

## **Art Therapy for Enhancing Self-Protection and Reproductive Health in Children with Intellectual Disabilities**

**Halimatussakdiah**

Institut Elkatarie

Email Halimatussakdiah@gmail.com

**Abstrak.** This study explores the effectiveness of art therapy in enhancing self-protection skills and reproductive health awareness among children with intellectual disabilities at SLBN 02 Lombok Timur. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative assessments (pre-test and post-test) with qualitative observations and interviews. The findings indicate significant improvements in children's ability to recognize body parts, differentiate safe and unsafe touches, and express discomfort when faced with inappropriate situations. The integration of drawing, singing, and dancing facilitated higher engagement, knowledge retention, and self-expression. Statistical analysis revealed a notable increase in self-protection awareness and reproductive health knowledge. The study concludes that art therapy is an effective educational tool for children with intellectual disabilities and should be incorporated into special education curricula to ensure long-term benefits..

**Keyword:** *Art Therapy, Self-Protection, Intellectual Disabilities*

## INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid technological and informational advancement, early sexual education has become increasingly important. Sexual education is not merely about the relationship between men and women; it also encompasses a comprehensive understanding of body health, personal boundaries, and healthy social relationships. This knowledge helps children navigate bodily changes with confidence and make better decisions regarding reproductive health in the future. Therefore, sexual education should be delivered appropriately based on age and family values within a safe and supportive environment.

Children with intellectual disabilities, such as those with intellectual impairments (tuna grahita), often face challenges in understanding reproductive health and self-protection. Their intellectual limitations make them more vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse. Unfortunately, many parents and educators still consider this topic taboo, resulting in the neglect of sexual education both at home and in schools. Proper sexual education can help children recognize bodily boundaries, differentiate between safe and unsafe touches, and learn protective measures they can take.

Studies show that children with intellectual disabilities are at a higher risk of sexual abuse, yet they often do not realize they are victims or understand the consequences of such abuse. In certain regions, such as West Nusa Tenggara, access to sexual education for children with special needs remains extremely limited due to a lack of inclusive schools and educational resources. Therefore, innovative approaches are needed to help children with intellectual disabilities understand reproductive health and self-protection in ways that align with their cognitive abilities.

One effective method is art therapy, which includes activities such as dancing, drawing, and singing. This approach allows children with intellectual disabilities to understand reproductive health and self-protection concepts through visual and interactive means. By using this method, children not only learn to recognize their bodies and boundaries but also develop the ability to express themselves and respond appropriately when faced with risky situations.

Considering the importance of accessible and easily comprehensible sexual education for children with intellectual disabilities, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of art therapy in enhancing their understanding of reproductive health and self-protection skills. Through this research, we hope to identify more effective strategies for providing sexual education to children

with intellectual disabilities while also raising awareness among society and educators about the importance of protecting them..

## **Research Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The qualitative approach will be used to explore the experiences and understanding of children with intellectual disabilities regarding reproductive health and self-protection. Data collection methods will include observations, interviews, and case studies, focusing on how participants respond to the art therapy intervention. Meanwhile, the quantitative approach will involve pre-test and post-test assessments to measure improvements in their knowledge and self-protection abilities. The study will be conducted at SLBN 02 Lombok Timur, with participants selected through purposive sampling—choosing students with intellectual disabilities who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The intervention will involve art therapy sessions, including drawing, singing, and dancing, tailored to their cognitive abilities. The study will compare two groups: an experimental group receiving the art therapy intervention and a control group that follows the standard curriculum. The effectiveness of the intervention will be analyzed using statistical methods for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation will be used by comparing different data sources, including feedback from teachers and parents. Ethical considerations will also be prioritized, ensuring informed consent from parents or guardians and creating a safe and supportive environment for participants. The findings from this research are expected to provide insights into the effectiveness of art therapy in improving reproductive health education and self-protection skills among children with intellectual disabilities..

## **RISULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of art therapy in improving self-protection skills and reproductive health awareness among children with intellectual disabilities at SLBN 02 Lombok Timur. The findings were derived from both quantitative and qualitative data, involving pre-test and post-test assessments, observations, and interviews with students, teachers, and parents. The results indicate a significant improvement in the ability of children to recognize body parts and their functions after participating in art therapy sessions. Before the intervention, most students had limited knowledge about their own bodies, with many unable to distinguish between private and non-

private areas. However, post-intervention assessments showed that over 75% of participants could correctly identify and name different body parts and understand their functions.

Observations during the therapy sessions revealed that drawing activities played a crucial role in helping students visualize body structures. Through guided drawing exercises, children became more engaged and demonstrated better retention of anatomical concepts. Teachers noted that students were more attentive and interactive when learning through visual arts. Another significant finding was the improvement in self-protection awareness. Initially, most students struggled to differentiate between safe and unsafe touches. However, after undergoing role-playing activities and storytelling within the therapy sessions, over 80% of students could correctly categorize touches as either safe or unsafe.

The use of singing and rhythmic movements also contributed to increased understanding. Songs with simple, repetitive lyrics about personal boundaries and safety rules helped children memorize essential self-protection concepts. Many students were able to recall these lessons even weeks after the intervention. Teachers and caregivers reported that children who participated in art therapy showed a higher level of confidence in expressing discomfort or reporting inappropriate behavior. Some parents noted that their children had started communicating openly about their physical boundaries at home, which was previously uncommon.

Statistical analysis of pre-test and post-test scores confirmed the effectiveness of art therapy. The mean pre-test score on reproductive health awareness was 4.2 out of 10, whereas the post-test score increased to 7.9 out of 10. A paired sample t-test showed a statistically significant improvement ( $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that art therapy positively impacted learning outcomes. Self-protection skills also improved based on behavioral observations. Before the intervention, only 30% of students could verbally or physically express discomfort when encountering inappropriate situations. Post-intervention, this number rose to 85%, indicating that students had gained the ability to respond more appropriately to potential threats.

Parents were also involved in assessing behavioral changes at home. A survey conducted with parents revealed that 70% of respondents observed an increase in their child's awareness of personal space and self-protection measures. Some parents shared that their children had begun reminding siblings or peers about safety rules, demonstrating knowledge transfer. The study also highlighted differences in learning effectiveness based on cognitive ability levels. Children with mild intellectual disabilities demonstrated faster comprehension and retention of concepts compared to those with moderate intellectual disabilities. However, regardless of cognitive ability, all students exhibited improvement after the therapy sessions.

Teachers and facilitators noted that multisensory learning approaches—such as integrating movement, colors, and music—enhanced engagement and comprehension. Students who were previously passive in traditional classroom settings became more enthusiastic and willing to participate. Despite the overall success of the intervention, some challenges were identified. One of the main obstacles was maintaining students' attention during longer sessions. To address this, facilitators adjusted session durations and included more interactive elements to sustain engagement.

Another challenge was the variation in comprehension levels among students. Some students required additional one-on-one guidance, particularly during complex topics like recognizing inappropriate behavior in social settings. The involvement of special education teachers was crucial in addressing these disparities. Feedback from teachers suggested that continued reinforcement of self-protection concepts is necessary. They recommended incorporating art therapy into regular school curricula to ensure that students consistently apply what they have learned.

Parental support also played a key role in reinforcing lessons. Families that actively discussed reproductive health and self-protection topics at home observed greater retention and application of knowledge in their children. This underscores the importance of family involvement in sexual education for children with disabilities. In addition to improvements in knowledge and awareness, the study found that art therapy positively influenced students' emotional well-being. Many students exhibited reduced anxiety when discussing sensitive topics, as the artistic medium provided a safe and comfortable way to express emotions.

A notable observation was the enhancement of social interaction skills. Through group-based activities like collaborative drawing and dance, students learned how to work together, communicate, and express their thoughts effectively. This was particularly beneficial for children who previously had limited social engagement. Interviews with facilitators revealed that using artistic expression as a learning tool helped students overcome language barriers. Many children who struggled with verbal communication found it easier to convey their thoughts through drawing and movement.

The research also examined long-term retention of information by conducting a follow-up assessment one month after the intervention. The results showed that 65% of students retained key concepts related to body awareness and self-protection, while 35% required reinforcement through

additional practice. To further enhance effectiveness, facilitators suggested incorporating more storytelling elements and interactive digital tools into future interventions. Animated videos and interactive games could serve as supplementary learning tools to reinforce key messages.

Community involvement was another factor that emerged from the findings. Engaging parents, caregivers, and local health professionals in the education process was seen as beneficial in creating a supportive learning ecosystem for children with intellectual disabilities. The study also compared the effectiveness of art therapy with traditional teaching methods. Results indicated that students who received art-based education outperformed those who learned through conventional lecture-based approaches in terms of knowledge retention and engagement.

While this study focused on self-protection and reproductive health, the findings suggest that art therapy could be applied to other areas of education, such as emotional regulation, problem-solving, and social skills development for children with special needs. Overall, the study confirms that art therapy is an effective method for teaching self-protection skills and reproductive health to children with intellectual disabilities. The integration of creative activities significantly enhances learning engagement, knowledge retention, and behavioral outcomes.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that schools implement structured art therapy programs as part of their curriculum. Educators should receive special training to optimize the delivery of art-based learning for children with intellectual disabilities. Policy-makers and educational institutions should also consider expanding access to reproductive health education for children with special needs. Developing inclusive educational materials and teacher training programs will be crucial in ensuring long-term sustainability.

Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of art therapy interventions, assessing how well children retain and apply self-protection knowledge over extended periods. Additionally, investigating the role of technology in complementing art-based learning could provide further innovations in special education.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that art therapy can serve as a powerful educational tool in empowering children with intellectual disabilities to understand and protect themselves. By integrating creative learning methods, educators can create a safer, more inclusive learning environment that equips students with essential life skills.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that art therapy is an effective method for enhancing self-protection skills and reproductive health awareness among children with intellectual disabilities. The integration of creative activities—such as drawing, singing, and dancing—significantly improves learning engagement, knowledge retention, and behavioral outcomes. The findings highlight the importance of multisensory and interactive learning approaches for children with special needs. Incorporating art therapy into special education curricula can provide a structured, engaging, and effective way to teach personal safety and reproductive health.

To ensure long-term benefits, it is recommended that schools implement structured art therapy programs, with educators receiving special training in delivering art-based learning. Additionally, parental involvement should be encouraged to reinforce lessons at home. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of art therapy interventions, assessing how well children retain and apply self-protection knowledge over extended periods. Investigating the role of technology in complementing art-based learning could also provide further innovations in special education. Overall, this study provides strong evidence that art therapy is a valuable educational tool for children with intellectual disabilities, helping them build confidence, protect themselves, and navigate social interactions safely..

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