

THE USE OF ART THERAPY TECHNIQUES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE EMOTIONAL STATE OF MILITARY PERSONNEL

Z. Madaliyeva, G. Kassen, N. Sadykova, L. Baimoldina, A. Gabdrakhman

*Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Department of General and Applied psychology,
Almaty (KAZAKHSTAN)*

Abstract

Military personnel often face challenging and traumatic experiences that can have a significant impact on their emotional state. Art therapy techniques have been shown to be effective in the management of emotional distress and the promotion of emotional well-being. This review aims to explore the use of art therapy techniques in the management of the emotional state of military personnel. The research has been conducted with support of the grant project of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "Development of algorithms for recognizing negative emotional states of servicemen of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan" in the aspect of approval of the art therapy session. The results of the review suggest that art therapy techniques can be effective in reducing symptoms of emotional distress and promoting emotional well-being in military personnel. These effects were consistently reported across the studies, with a number of studies demonstrating statistically significant improvements in measures of emotional state. Furthermore, it differentiates the content of art-therapeutic activity in the prevention of abnormal indicators in society based on the results of a questionnaire after a trial art-therapeutic session conducted with service members of different age groups. By analysis of personal data, it has been proved that through the creation of their own creativity, the adaptation of the soldier's personality is facilitated, including the development of all senses, memory, attention, will, imagination, intuition, stress relief, increased emotional tone, confidence, a positive attitude, and a partial settlement of negative emotional states. The respondents' statements in open questionnaire questions regarding the materials of the art therapy session allow the authors to assert that working on drawings, modeling, and other ways of working in art therapy is a safe way to discharge destructive emotions. Art therapy techniques were also found to be well-received by military personnel, with high levels of engagement and satisfaction reported. In addition, art therapy interventions were found to be feasible and practical, with a number of studies reporting that they can be effectively implemented in military settings. The results of this review suggest that art therapy techniques have the potential to be a useful tool in the management of the emotional state of military personnel. It is proved that the possibilities of art therapy in the context of the prevention of emotional disorders, depression, suicidal behavior, and other negative indicators in the ranks of the Armed Forces are quite high, and the probability of diagnosing negative emotional states using art methods enhances the role of art therapy in mass psychological training of military personnel. Further research is needed to confirm the findings of this review and to identify the specific art therapy techniques that are most effective in this population.

Keywords: art therapy, art methods, prevention, emotional tone, negative emotional states, art therapy session, art technology, positive attitude.

1 INTRODUCTION

Armed Forces service is distinguished from other forms of public service by a number of distinguishing characteristics. The psycho-emotional state of a serviceman is an important personal-subjective factor that has a substantial effect on the performance of service duties [1]. Negative emotions that inevitably arise during the performance of duties in extreme, life- and health-threatening situations can lead to aggressive-chaotic, affective actions or the abandonment of necessary actions and the withdrawal from service tasks, which can result in emotional breakdowns, accidents, injuries, and deaths of personnel [2].

According to open WHO statistics for 2017, depression affected approximately 4.4% of the total population of Kazakhstan, which based on official population statistics, is approximately 794.000 (figures are not standardized by age) [3]. Depressive conditions can significantly impair well-being and result in psychological and physical suffering, a decline in quality of life, suicidal tendencies, and disability if they progress unfavorably. In the past decade, Kazakhstan has been on the list of nations with an unfavorable suicide rate among young people (under 29) [4], and this phenomenon has also been observed in the military.

Cases of suicide demoralize personnel and reduce the combat readiness of troops, cause great moral and psychological harm to civil society, entail a negative attitude of the population toward military service, and form its negative image in the public consciousness [5]. At the state level, programs for the prevention of suicidal behavior are currently being implemented. However, the specific conditions of military service, often equated with extreme, as well as the complex interaction of personal and situational factors, the proportion of each of which is different in each case, require close attention to the issue of identifying suicide risk factors among servicemen.

Negative emotional states destroy a person, affect his general condition, the development and improvement of cognitive processes, moreover, they generate other more complex negative emotional states, sometimes their critical consequences. So, anxiety and depression can become the basis of suicidal mood and behavior, an aggressive state can cause affect and illegal actions. The fact that accurate recognition of emotions, their adequate interpretation, understanding of their manifestations are the key condition for successful communication and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships has become the basis for the emergence of new phenomena - "emotional intelligence", "emotional flexibility".

All this makes the problem of managing their emotional state urgent in order to prevent them from getting into areas where they can become the basis of permissiveness, aggression, destructive addictions, etc.

It is well known that art therapy strengthens a person's personality, because when they create, already in childhood, they think about, "feel" their world; look for their own language that connects them with the "outer big world" and most accurately expresses their "inner small world". A variety of ways of self-expression, assistance in self-acceptance, positive emotions arising in the process of art therapy, reduce aggression and depression, increase self-esteem and adaptive abilities of a person to everyday life. In conditions of emergency or work complicated by military operations, art methods may be able to influence the human psyche even more strongly through subconscious channels and help in establishing harmonious connections with the outside world and with oneself.

Art methods allow us to work with feelings: to explore and popularize them on a symbolic level, to actualize and express conscious and unconscious feelings and needs, including those that are too difficult to express with words. Also, the hidden content of art therapy allows you to determine the true orientation of the personality, diagnose subjective relationships with the world and with yourself, influence the subconscious structures of the personality.

2 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the importance of art-therapeutic methods in the settlement of negative emotional states of service members based on the results of an art-therapeutic session conducted with different age groups of representatives of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Materials and methods: art methods, art techniques, questioning, and oral questioning of military personnel after the session, content analysis of personal data.

Research base: a paramilitary institution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which wished the anonymous participation of its personnel.

2.1 Development of an art therapy session using a complex of art methods

It is well known that everything connected with the word "art" is an indicator and means of predominantly non-verbal communication; this makes this industry especially valuable for those who are not fluent enough in speech, find it difficult to verbally describe their experiences, or, on the contrary, are excessively dependent on speech communication. This category of people can also include military personnel who are accustomed to obeying short orders and are not particularly talkative. Symbolic speech is one of the foundations of fine art; it often allows a person to express their experiences more accurately, take a fresh look at the situation and everyday problems, and find a way to solve them [6].

Furthermore, according to A.I. Kopytin [7], in many cases, art therapy allows for the bypass of "consciousness censorship," presenting a unique opportunity for the study of unconscious processes, the expression and actualization of latent ideas and states, and those social roles and behaviors that are "repressed" or poorly manifested in society. It is a means of free self-expression and self-knowledge, has an "insight-oriented" character, and assumes an atmosphere of trust, high tolerance, and attention to the inner world of a person.

Group forms in art therapy are used very widely, not only in healthcare but also in education, the social sphere, and other areas [8]. At the same time, the art-therapeutic process takes place within the framework of psychotherapeutic relationships, and the creation of images acts as the main means of communication. At the same time, the art therapist creates conditions for the nonverbal expression of conscious and unconscious feelings and ideas, helping the group members communicate with each other.

Researchers identify a number of features of the group method of art therapy: group experience counteracts alienation and helps to solve interpersonal problems; the group reflects society in miniature, making obvious such hidden factors as partner pressure, social influence, and conformity; the possibility of receiving feedback and support from people with similar problems; In a group, a person can learn new skills and experiment with different styles of relationships among equal partners; in a group, participants can identify themselves with others, "play" the role of another person to better understand him and themselves, and get acquainted with new effective ways of behavior used by someone; interaction in a group creates tension that helps clarify psychological problems for everyone; the group facilitates the processes of self-disclosure, self-exploration, and self-knowledge [7].

In this regard, the art therapy session developed by us has absorbed the best traditions of group art therapy as a "lightweight" form of influence on personal structures.

At the same time, the use of art therapy methods is not widespread enough in practical military psychology. This fact necessitated the development and testing of a group art therapy session, which, in our opinion, will allow us to develop valuable social skills, provide mutual support, solve common problems, observe the results of their actions and their impact on others, master new roles and manifest latent personality qualities, regulate negative emotional states, observe how the modification of role behavior affects relationships with others, increase self-esteem, and strengthen personal identity. In this regard, the art therapy session developed by us has absorbed the best traditions of group art therapy as a "lightweight" form of influence on personal structures.

The main procedural stages of the developed art therapy session:

- 1 Emotional mood ("warming up").
- 2 Actualization of visual, auditory, kinesthetic sensations.
- 3 Individual visual work (theme development).
- 4 Verbalization stage (activation of verbal and nonverbal communication).
- 5 Collective work (collaging) or work in pairs, small groups.
- 6 The final stage. Reflexive analysis.

When organizing the session, we relied on the rules for an art therapy specialist developed by Koloshina T. Yu [9]:

- 1 Commands, instructions, demands, coercion are unacceptable in the art therapy process.
- 2 A participant of an art therapy session: can choose the types and content of creative activity suitable for him, visual materials, as well as work at his own pace; has the right to refuse to perform certain tasks, open verbalization of feelings and experiences, collective discussion ("inclusion" in group communication is largely determined by the ethics and skill of a psychologist); has the right to simply observe the activities of the group or do something at will, if it does not contradict social and group norms.
- 3 All products of creative visual activity are accepted and deserve approval, regardless of their content, form, aesthetic appearance. A ban on comparative and evaluative judgments, marks, criticism, punishments has been adopted.

Based on the above rules, our author's approach to the art therapy session was expressed in the following provisions:

- Due to the resourcefulness of art methods (they lie outside the sphere of a person's daily life), our session is focused on building solutions, a perspective look into the future, instead of returning to the problem.
- Art therapy mostly orients a person to "beginnings" rather than to "completion" and this specificity is characteristic of our session as well.
- In the process of art therapy activity, a person forms an orientation towards creation, avoiding the positions of "self-examination" and "self-blame". In our session, the creative potential of

art is even stronger through self-esteem enhancement, art diagnostics, activating self-awareness and self-knowledge.

- Art therapy is able to initiate in a person the processes of self-help, self-healing, self-development [10].

The purpose of the five-hour art therapy session developed by us was to develop a balanced personality that can keep a balance between its contradictions - polarities of feelings and emotions (for example, optimism-pessimism, love - hate, weakness - strength, dependence - independence, dominance - submission, hope - despair, etc.), that is, achieving a kind of harmony which will help the individual in the future to resist in difficult and stressful life situations.

All the techniques used in the session as a whole solved the following tasks: expanding the horizons of the individual; developing life prospects; adequate acceptance of internal life crises; settlement of negative emotional states.

When selecting techniques, we relied on the main methodological position - various modalities of creative expression, represented by drawing, music, applied activities, etc. maximize the individual's capabilities [7].

The session was tested among military personnel based on the study (a total sample of 123 people). Here are the main content stages and techniques (they reflect the above-mentioned 6 procedural stages of an art therapy session):

A. Content stage of the session: visual (duration: 1 hour 30 minutes - 1 hour 45 minutes).

Visual creativity allows you to understand yourself, freely express your thoughts and feelings, dreams and hopes, be yourself, feel the fullness of life, free yourself from negative experiences of the past. It becomes not only a reflection in the minds of the participants of the session of the surrounding and social reality, but also its modeling, the expression of attitudes to it.

Drawing participates in the coordination of the relationship between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, being directly connected with the most important functions (vision, motor coordination, speech and thinking), it not only contributes to the development of each of these functions, but also connects them with each other. If fine art therapy uses the process of creating images as a tool for achieving goals, then fine art therapy promotes goal formation and goal setting of the individual in the process of creating images.

At the same time, various visual materials were used:

- 1 Watercolor and gouache paints, graphic and colored pencils, felt-tip pens, crayons, pastels and even plasticine as a means of drawing with a smearing technique;
- 2 Drawing paper of different formats and shades, cardboard;
- 3 Brushes of different sizes, sponges for painting over large spaces, etc.

★ Aquatip technique [11].

Purpose: development of emotional intelligence and activation of creative resource.

Tasks: development of self-expression abilities; removal of internal control; development of creative imagination, reflection.

Inventory: a sheet of A3 paper, paints, gouache, glass 5x5 centimeters, brushes of different sizes, wet and dry napkins, a jar of water.

Working time: 15 - 30 minutes.

★ The technique "Breakfast - lunch - dinner", proposed by Z.Madalieva, L. Komekbayeva, M.Suleimenov [12].

Purpose: diagnosis and correction of a person's perception of himself surrounded by other people.

Tasks: stabilization of self-esteem; development of emotional and social intelligence; acceptance of one's own resource and problematic aspects of personality.

Inventory: brushes, watercolor and gouache paints, graphic and colored pencils, markers, crayons, pastels, a jar for water, a white sheet of paper (A-1).

Working time: 20-25 minutes.

★ Technique "Life line / Life path" by A. Kopytin [2] with elements of phototherapy.

Purpose: actualization and expression of feelings associated with different periods of life; their awareness and integration.

Tasks: strengthening the image of the "I"; identification and awareness of needs, attitudes and values; finding or revaluation of the meaning of life; research of the system of relationships, actualization and resolution of intrapersonal conflicts.

Inventory: photos, glue, paints, brushes, paper (A3).

Working time: 30 minutes.

★ The technique of drawing with plasticine "Favorite plate" with elements of mandalotherapy developed by us.

Purpose: to activate creative activity; to give an opportunity to manifest different feelings that fill the inner space of a person.

Tasks: search for self-improvement resources; development of emotional intelligence, sensuality; formation of the skill of reflection of one's own states and needs.

Inventory: plasticine of different colors, a jar of water, circles with a diameter of 27 cm cut out of thick paper, divided into sectors, a plastic knife for cutting off excess plasticine, wet wipes.

Working time: 15-20 minutes.

B. Content stage of the session: music-visual (duration: 1 hour 30 minutes).

★ The "Keep the rhythm" technique (modified by E. Tararina [11])

Purpose: activation of personal resources with the help of phytotherapy.

Tasks: development of group dynamics; development of a sense of rhythm, concentration on a certain action (regardless of external conditions), increasing internal activity due to the pace of external actions; reducing the level of aggression and anxiety through rhythmization of actions; activation of interaction of the left and right hemispheres.

Inventory: drums of different sizes, drumsticks, original musical compositions and ethnic music of the peoples of the world using drum rhythms (recordings on discs).

Working time: 15-20 minutes

★ "Epilogue technique" or "From sound to chord" exercise

Inventory: musical instruments with different sound ranges and "the degree of complexity of their use; objects that emit sound.

Working time: from 3 to 10 minutes.

★ Technique "Me and my talent" (modification by E. Tararina [11])

Purpose: expanding the range of social and professional choice; formation of self-knowledge skills; gaining experience in creating your own "creative product"; disclosure of new facets of personality; awareness of the peculiarity, uniqueness of professional capabilities of the individual.

Tasks: to learn to listen and hear the inner self; to develop emotional intelligence, sensuality, tactile sensations and fine motor skills of the hands; to realize their creative abilities; to promote personal and professional growth, self-development.

Inventory: foil of different colors (30x30 cm), a sheet of paper (A4).

Working time: 25-30 minutes.

★ The technique of drawing semolina M. Shevchenko [13]

Purpose: development of harmonious interaction of the right and left hemispheres, creative imagination, aesthetic taste, self-esteem, relaxation.

Tasks: strengthening trust between group members; relieving emotional tension, relaxation.

Inventory: semolina or sand, a sheet of Whatman (according to the number of participants).

Duration of work: 15-20 minutes.

Form of work: in pairs.

★ Technique "Creating an image of your face in working with clay" by V. Nikitin [11] (modified by E. Tararina)

Purpose: establishing a connection between the conscious and the unconscious; self-acceptance; awareness of personal boundaries; search for self-improvement resources.

Tasks: to develop emotional intelligence; to gain creative experience; to develop tactile sensations, fine motor skills.

Inventory: clay, a glass of water, napkins.

Working time: 35-40 minutes.

★ Collage creation technique

Purpose: planning for the future, development of reflection, strengthening of personal resource, self-esteem.

Tasks: To learn how to structure the space in connection with goals; to teach listening and hearing the inner voice and intuition; to use tactile sensations for greater inner experience; to develop emotional intelligence. Develop the ability to adequately accept yourself and your environment.

Inventory: a sheet of A3 paper, glue, magazines, scissors.

Working time: 30 minutes.

3 RESULTS

After conducting the developed art therapy session (using various materials, art methods and art techniques), we conducted a questionnaire using closed and open questions. The respondents were military personnel aged 22 to 45 years, a sample of 87 people (123 people out of the total sample of participants in an art therapy session).

A certain part of the respondents felt tension relief largely (29 respondents, which is 33% of the sample, stated this immediately after the session), 19 respondents (22% of the sample) felt an increased emotional tone, 10 people felt confidence during the drawing session (11% of the sample).

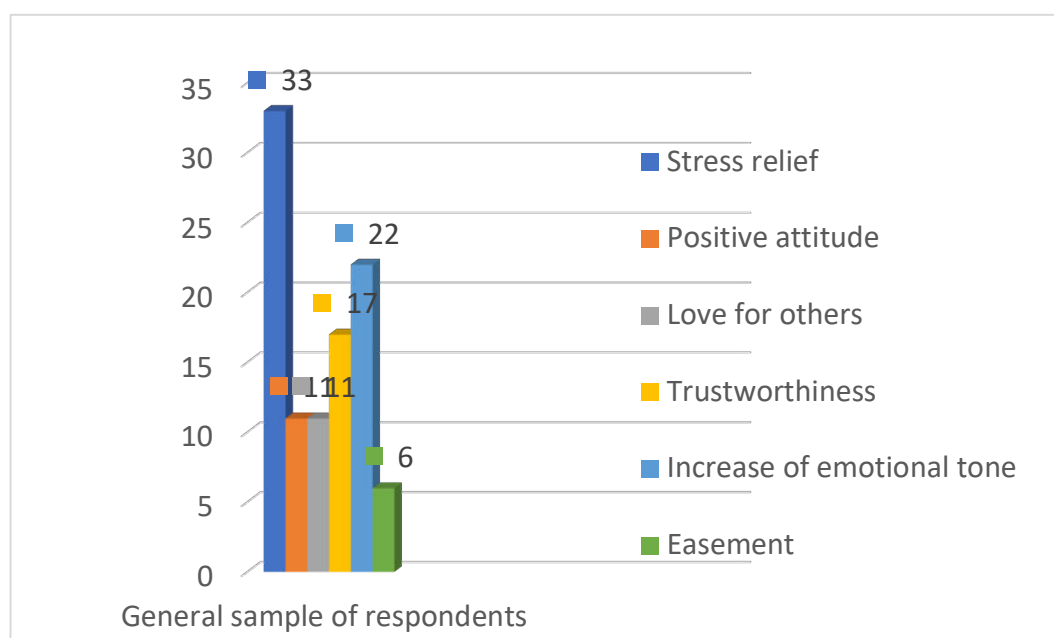


Figure 1. Results of answers to the question about the appearance of emotions and new states in respondents during an art therapy session.

In the answers to the question "What cognitive processes and individual personality traits have you activated during the session?" serious discrepancies were found between the younger and more

experienced servicemen. If young military personnel (22-30 years old) they believe that imagination (38%) and attention (21%) develop the most, then more experienced (36-45 years) they stated about improving the adaptive properties of personality (54%), willpower (37%) and intuition (32%). At the same time, unlike the younger ones, the more experienced ones were less categorical, believing that along with these processes and properties, self-esteem, thinking, and imagination develop in parallel.

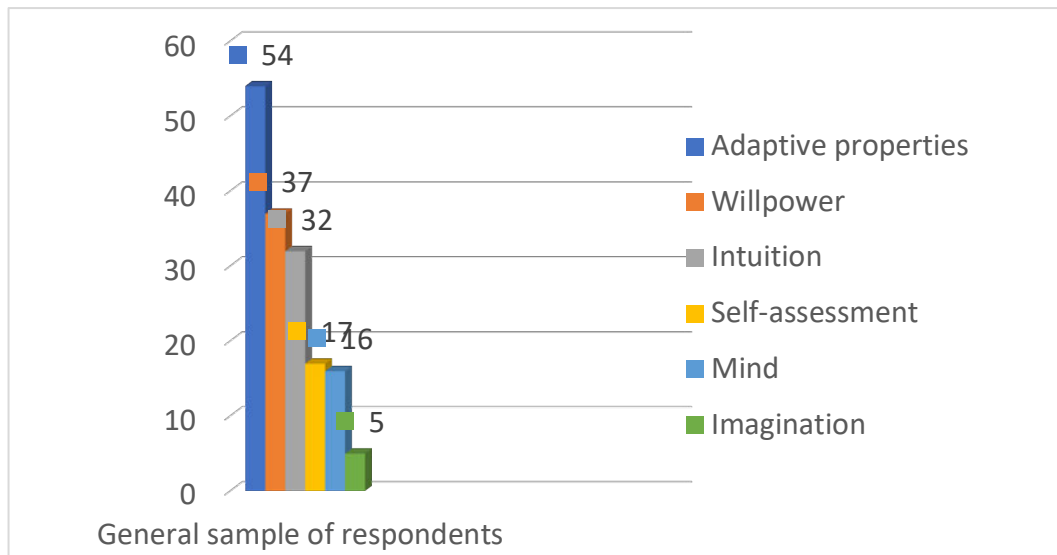


Figure 2. The results of the answers to the question about the activation of cognitive processes and individual personality traits of respondents during an art therapy session.

The question of preferences in the choice of materials for the session assumed a partially closed form (respondents were asked to tick the preferred material) and an open one - it was necessary to justify their preference themselves.

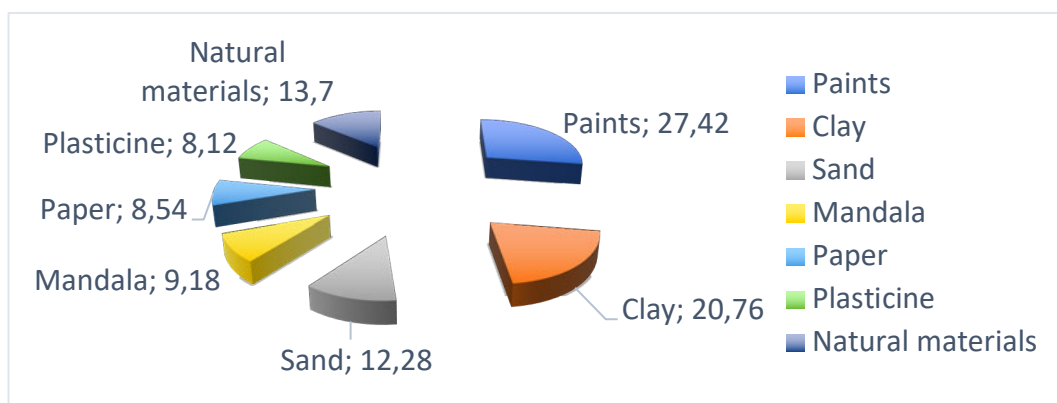


Figure 3. Distribution of the total sample of respondents according to the preferences of the material in the art therapy session.

As shown in Figure 3, the art therapy session participants roughly distributed their preferences for using the materials equally, with a slight advantage in favor of paints and clay. At the same time, the majority of respondents explained their choice as follows: "Paints, whether watercolor or gouache, give a wide opportunity not only to realize your creative potential but also to calm yourself by choosing a color you like and diluting it to experiment with your mood, express your needs and desires at the moment, and try yourself in a combination of colors." As for clay, there were also interesting arguments from the session participants: "clay is a unique material that makes it possible to feel like a creator"; "clay is a very soft and elastic material that allows you to work with your condition and even character; with the help of it, you can become firmer and more persistent"; "I love clay and plasticine because they help me express myself in a three-dimensional form, and the volume allows me to feel cooler, stronger, and more confident in this shaky world."

Regarding sand, there were also unique statements: "the fluidity of sand gives strength and faith that time, like sand, can be subject to you"; "sand is an excellent material with which it is pleasant to work, feeling its flow ability and unsteadiness, thereby allowing you to feel your confidence and strength, the ability to subdue the elements"; "with any material, and especially with sand, you feel that you are the ruler of the world, that the future of the planet is in your hands, that you can do something good and leave a mark."

The experience of conducting the developed art therapy session and the subsequent questionnaire allows us to conclude that through familiarization with the fruits of creativity of all mankind in its various forms and the creation of their own creativity, the adaptation of the individual in society is promoted, as is the development of all sense organs, memory, attention, will, imagination, intuition, and the settlement of negative emotional states.

4 CONCLUSION

The survey we conducted after the art therapy session revealed that the participants felt tension relief, increased emotional tone, confidence, and, most importantly, the removal of emotional tension, which is the starting point for the settlement of the emotional state. In general, respondents noted that in addition to the session effects they indicated in the questionnaire, they had a positive emotional mood in a group, and joint participation in artistic activities contributed to the creation of mutual acceptance and empathy relationships.

The respondents' statements in open questionnaire questions regarding the materials of the art therapy session allow us to say that work on drawings, modeling, etc. methods of work in art therapy are a safe way to discharge destructive emotions; they allow you to work out thoughts and emotions that a person is used to suppressing, promote creative self-expression, develop imagination and intuition, and reduce negative emotional states and their manifestations.

At the same time, the category of active military personnel under the current conditions of service is characterized by a wide range of behavioral disorders and adaptation disorders that develop under conditions of combat stress and subsequently persist for more or less a long time. Taking into account the different psychosocial situations of these types of clients, it is unlikely that a single, unified model of art therapy would work well with all of them.

As some means of increasing the effectiveness of art therapy with these target groups, we see the development of group interactive art therapy, which allows more fully implementing group therapeutic factors related to group dynamics as well as expanding the range of art therapy methods based on the use of an environmental approach.

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