Grace Peterson Nursing Research Colloquium

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The Effects of Creative Arts Therapies on the Traumatic Stress Symptoms of Refugee Minors

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The Effects of Creative Arts Therapies on the Traumatic Stress Symptoms of Refugee Minors

Nhu Do
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Introduction
The experiences of refugees are often characterized by traumatic stressors including loss and violence. Minors of these target populations are particularly sensitive to traumatic stress due to the nature of their developmental state. Currently, there is a lack of evidence-based research on the efficacy of Creative Arts Therapies (CATs) as interventions to reduce traumatic stress symptoms of refugee minors.

Methodology
For this literature review, an integrative literature review was utilized to answer the main research question concerning CATs' effectiveness with refugee minors. This review allowed for data from diverse studies to be synthesized in a meaningful manner. It provided a comprehensive summary of the literature and its findings.

Research Questions
1) What are the effects of creative arts therapies for refugee minors?
2) Can CATs decrease the traumatic stress symptoms of refugee minors?

Conceptual Model
Richard Lazarus’ and Susan Folkman’s theory of stress and coping focuses on the individual’s psychological responses to stressful stimuli. The theory of stress and coping has the potential to guide the study of Creative Arts Therapies (CATs) as interventions for traumatic stress by unpacking the factors in stress response.

Results
Effects of CATs on Refugee Minors
1) Social engagement and connection
All six of the studies incorporated group dynamics into their interventions and promoted the sharing of emotions in a safe space. Students found their life-satisfaction and hope may have increased upon being able to help from a social network.

2) Self-esteem and self-efficacy
Creative and expressive arts therapy provide children with the appropriate space to create and improve their self-concept. The act of making allowed children to create unique products they were proud of, which ultimately increased their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

3) Coping and relaxation
Coping strategies were indicated as instrumental in how the children managed their symptoms. This was described as a “toolkit” given to the children which helped them learn how to calm themselves and take contact with others. Through relaxation techniques, they learned to decrease their stress and gained a sense of control over their symptoms.

Table 1. Summary of Articles Reviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Author</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>CATs Intervention</th>
<th>CATs Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demott (2017)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>145 unaccompanied minor refugee boys aged 12 and 18 years of age</td>
<td>10 sessions expressive arts intervention (EXIT) within 5 weeks</td>
<td>There was significant time by group interaction in students of the EXIT group for post-traumatic stress symptoms. EXIT group had higher life satisfaction and higher hope for future than control group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalantari (2012)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>88 war bereaved Afghan refugee students between 12 and 18 years of age</td>
<td>6 unstructured and structured writing sessions on 3 consecutive days</td>
<td>Students in the experimental group had a significant decrease in TSC scores. Analysis of covariance indicated significant effect of program on the experimental group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houshead (2008)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>105 immigrant and refugee preschoolers predominantly from Southeast Asia</td>
<td>School-based program consisting of sandplay workshops throughout the school year of 2004-2005</td>
<td>Children in experimental group benefited moderately from the program. Children whose families experienced violence in their homelands had significant decreased SDQ global scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowe (2017)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>30 refugee students from Burma between 11 and 20 years of age</td>
<td>16 sessions of Burma Art Therapy Program over the course of 6 months</td>
<td>The proportion of participants reporting symptoms of anxiety decreased by a statistically significant 6.8%. Teacher reports indicated a decrease of 5.2% among participants who had severe difficulties in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibidau &amp; Kork (2012)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>31 refugee children between 6 and 13 years of age</td>
<td>Twice weekly 30-minute child-centered play therapy (CCPT) sessions for 12 weeks</td>
<td>Results from ANCOVA measures indicated CCPT group demonstrated same significant decrease in severity of PTSSD rating as evidence-based TF-CBT group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Duguna (2016) | Quantitative | 64 Syrian refugee children between 7 and 12 years of age | 5-day workshops of art therapy directed guided by Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) | The mean scores of children were significantly higher at pre-intervention in comparison to post-treatment regarding trauma, depression and trai

Purpose
The purpose of this integrative literature review is to evaluate current research articles to determine the efficacy of CATs as therapeutic interventions for refugee minors by comparing their traumatic stress symptoms before and after participating in CATs.

Table 2. Efficacy of CATs on Decreasing Traumatic Stress Symptoms of Refugee Minors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Author</th>
<th>CATs Intervention</th>
<th>Intervention Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demott (2017)</td>
<td>Expressive Arts in Transition (EXIT)</td>
<td>There was significant time by group interaction in students of the EXIT group for post-traumatic stress symptoms. EXIT group had higher life satisfaction and higher hope for future than control group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalantari (2012)</td>
<td>Writing for Recovery</td>
<td>Students in the experimental group had a significant decrease in TSC scores. Analysis of covariance indicated significant effect of program on the experimental group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Househead (2008)</td>
<td>Sandplay Therapy</td>
<td>Children in experimental group benefited moderately from the program. Children whose families experienced violence in their homelands had significant decreased SDQ global scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowe (2017)</td>
<td>Burma Art Therapy Program (BATP)</td>
<td>The proportion of participants reporting symptoms of anxiety decreased by a statistically significant 6.8%. Teacher reports indicated a decrease of 5.2% among participants who had severe difficulties in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibidau &amp; Kork (2012)</td>
<td>Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT)</td>
<td>Results from ANCOVA measures indicated CCPT group demonstrated same significant decrease in severity of PTSSD rating as evidence-based TF-CBT group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Duguna (2016) | Art Therapy | The mean scores of children were significantly higher at pre-intervention in comparison to post-treatment regarding trauma, depression and trai

Conclusion
Creative Arts Therapies (CATs) have been indicated as possible early interventions for decreasing mental health symptoms of refugee minors who undergo traumatic migratory experiences.

This review identified three major themes that highlighted the beneficial effects of CATs related to: 1) Social engagement & connection; 2) Self-esteem & self-efficacy; and 3) Coping & relaxation.

The empirical evidence also indicated the decrease in traumatic stress symptoms such as maladaptive grief, depression, and anxiety to be statistically significant in several CATs intervention studies.

There is a need for more long-term interventions and follow-ups, as mental health symptoms tend to require long period of time to demonstrate significant trends.

Experiences CATs may not be comprehensively captured with standardized post-traumatic stress scales.

Limited number of empirical studies for CATs effects on refugee minors.

Populations included in studies may not be representative of diverse refugee populations.

Several studies had very short-term post-tests and follow-ups.

Recommendations
The literature suggests that different tools for analysis be used such as the Diagnostic Drawing Series, which is a more art-based assessment, to understand the positive growth of the participants during the therapeutic process.

More empirical studies focusing on the effects of CATs on refugee minors are needed.

Larger-scale studies with a more diverse refugee population are needed to establish accurate representation.

There is a need for more long-term interventions and follow-ups, as mental health symptoms tend to require long period of time to demonstrate significant trends.

There is a need for more art-based studies to be done and the inclusion of refugee minor population must be highlighted.

Health professionals have a responsibility to serve the most vulnerable groups of their society. The current state of global migration demands their support through more research, advocacy, and policy changes.

Limitations
- Experiences CATs may not be comprehensively captured with standardized post-traumatic stress scales.
- Limited number of empirical studies for CATs effects on refugee minors.
- Populations included in studies may not be representative of diverse refugee populations.
- Several studies had very short-term post-tests and follow-ups.

Recommendations
- The literature suggests that different tools for analysis be used such as the Diagnostic Drawing Series, which is a more art-based assessment, to understand the positive growth of the participants during the therapeutic process.
- More empirical studies focusing on the effects of CATs on refugee minors are needed.
- Larger-scale studies with a more diverse refugee population are needed to establish accurate representation.
- There is a need for more long-term interventions and follow-ups, as mental health symptoms tend to require long period of time to demonstrate significant trends.
- There is a need for more art-based studies to be done and the inclusion of refugee minor population must be highlighted.
- Health professionals have a responsibility to serve the most vulnerable groups of their society. The current state of global migration demands their support through more research, advocacy, and policy changes.