



# Using the Occupation of Art to Improve Mental Health in Older Adults

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## Introduction

- Depression and anxiety are prevalent among long-term care (LTC) facility residents due to physical and/or cognitive decline, inability to live on their own, isolation, fear of relying on others to meet their needs, and shifts in routines and roles (Ciasca et al., 2018; Yao et al., 2019).
- Mental health must be addressed within this population (Ciasca et al., 2018).
- Research has shown that art can lessen mental health symptoms, enhance community engagement, facilitate a more positive environment, and easily be adapted to fit individual needs (Vaartio-Rajalin et al., 2021).
- Art is considered a leisure occupation because it is relaxing and rewarding, there is no pressure on performance, and it does not require extensive planning or commitment (AOTA, 2020).
- Art is currently not implemented in LTC facilities on a regular basis (Vaartio-Rajalin et al., 2021).

**Purpose:** To determine if engagement in weekly art groups affects the mental health of LTC residents

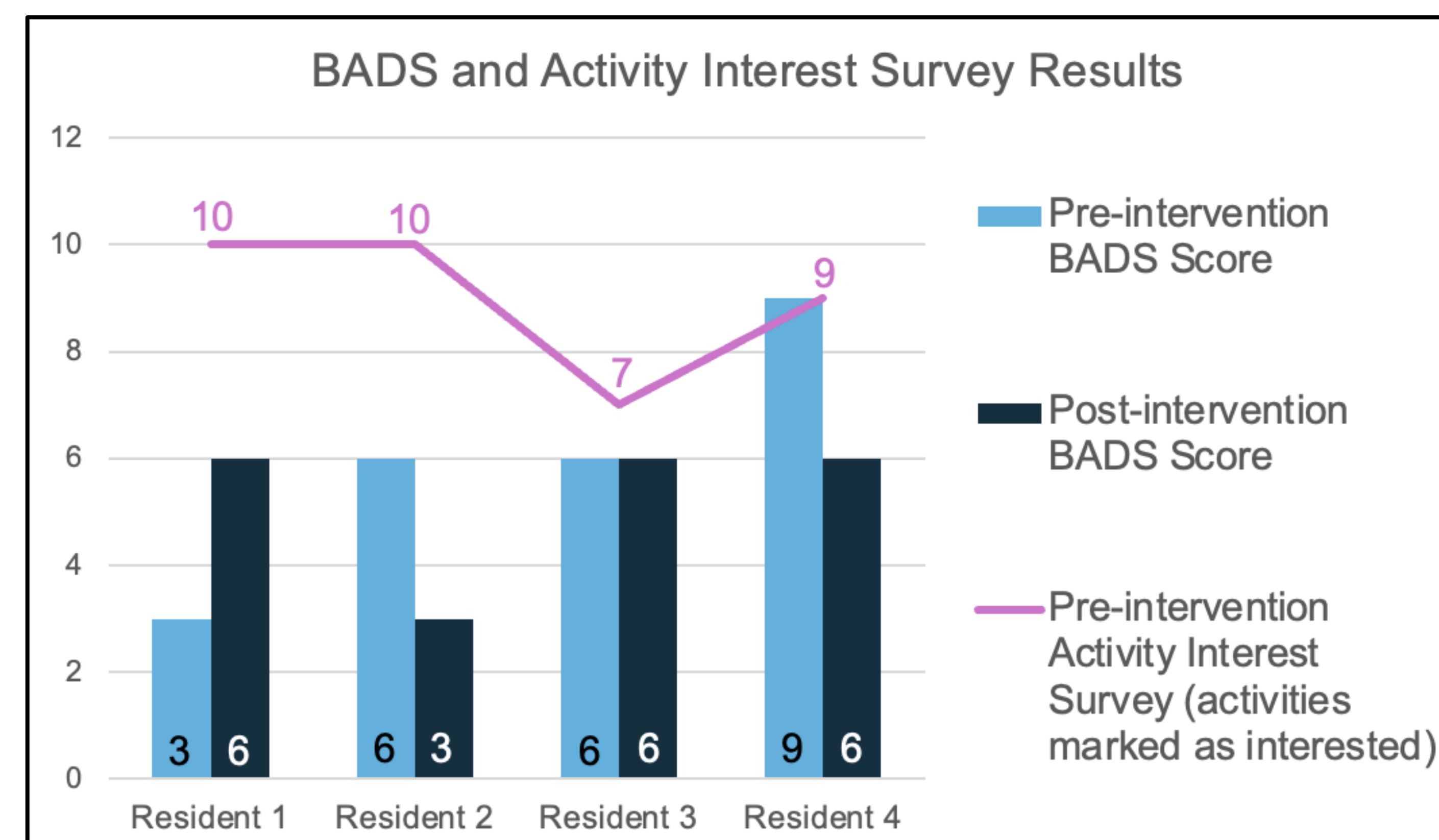
## Methods

- **Recruitment:**
  - Distributed flyers and spoke to residents face-to-face at Aspire Physical Recovery Center (APRC) in Hoover, AL
  - Convenience sampling (based on availability and interests)
  - 9 LTC residents expressed interest in study
- **Data Collection**
  - **Pre-intervention** (9 participants total)
    - Medical chart review
    - Activity Interest Survey
    - Brief Anxiety and Depression Scale (BADs)
  - **Intervention** (4-7 residents each session; 4 consistent participants)
    - **Art activities:** painting, making collages, sewing, baking cookies, crafts, coloring
    - **Site:** Life enrichment room/dining hall at Aspire Hoover
    - **Frequency:** 1 activity per week for 6 consecutive weeks (+ 1 make-up session)
    - Adaptations as needed
  - **Post-intervention** (4 participants total)
    - BADs
    - 3 out of 4 completed a face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interview with open-ended questions
- **Data Analysis**
  - **BADS:** Descriptive statistics and paired t-test
  - **Activity Interest Survey:** Descriptive statistics
  - **Qualitative Interview:** Thematic analysis

## Results

### Demographics

- 2 males and 2 females
- Age (mean): 78 years old
- Age (range): 69 to 92 years old
- Length of stay at APRC Hoover (mean): 1 year 8 months
- Length of stay at APRC Hoover (range): 3 months to 4 years



### Quantitative Results

- 13% decrease in overall BADS score
- 8% decrease in overall depressive symptoms
- 17% decrease in overall anxiety symptoms
  - $p = .638$
- No statistical significance

### Quantitative Themes

#### **Sense of purpose**

- "It made me feel productive."
- "It kept me busy."
- "I like to stay busy and do something."
- "I like to work on different projects."

#### **Self-expression**

- Art "is kind of insight to what you're thinking."
- "When you're in art, you express your feelings."

#### **Community engagement**

"I met a lot of new people."

#### **Positive emotion**

"It made me feel happy to do something."

## Discussion

### Major Findings

- Improvements in overall quality of life and mental health among participants
- Positive participant experiences
- Several barriers limiting participation in art sessions within LTC settings
- Art is easily adaptable to meet a variety of needs
  - Ex: Step-by-step visual and verbal instructions, large utensils, pre-cut materials, hand over hand assistance, extended time

### Limitations & Areas of Improvement

- Small sample size
- Decreased resident buy-in or interest
- Participant cognition, physical abilities, illness, and/or injury
- Staff shortage

## Conclusion

### Implications

- Incorporating leisure activities into future interventions
- Consistency is key
- Increased OT involvement in art activities

### Future Research

- Increase amount of art sessions provided each week
- Create personalized art supply kits for residents to use in private rooms
- Research additional anxiety and depression screening tools
- Create information sheet about benefits of participating in art

## References

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