals?”, 45% answered “yes,” while 55% answered “no.”

For the question “Are you familiar with the concept of creativity?”, 71% of respondents gave a positive response, while 29% gave a negative response.

When offered definitions of the concept “creativity,” four respondents selected the correct answer. Eight respondents confused creativity with relaxation, while eight others could not provide an answer.

We also explored how frequently respondents interact with friends and relatives or visit them (see Fig. 3).

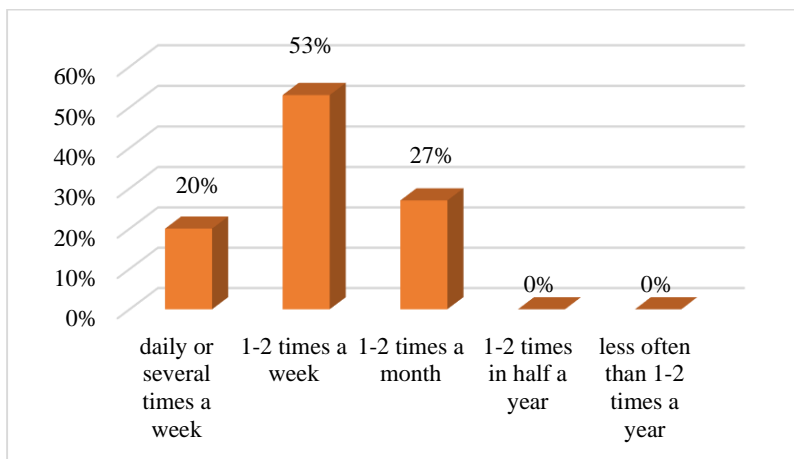


Figure 3: Distribution of Responses to the Question “How Often Do You Socialize with Relatives and Friends – Invite Them Over or Visit Them?”

The result was as follows: 53% of respondents interact with relatives and friends infrequently, while 20% do so daily or several times a week.

The question about how respondents spend their evenings helped us understand the available leisure options for the elderly. 11% watch TV, 15% prefer going for walks, and 6% enjoy active recreation. At the same time, 92% sometimes feel lonely, while 8% feel lonely often.

To the question “Would you like to engage in creative activities?”, 65% of respondents answered positively, 15% were unsure, and only 20% expressed a negative interest in creativity. Generally, these negative responses were related to self-doubt, concerns about lacking creative skills, etc.

The survey also asked if respondents were members of any clubs or communities. 45% said “yes,” 25% said “no,” and the remaining respondents expressed interest in participating in such initiatives (fig. 4).

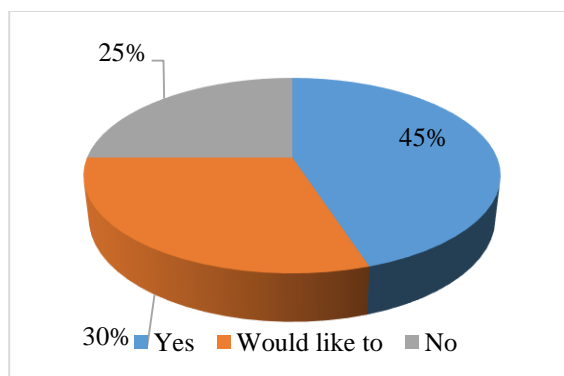


Figure 4: Distribution of Responses to the Question “Are You a Member of Any Communities or Interest Clubs?”

To the question “What types of social and cultural activities in cultural institutions would you like to participate in?”, 32% of respondents chose club activities, 10% selected workshops, 23% preferred exhibitions, and 35% chose creative-interest groups (see Fig. 5).

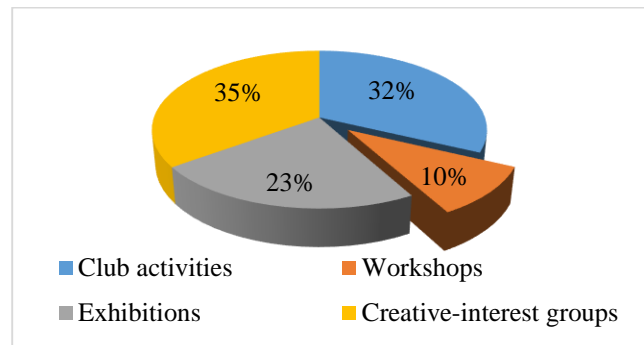


Figure 5: Distribution of Responses to the Question “What Types of Social and Cultural Activities in Cultural Institutions Would You Like to Participate In?”

The next question, “What shortcomings exist in the Galushkov Rural Club's activities for organizing leisure for the elderly?” showed that 2.5% of respondents indicated “specialist passivity,” 8.2% selected “lack of staff and material resources,” and 89.3% pointed to “amateur level of events.”

The final question identified what types of activities for the elderly are missing in the Galushkov Rural Club's activities. Respondents suggested organizing workshops, creative exhibitions, and establishing a creative workshop where they could pursue their favorite creative activities (e.g., scrapbooking, felting, collage, topiary, beadwork, robotics, etc.).

Based on the survey, we identified the following issues faced by the elderly: poor health, loneliness, and financial problems, with health issues being the most prominent (40%). While 45% of respondents participate in various clubs or communities, 25% lack the motivation to do so due to low social activity.

4 CONCLUSION

Thus, we concluded that most participants reported a lack of friendly communication, isolation, and an absence of close people willing to offer support. They found it challenging to connect with others, felt abandoned, spent their free time alone, did not see themselves as harmonious individuals, and consequently, most felt lonely.

The work of modern cultural institutions should be grounded in a certain perspective—a system of activities designed not only to meet needs for active leisure or new information but also to serve as a means of socialization for elderly people in contemporary society.

In modern socio-cultural theory and practice, art therapy occupies a special place. Through art-based activities, favorable conditions are created for organizing active leisure for the elderly, integrating individuals into cultural activities in all their diverse forms, and developing and realizing the creative potential of seniors.

Art, as a unique form of spiritual and practical activity, awakens imagination and fantasy in the elderly, acting as an antidote to loneliness, low social activity, alienation, and more.

Therefore, the application of art technologies in socio-cultural activities is a factor in the formation and overcoming of behavioral deviations in the elderly, the adoption of cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic values, and socialization in modern conditions.

Using art techniques in working with the elderly to support their socialization is based on the belief that every person, regardless of whether they have learned music, singing, or drawing, has the ability to project internal conflicts through creative expression. The combination of art and therapy helps older adults enjoy their time, remain active, and find joy in life. Thanks to the use of art technologies in cultural institutions, individuals undergo a socialization process and develop unique creative abilities and means of self-expression.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

NE and EKh conceived the idea, designed the project and wrote the manuscript. NK and OK participated in the design of the study and helped in writing the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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