

Research Article

Therapeutic Effects of Art on Emotional Expression in Conflict-Affected Students

Lugyi No

Education Department, University of Massachusetts, Lowell, USA



ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT



Keywords:

Art Therapy, Emotional Expression, Conflict-Affected Adolescents, Therapeutic Interventions, Quantitative Experimental Study

Article History:

Received: 11-06-2024

Accepted: 05-10-2024

Published: 18-10-2024

This study investigates the short-term therapeutic effects of art interventions on the emotional expressions of Grade 9 and 10 students in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar. Utilizing a quantitative experimental design, the study involved 80 students who participated in either free or guided drawing sessions. Pre- and post-intervention surveys measured changes in emotional states, revealing significant reductions in sadness and worry, and enhancements in happiness and mental peace. Guided drawing, in particular, facilitated the direct expression of complex emotions, indicating the effectiveness of structured art activities as therapeutic tools. Grounded in the cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) framework, which posits that engaging in positive activities can modify negative thought patterns, the findings underscore the potential of art interventions to improve mental health and emotional resilience among youth in crisis settings. This research contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence of the immediate benefits of art therapy in educational environments affected by conflict and offers practical applications for enhancing emotional well-being in similar contexts.

Cite this article:

No, L. (2024). Therapeutic Effects of Art on Emotional Expression in Conflict-Affected Students. *Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(10), 36–46. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v3i10.350>

Introduction

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the country has faced significant socio-political upheaval, leading to widespread conflict and displacement. These conditions have severely impacted the educational and psychological well-being of adolescents in conflict-affected regions. Adolescents, particularly those in Grade 9 and 10, are at a critical developmental stage where emotional support is paramount (Eccles et al., 1993). This study investigates the short-term therapeutic effects of drawing interventions on adolescents' emotional expression, focusing on students in these grades from conflict-affected areas of Myanmar.

Pekon Township, located in Shan State, has been a focal point of intense conflict. Due to clashes between military council forces and resistance groups in both urban and rural areas, residents were forced to flee, adding to the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) already sheltering in the area (Karenni State IDP Assistance Network, 2024). Pekon Township has been abandoned due to the conflict, with civilians forced to flee, leaving only armed groups and military forces in the area. More than 80% of the population of Myanmar's Karenni State, which includes Pekon, has been displaced by the ongoing war, amounting to about 350,000 of the 420,000 residents (Wei, 2024). The influx of IDPs has

resulted in acute shortages of food and shelter, exacerbating the already dire situation for the residents (MPM, 2024; Wei, 2024).

Many of the displaced students are studying in makeshift schools or IDP camps, where the lack of stable infrastructure further complicates their educational and emotional needs (Karenni State IDP Assistance Network, 2024). Drawing on findings from previous studies, including those by Buriel et al. (2019), Gatta et al. (2014), and Feen-Calligan et al. (2020), this research aims to enhance our understanding of the potential benefits of art interventions for adolescents during conflict. Art therapy has been shown to be a powerful tool for emotional expression and psychological healing, particularly in traumatic contexts. This study emphasizes the critical need for targeted emotional support interventions against the backdrop of the significant educational and psychological disruptions faced by Myanmar's adolescents.

Emotional states such as sadness, happiness, worry, and mental peace are central to this investigation. Sadness is characterized by feelings of sorrow, helplessness, and disappointment (American Psychological Association, 2020); happiness is characterized by feelings of joy, satisfaction, and contentment (Lyubomirsky, 2001); worry is characterized by feelings of anxiety, unease, and concern about potential future events (Borkovec, Robinson, Pruzinsky, & DePree, 1983); and mental peace is characterized by a state of calmness, tranquility, and absence of stress (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009). This

*Corresponding Author:

Email: Lugyi_No@student.uml.edu (Lugyi No)

<https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v3i10.350>

© 2024 The Authors. Published by Sprin Publisher, India. This is an open access article published under the CC-BY license

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

study aims to measure the effectiveness of drawing interventions in improving the emotional well-being of conflict-affected students.

Utilizing a quantitative experimental approach, this study assesses changes in emotional expression by examining students' artworks and survey responses before and after drawing interventions. The focus on an adolescent age group identified by Boulton (2000) and Eisenberg et al. (1993) as being at a crucial developmental juncture adds to the significance of this research. The researcher's involvement in educational initiatives in Pekon Township, a conflict-affected area, provides a unique practical perspective and strengthens the goal of offering practical solutions to improve these students' resilience and emotional well-being during a critical developmental stage amid ongoing conflict.

Literature Review

Drawing interventions has been identified as one of the critical therapeutic measures, particularly in adolescents within conflict-affected regions. Whitenburg (2020) conducted a study demonstrating that art therapy played a very important role in improving the emotional well-being of adolescents who had experienced severe traumas. Through qualitative interviews and analysis of participant artwork, Whitenburg found the act of drawing allowed individuals to express feelings they could not find the words for, providing an integral outlet to process trauma and decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression. This study underlines that art therapy serves as a non-verbal means of communication, bridging the gap for those struggling with traditional therapeutic methods.

Similarly, Gatta et al. (2014) used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the effectiveness of art therapy with adolescents diagnosed with personality disorders. The study combined quantitative measures of psychological well-being with qualitative interviews capturing benefits of art therapy. The findings revealed that sensory engagement through art helped externalize internal conflicts and emotions for the participants, resulting in high levels of improvement in mental health. Additionally, the supportive group environment enhances mutual support among members of the group, offering a sense of community and belonging for the adolescents with a personality disorder in this particular study.

Feen-Calligan et al. (2020) developed a 12-week art intervention program for Syrian refugee youths in the U.S. Using a quasi-experimental design, they assessed whether drawing interventions reduced stress and trauma-related concerns among participants. The findings indicated significant improvements in coping mechanisms and a reduction in post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Despite the lack of a control group, the longitudinal design captured changes over time, highlighting the long-term benefits of art therapy.

Buser et al. (2023) studied the impact of art therapy on the emotional well-being and mental health of children in conflict-affected Kashmir. Their pre-test and post-test design with control groups provided robust evidence of art therapy's role in fostering supportive school environments and enhancing students' sense of belonging and empowerment. This controlled design strengthens the causal claims about the positive impact of art therapy in conflict zones.

Spier (2010) assessed the effectiveness of group art therapy in a school setting for eighth graders. Using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design, he observed improvements in coping skills and a decrease in disruptive behaviors. His study suggests that the efficacy of art therapy enhances students'

transitions and promotes a sense of belonging within the school community.

Ramirez et al. (2020) and Harpazi et al. (2020) provided insights into the effectiveness of group art therapy for addressing emotional and social issues among adolescents in varied settings. According to the findings of a cross-sectional study on "At-Risk" students by Ramirez et al. (2020), art therapy improved those students' handling of school-related and internalizing problems. Harpazi et al. (2020) employed a mixed-methods approach, showing that art therapy sessions in schools provided a supportive space for emotional expression, evolving from a leisure activity to a significant therapeutic tool.

Kaimal and Ray (2016) investigated the impact of free art-making on affect and self-efficacy in a study involving 39 healthy adults. Their mixed-methods quasi-experimental design, which lacked a control group, measured participants' positive and negative affect and perceived self-efficacy before and after a 45-minute art-making session facilitated by an art therapist. The findings revealed significant improvements in positive affect and self-efficacy, alongside reductions in negative affect. These benefits were consistent across different demographics, including prior art-making experience, gender, age, and race/ethnicity. Participants' artwork varied widely, encompassing themes of nature, people, activities, memories, and abstract concepts. This study underscores the value of unstructured art-making sessions in improving emotional states and self-efficacy.

Nicolas (2023) and Easwaran et al. (2021) further examined how art therapy impacts depression and well-being among adolescents. Nicolas used a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the therapy's effectiveness in reducing depression among high school students, while Easwaran employed participatory methods to understand how art engagement assists youth with depression and anxiety. Their studies emphasize the significance of involving adolescents in expressing their mental health experiences through art.

Slayton, D'Archer, and Kaplan (2010) conducted a comprehensive review of studies from 1999 to 2007 that evaluated the effectiveness of art therapy across various clinical and nonclinical populations. The review aimed to isolate art therapy as a specific intervention, distinguishing it from studies that blended it with other modalities. The findings indicated a growing body of quantifiable data supporting art therapy's effectiveness in treating a range of symptoms, age groups, and disorders. However, the authors highlighted the need for continued research with rigorous methodologies to further substantiate the therapeutic benefits of art therapy.

Stuckey and Nobel (2010) explored the relationship between engagement with the creative arts and health outcomes, focusing on music engagement, visual arts therapy, movement-based creative expression, and expressive writing. Their review highlighted evidence that art-based interventions can effectively reduce adverse physiological and psychological outcomes, such as stress and anxiety. However, they noted that the extent to which these interventions enhance overall health status remains largely unknown. They called for further investigation into the complexities of how engagement with the arts can improve health.

De Witte et al. (2021) conducted a scoping review to identify and analyze the therapeutic factors and mechanisms of change within creative arts therapies (CATs), including art therapy, dance/movement therapy, drama therapy, music therapy, psychodrama, and poetry/bibliotherapy. The review encompassed 67 empirical studies, documenting positive psychological and physiological impacts such as reductions in

stress, trauma, depression, anxiety, and pain. Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the efficacy of CATs, the specific therapeutic factors contributing to these positive outcomes remain underexplored. The authors proposed a framework consisting of 19 therapeutic domains, aiming to clarify the terminology used in change process research and offering a structured approach to understanding how CATs facilitate therapeutic change.

Buriel et al. (2019) emphasizes the adverse effects of armed conflict on education, particularly in the Middle East, and the importance of providing urgent educational support in such environments. Their research indicates that armed conflict disrupts educational systems, leading to significant psychological and academic setbacks for students. The study discusses how education in emergencies (EiE) has evolved since reforms in 2005, particularly noting the integration of art interventions with psychosocial goals. Buriel et al. argue that art therapy can play a crucial role in mitigating the negative impacts of conflict by offering a form of emotional relief and helping students process their experiences. They provide evidence that art interventions not only support emotional well-being but also contribute to the stabilization of educational environments in conflict zones.

Given the ongoing conflict in Myanmar, similar disruptions in the educational system and psychological well-being of adolescents are evident. The findings from these studies suggest that art therapy could offer significant benefits in this context. By providing a safe and supportive environment for emotional expression, art therapy can help adolescents in Myanmar process their trauma, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and foster resilience and a sense of community.

Despite the considerable volume of research demonstrating the benefits of art therapy in various conflict-affected settings, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the immediate impact of such interventions on the emotional expressions of adolescents in conflict-affected regions, particularly in Myanmar. Most existing studies focus on long-term impacts or specific clinical populations, leaving a gap in knowledge about short-term, immediate effects on a general adolescent population in an educational setting. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the short-term impact of art interventions on the emotional well-being of Grade 9 and 10 students in Myanmar, contributing valuable insights to the field of art therapy and educational support in conflict settings.

Research Objectives

To explore the short-term therapeutic effects of art intervention on emotional expression and emotional well-being among Grade 9 and 10 students in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research Questions: How does art intervention affect the emotional well-being, emotional states (worry, sadness, happiness, and mental well-being), and personal emotional experiences of adolescents in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar?

Hypothesis: *Art intervention significantly improves the emotional well-being, specific emotional states (worry, sadness, happiness, and overall mental well-being), and personal emotional experiences of adolescents in the conflict-affected areas of Myanmar.*

Research Design and Method

This study adopts a quantitative experimental survey research design to assess the therapeutic effects of art interventions on the emotional well-being of Grade 9 and 10 students in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar. Utilizing surveys as the primary data collection method, the research aims to measure changes in emotional states before and after drawing sessions, comparing two groups with distinct approaches: free drawing and guided drawing.

Methodological Approach

This study employs survey to investigate the impact of art activities on the emotional well-being of 9th and 10th graders in conflict-impacted regions of Myanmar. Grounded in existing art therapy research, the survey is designed to measure changes in students' emotional states—happiness, sadness, worry, and peace of mind—before and after art sessions. The study compares free and guided drawing to understand how different art interventions affect students' emotions.

Informed consent from the minors' parents or guardians was obtained, ensuring participants understood the survey's purpose, confidentiality, and their voluntary participation. The survey was structured to be engaging and straightforward, guiding students through questions about their emotional states pre- and post-art interventions. Post-survey inquiries were designed to evaluate the students' experiences and the perceived benefits of expressing emotions through art, aiming to foster genuine responses and gather meaningful data on the therapeutic value of art activities.

Participants: The study included 80 students from two schools, 40 students from each, in conflict-affected areas of Pekon Township, Myanmar. The sample encompassed both internally displaced persons (IDP) and local village residents. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring diversity in demographics and the extent of conflict impact.

Interventions: The experimental group in one school engages in free drawing sessions, drawing whatever pictures they like without specific guidance. The experimental group in the other school participated in guided drawing sessions, where they responded to prompts which encourage them to illustrate specific emotions or convey messages they wish to express to others. Pre- and post-surveys captured participants' emotional states before and changes after the drawing intervention.

Ethical Considerations: The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Massachusetts Lowell (IRB number: 24-040). Informed consent was a prerequisite for all study participants. For participants below the age of majority, informed assent was obtained along with consent from their legal guardians. The consent process involved providing detailed information about the study's objectives, the procedures to be followed, the voluntary nature of participation, and the strategies in place to protect participants' anonymity and personal data.

Data Analysis: The data analysis for this study utilized descriptive statistics, using Stata, to summarize participant demographics, emotional states before and after the drawing sessions, and perceptions of the drawing interventions. Frequency tables and cross-tabulations were used to present the distribution of key demographic variables, such as gender, living conditions, grade level, student groups, and age. Emotional states, including levels of happiness, sadness, worries, and mental peace, were analyzed using descriptive statistics both before and after the drawing interventions. Additionally, cross-tabulations were employed to compare emotional states and perceptions of stress release between the

Free Drawing and Guided Drawing groups. These analyses provided a comprehensive overview of the participants' characteristics and the impact of the drawing interventions on their emotional well-being.

The decision to use only descriptive statistics in this study is based on the exploratory nature of the research, which aims to provide an initial overview of the emotional states of students before and after drawing interventions in conflict-affected areas. Descriptive statistics offer simplicity and clarity, allowing for straightforward communication of the findings. Given the sample size of 80 students, descriptive methods are sufficient to highlight key differences and similarities within the dataset without requiring more complex inferential techniques. Additionally, much of the data is categorical, making frequency tables and cross-tabulations ideal for summarizing and presenting the information effectively. By focusing on descriptive statistics, the study achieves its goal of providing a clear and accessible overview of the participants' emotional states and the impact of the drawing interventions.

Theoretical Framework

This research is guided by cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which suggests that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interconnected, and that positive activity interventions can improve emotional and behavioral outcomes through negative thoughts to be modified (Beck, 1976). and cognitive restructuring. Behavioral interventions involve individuals engaging in positive and meaningful activities to improve mood and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in this study, drawing activities are a form of behavioral intervention, and provide students with a creative outlet that through which they express themselves creatively. This approach is especially important for students affected by conflict, as research has shown that creative activities such as drawing can significantly increase emotional expression and reduce stress, leading to better mental health outcomes (Drake, Coleman, & Winner, 2011).

Cognitive restructuring involves identifying and challenging negative thought patterns in order to change emotional responses and behaviors. Through drawing, students can express and reconstruct their experiences and emotions, facilitating cognitive restructuring. This process helps them manage and modify their intense emotions effectively (Pizarro, 2004), which is essential for coping with the psychological impact of conflict. Guided visualization activities are used to help students identify and reframe negative thoughts and feelings, consistent with the emotion regulation phase of CBT. By incorporating these visualization activities, the study aims to demonstrate that such interventions can significantly improve emotional well-being and reduce negative emotions such as sadness and anxiety students affected by conflict.

Findings

Table 1: Level of Happiness Before Drawing Intervention

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mildly unhappy	14	17.5	17.5
Not happy at all	4	5	57.5
Neither happy nor unhappy	28	35	52.5
Slightly happy	30	37.5	95
Very happy	4	5	100
Total	80	100	100

Table 2: Status of Happiness After Drawing Intervention

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
(No response)	1	1.25	1.25
It gets better	32	40	41.25
It gets better significantly	16	20	61.25
It gets worse a little bit	17	21.25	82.5
It gets worse significantly	5	6.25	88.75
Unchanged	9	11.25	100
Total	80	100	100

Table 3: Level of Sadness Before the Drawing Intervention

Sadness Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Felt sad	49	61.25	61.25
Neutral	13	16.25	77.5
Did not feel sad	18	22.5	100
Total	80	100	

Table 4: Status of Sadness After Drawing

Status	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Felt sadder	8	16.33	16.33
Unchanged	7	14.29	30.61
Reduced sadness	33	67.35	97.96
No response	1	2.04	100
Total	49	100	

Table 5: Level of Mental Peace Before the Drawing Intervention

Status	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not satisfied	30	37.5	37.5
Not sure	13	16.25	53.75
Satisfied	37	46.25	100
Total	80	100	

Table 6: Overall Feeling After Drawing Intervention

Status	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
I feel worse now	4	5	5
Unchanged	14	17.5	22.5
I feel better now	62	77.5	100
Total	80	100	

Table 7: Level of Worries Before Drawing Intervention

Level of Worries Last Week	Frequency	Percent
Minimal Worries	9	11.25%
Moderate Worries	49	61.25%
Significant Worries	12	15.00%
No Worries	10	12.50%
Total (Excluding No Worries)	70	87.50%

Table 8: Status of Worries After Drawing Intervention

Status of Worries After Drawing	Frequency	Percent
Reduced Worries	59	74.68%
Increased Worries	6	7.59%
Unchanged	14	17.72%
Total	79	100%

Table 9: Perception of Stress Release through Drawing

Perception	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	3	3.75	3.75
Unsure	1	1.25	5
Agree	76	95	100
Total	80	100	

Table 10: Opinion on Drawing Sessions in Curriculum

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No, I don't agree	10	12.5	12.5
Yes, I agree	70	87.5	100
Total	80	100	100

Table 11: Before Art Intervention

Level of Sadness	Free Drawing Group	Guided Drawing Group
Sad (very sad + somewhat sad)	32 (10+22)	31 (4+27)
Neutral	5	8
Not sad	3	1
Total	40	40

Table 12: After Art Intervention

Overall Feeling After Drawing	Free Drawing Group	Guided Drawing Group
Feel better (better + significantly better)	29 (23+6)	33 (31+2)
I feel worse now	3	1
Unchanged	8	6
Total	40	40

Table 13: Does Drawing Make You Release Stress?

Release Stress	Free Drawing Group	Guided Drawing Group
I don't know	0	1
No, I don't think so	2	1
Yes, I think so	38	38
Total	40	40

Figure 1: Some Pictures depicted by Free drawing group



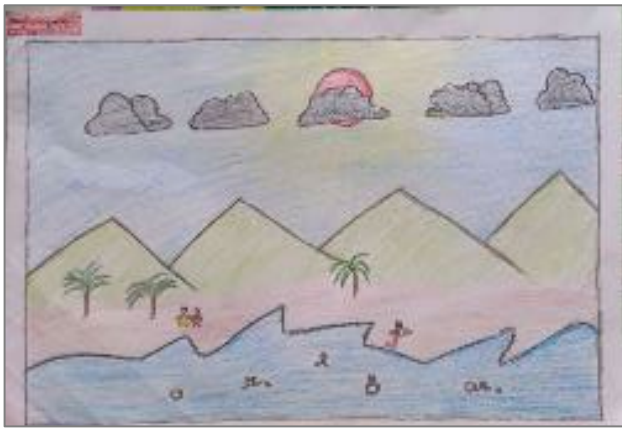
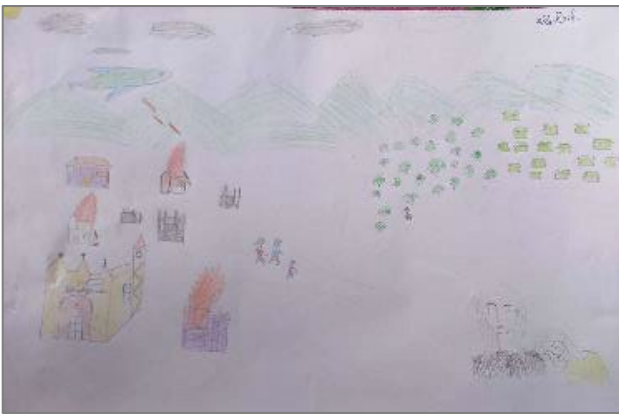


Figure 2: Some Pictures depicted by Guided drawing group







The impact of the drawing intervention on students' happiness and sadness

22.5% of students felt unhappy, and 61.25% felt sad before the drawing intervention (Table 1 and Table 3). After the intervention, 60% of the students reported increased happiness (40% slightly, 20% significantly) (Table 2), while sadness decreased in 67.35% of the students (Table 4). This indicates that the drawing intervention generally reduced sadness and improved happiness. These findings are consistent with the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which emphasize the role of engaging in positive activities to improve mood (Beck, 1976). The observed changes also align with previous research by Whitenburg (2020) and Gatta et al. (2014),

who highlighted the therapeutic benefits of art in reducing anxiety and depression symptoms.

The level of worries among students before and after a drawing intervention

The level of worries among students before and after a drawing intervention is detailed in Table 7 and Table 8. Before the drawing intervention, 61.25% of students reported moderate worry, 15% had significant worry, 11.25% had minimal worry, and 12.5% had no worry (Table 7). After the intervention, 74.68% reported reduced worries, 7.59% experienced increased worry, and 17.72% saw no change (Table 8). The intervention significantly lowered worry levels for about 75% of the students, suggesting that drawing activities can effectively reduce worries, especially in conflict-affected school settings. These results are supported by Feen-Calligan et al. (2020), who found similar improvements in coping mechanisms among Syrian refugee youths.

Student Mental Peace Before and After Drawing Intervention

Before drawing intervention, 37.5% of students felt discontent with their mental peace, 16.25% were uncertain, and 46.25% were satisfied, showing a division in emotional well-being (Table 5). After the intervention, 77.5% felt improved mental peace, 17.5% felt unchanged, and only 5% felt worse (Table 6). This highlights the intervention's positive impact, increasing satisfaction from 46.25% to 77.5%. It demonstrates the drawing intervention's effectiveness in enhancing the mental and emotional well-being of the majority of students. The increase in mental peace aligns with the CBT framework's emphasis on cognitive restructuring and emotion regulation (Pizarro, 2004).

Assessing the Efficacy of Drawing Interventions in Stress Relief and Curriculum Integration Among Students

The survey results show that 95% of students found drawing helpful for stress release, with only 3.75% disagreeing and 1.25% uncertain (Table 9). This indicates a broad recognition of its therapeutic value. The data also revealed differing views on integrating drawing into the academic curriculum: 12.5% opposed this idea, whereas a substantial 87.5% favored it, reflecting a strong collective preference for embedding artistic activities like drawing within the educational framework, especially in settings affected by conflict (Table 10).

Comparison between two students' group

Before the art intervention, the Free Drawing and Guided Drawing groups reported similar levels of sadness, with 32 and 31 students respectively feeling sad (Table 11). After the intervention, there was a noticeable improvement in emotions: 29 students in the Free Drawing and 33 in the Guided Drawing group felt better, suggesting a particularly beneficial impact of structured art activities (Table 12). Furthermore, 38 students in each group found drawing helpful for stress relief, affirming the intervention's role in managing stress (Table 13). This uniform enhancement in emotional and stress-related outcomes post-intervention underscores the effectiveness of art interventions in improving emotional well-being, regardless of the drawing approach.

Comparative analysis of the artistic expressions between the two groups

The drawings from the two groups show clear differences as shown in appendix. The Free Drawing Group often drew

landscapes with mountains and plants, suggesting a sense of peace. Some drawings with less color or a lone figure might show feelings of loneliness or deep thought. On the other hand, the Guided Drawing Group drew about conflict and difficult emotions. Their artworks include strong words that share their wishes for peace and the hardships they face because of conflict. Phrases such as: "Now, I learn that life is such a hard thing" and "I am not happy these days, missing home and want to stay with all the family members. Where is peace?" encapsulate the students' deep yearnings and reflect the turbulence of their current realities. Others, like "If we cannot go back and harvest, what are we going to eat" and "Way back to home wishing a pleasant morning," express concerns for the future and a desire to return to a sense of normalcy. Affirmations like "I want peace and freedom from fear" and "Let's be resilient till the end" further underscore the resilience and hopeful resolve present among the students, despite the adversity they face. The difference in the content of the drawings between the two groups suggests that the guided drawing approach may encourage students to confront and express their experiences more directly. This observation highlights the potential of art as a tool for helping young people to express complex emotions in settings affected by conflict.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with the principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which emphasize the interconnectedness of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The significant reductions in sadness and worry, alongside improvements in happiness and mental peace, observed in this study can be attributed to the positive activity interventions provided by the drawing sessions. According to Beck's (1976) cognitive restructuring theory, engaging in positive and meaningful activities, such as drawing, helps individuals modify negative thought patterns, leading to improved emotional and behavioral outcomes. The drawing sessions provided students with a creative outlet to express and reconstruct their experiences and emotions, facilitating cognitive restructuring and emotional regulation.

This study aligns with Buriel et al. (2019) and Feen-Calligan et al. (2020), showing improved happiness in students after art interventions, which supports art therapy's role in enhancing emotional well-being in educational settings, especially among conflict-impacted youth. The decrease in sadness, echoing Gatta et al. (2014), indicates art therapy's potential in reducing negative emotions and possibly depression symptoms, as Nicolas (2023) suggests. Additionally, the increased mental peace and stability post-intervention, supported by Buser et al. (2023) and Harpazi et al. (2020), highlight art's effectiveness in fostering emotional equilibrium. The students' positive reception towards art therapy, in line with Quinlan et al. (2016) and Ramirez et al. (2020), underscores its perceived benefits and acceptability. This research advocates for integrating art-based interventions in educational programs, especially in conflict settings, to aid emotional processing and well-being in adolescents, contributing to the literature on art therapy's therapeutic impacts in specific contexts.

Future plan for Improvement

Future research should expand upon these findings by employing longitudinal approaches to observe the enduring effects of art interventions. Long-term studies will help determine whether the short-term benefits observed in this study translate into sustained improvements in emotional well-being. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, will provide a richer

understanding of students' personal experiences with art therapy and how it impacts their emotional and psychological states over time.

Improved sampling strategies should include a broader array of students from different conflict-affected areas in Myanmar to capture diverse experiences and responses to art therapy. This will enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide insights into how various environmental contexts influence the effectiveness of art interventions.

By addressing these directions, future research can contribute valuable knowledge to the field of educational support and art therapy in conflict-affected settings, ultimately informing the development of more effective and targeted interventions for enhancing the emotional resilience and well-being of adolescents in crisis environments.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Jill Hendrickson Lohmeier, a professor of Research and Evaluation in Education at the University of Massachusetts, who supervised and supported every aspect of this experimental research. Additionally, I extend my gratitude to the teachers and volunteers who facilitated the data collection process and provided support throughout the study. I am also grateful to the students who participated in the research, sharing their artwork and insights. Special thanks to my Ph.D. colleagues for their guidance and feedback on this paper.

I also wish to acknowledge the use of Grammarly and ChatGPT for grammar and writing assistance, which helped improve the clarity and readability of this manuscript.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest. No financial interest or benefit has arisen from the direct applications of this research.

Funding details

No funding was received for this research.

Reference

- Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders*. New York, NY: International Universities Press. Retrieved from <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=204916>
- Borkovec, T. D., Robinson, E., Pruzinsky, T., & DePree, J. A. (1983). Preliminary exploration of worry: Some characteristics and processes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 21(1), 9–16. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967\(83\)90121-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(83)90121-3)
- Buriel, A., Morais, S., & Loquet, M. (2019, January 1). *Arts education in emergency humanitarian aid: educational issues with young people living in camps in conflict areas in the Middle East*. HAL (Le Centre Pour La Communication Scientifique Directe). <https://doi.org/10.24981/m2019.14>
- Buser, M., Brännlund, E., Holt, N. J., Leeson, L., & Mytton, J. (2023, January 23). Creating a difference – a role for the arts in addressing child wellbeing in conflict-affected areas. *Arts & Health*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2023.2168710>
- Chambers, R., Gullone, E., & Allen, N. B. (2009b). Mindful emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29(6), 560–572. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.06.005>
- De Witte, M., Orkibi, H., Zarate, R., Karkou, V., Sajjani, N., Malhotra, B., Ho, R. T. H., Kaimal, G., Baker, F. A., &

- Koch, S. C. (2021). From Therapeutic Factors to Mechanisms of Change in the Creative Arts Therapies: A Scoping Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.678397>
- Drake, J. E., Coleman, K., & Winner, E. (2011). Short-term mood repair through art: Effects of medium and strategy. *Art Therapy*, 28(1), 26–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2011.557032>
- Easwaran, K., Narasimhan, L., Japee, Y., Raja, T., Murali, A., & Easwaran, D. (2021, September 9). *Why art matters for youth mental health: A youth led participatory insight analysis*. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/ap476>
- Eccles, J. S., Midgley, C., Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C. M., Reuman, D., Flanagan, C., & Mac Iver, D. (1993). Development during adolescence: The impact of stage-environment fit on young adolescents' experiences in schools and in families. *American Psychologist*, 48(2), 90–101. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.48.2.90>
- Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., Guthrie, I. K., & Reiser, M. (2000, January). Dispositional emotionality and regulation: Their role in predicting quality of social functioning. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(1), 136–157. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.1.136>
- Feen-Calligan, H., Ruvalo Grasser, L., Debryn, J., Nasser, S., Jackson, C., Seguin, D., & Javanbakht, A. (2020, July). Art therapy with Syrian refugee youth in the United States: An intervention study. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 69, 101665. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2020.101665>
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–226. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.56.3.218>
- Gatta, M., Gallo, C., & Vianello, M. (2014, February 1). Art therapy groups for adolescents with personality disorders. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2013.11.001>
- Harpazi, S., Regev, D., Snir, S., & Raubach-Kaspy, R. (2020, November 9). Perceptions of Art Therapy in Adolescent Clients Treated Within the School System. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.518304>
- Hawker, D. S. J., & Boulton, M. J. (2000, May 1). *Twenty Years' Research on Peer Victimization and Psychosocial Maladjustment: A Meta-analytic Review of Cross-sectional Studies*. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-7610.00629>
- Kaimal, G., & Ray, K. (2016). Free art-making in an art therapy open studio: changes in affect and self-efficacy. *Arts & Health/Arts and Health*, 9(2), 154–166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2016.1217248>
- Karenni State IDP Assistance Network. (2024). Nearly 3,000 IDPs forced to flee again amid Pekon-Pinlaung border clashes. Retrieved from <https://mmpeacemonitor.org/326435/nearly-3000-idps-forced-to-flee-again-amid-pekong-pinlaung-border-clashes/>
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2001). Why are some people happier than others? The role of cognitive and motivational processes in well-being. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 239–249. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.239>
- MPM. (2024). Nearly 3,000 IDPs forced to flee again amid Pekon-Pinlaung border clashes. Retrieved from <https://mmpeacemonitor.org/326435/nearly-3000-idps-forced-to-flee-again-amid-pekong-pinlaung-border-clashes/>
- Nicolas, J. (2023). *The Effects of School-Based Art Therapy on Depressed Adolescents*. <https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2023.nurs.st.29>
- Pizarro, J. (2004). The Efficacy of Art and Writing Therapy: Increasing Positive Mental Health Outcomes and Participant Retention After Exposure to Traumatic Experience. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ683379>
- Quinlan, R., Schweitzer, R. D., Khawaja, N., & Griffin, J. (2016, February). Evaluation of a school-based creative arts therapy program for adolescents from refugee backgrounds. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 47, 72–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2015.09.006>
- Ramirez, K., Haen, C., & Cruz, R. F. (2020, November). Investigating impact: The effects of school-based art therapy on adolescent boys living in poverty. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 71, 101710. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2020.101710>
- Slayton, S. C., D'Archer, J., & Kaplan, F. (2010). Outcome Studies on the Efficacy of Art Therapy: A Review of Findings. *Art Therapy*, 27(3), 108–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2010.10129660>
- Spier, E. (2010, January). Group Art Therapy with Eighth-Grade Students Transitioning to High School. *Art Therapy*, 27(2), 75–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2010.10129717>
- Stuckey, H. L., & Nobel, J. (2010). The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(2), 254–263. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2008.156497>
- Wei, B. (2024). More than 80% of the population of Myanmar's Karen State has been displaced by war. *The Irrawaddy*. Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/more-than-80-of-the-population-of-myanmars-karen-state-has-been-displaced-by-war.html>
- Whitenburg, M. E. (2020). *Art Therapy as an Intervention and Its Effects on Anxiety and Depression*. DigitalCommons@EMU. <https://commons.emich.edu/mcnair/vol13/iss1/12/>

Appendix

Participant Demographics and Group Distribution				
Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Female	55	68.75	68.75
	Male	24	30	98.75
	Not Mentioned	1	1.25	100
Living Conditions	Internally Displaced	49	61.25	61.25
	Local Own Village	31	38.75	100
Grade Level	Grade 10	69	86.25	86.25
	Grade 9	11	13.75	100
Student Groups	Free Drawing Group	40	50	50
	Guided Drawing Group	40	50	100
Age	14	2	2.5	2.5
	15	19	23.75	26.25
	16	32	40	66.25
	17	25	31.25	97.5
	18	2	2.5	100