



RESEARCH PAPER

Improving Stress Levels and Resilience through Integrated Islamic Art Interventions in Undergraduate University Students

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ABSTRACT

The current research was planned to investigate the efficacy of integrated Islamic Art Interventions on stress and resilience among undergraduate university students. After screening on Stress levels with Students Stress Inventory, 10 participants were selected with moderate to severe stress from a public sector university. Furthermore another questionnaire were also used to measure the resilience which was a Brief Resilience Scale. The responses on questionnaires were taken before intervention and also post intervention. The results were generated and analyzed through SPSS (26 Version). The results of paired sample t-test indicate that Islamic Art Interventions significantly decrease the stress levels and significantly increasing the resilience levels among undergraduate university students. This carries implications for psychologists and educationists for using Islamic Art Interventions for improving the academic and personal life issues in the student population.

Keywords: Islamic Art, Resilience, Stress, Therapy, Undergraduate Students

Introduction

University students are a unique group of people who are passing through a critical period of life in which they experience many stressful events (Asif et al., 2020) As the education process to a higher level the students face more stressful events like tougher syllabus, challenging work assignments and projects or residing in hostels. Such challenges need to have better coping strategies. It is the duty of educators to help their students coping with such stressors which allow them maintain mental stability (Kumaraswamy, 2013).

Stress is defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as a person's physically as well as psychological response to an event, an object, or something that is perceived as a threat. Likewise, stress according to Campbell (2006), is a negative response people have to being under a lot of pressure. Stress is more prevalent when people are dealing with an overwhelming issue and feel inept. According to the definitions, stress is a psycho-physiological phenomenon that results from ongoing interactions between a person's environment and themselves (Yikealo et al., 2018).

According an Australian research, 53% of university students experiencing psychological anguish (Stallman, 2008). A sample of university students in Turkey were found to have stress (27%) (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). In addition, 30% undergraduate students in Canada showed psychological issues (Adlaf et al., 2001). Asian countries reported to suffer more from stress than the other countries, because a study conducted on the university students in India reported high level of stress (53%) (Iqbal et al., 2015). Earlier research also reported evidence of stress among university students in Pakistan (Asif et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2018). Past studies have reported that individuals with higher levels of resilience cope better when facing adversity, and resilience acts as a protective factor

against stress, depression, and anxiety (Bacchi & Licinio, 2017; Saddique et al., 2021). In a study by Ebenezer et al. (2020), the undergraduate students had moderate perceived stress levels and low resilience levels.

Building resilience requires a person's protective elements of abilities and skills (competencies) (Dyer & McGuinness, 1996). According to Brownlee et al. (2013), resilience is a progressive process, and an individual's resilience is greatly influenced by their environment. Moreover, resilience has constantly association with coping strategies (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008; Wu et al., 2020). It is well recognized that people with low psychological resilience react more quickly to everyday stressful occurrences, whereas people with high psychological resilience recover more quickly from adversity. (Ong et al., 2006) and are more satisfied with their life (Karaman et al., 2020). In order to improve the well-being of students and reduction of stress Art therapy is widely seen as an effective treatment (Malchiodi, 2005).

Literature Review

A lot of people utilized art therapy to treat psychological issues and diseases. Its effectiveness for treating a variety of psychological issues has been demonstrated by numerous research and its evidence-based approach to addressing psychological disorders (Hajra & Saleem, 2021). The idea behind art therapy is that life may be improved and repaired through the creative process of handicraft. It is a form of nonverbal expression of feelings and thoughts. Therapists are increasingly using this therapy with clients of all ages and from a variety of populations. Counselors, psychologists, doctors, instructors, and social workers are using the expression of emotions in the form of art for healing and treatment, not just therapists (Malchiodi, 2005).

Drawing, coloring, collage-making, clay-modelling, photography, and other artistic techniques are used in art therapy. Creating art helps ease tension such as stress, and creative ability is not really necessary (Boucher, 2016). While, Islamic-Patterned Art Therapy has also been shown to be effective in treating mental health conditions like stress among university students (Hajra & Saleem, 2021). Similarly, Mandala coloring as a therapeutic intervention for various mental problems like anxiety has been studied internationally.(Noor et al., 2017), depressive symptoms (Gussak, 2007), and PTSD symptoms (Lynch et al., 2006).

According to a Pakistani study, using Mandala coloring as a therapeutic approach is helpful in reducing anxiety, which can improve quality of life and work performance (Noor et al., 2017). While, Adult Islamic coloring book was developed by Hajra and Saleem (2021) and used as a therapeutic intervention over the course of 14 sessions to reduce stress, anxiety, as well as depression and to improve the psychological wellbeing of university students. Hajra and Saleem (2021) reported that about therapy that this therapy is very effective to reduce psychological issues and person feel relax, calm and stress free after this therapeutic intervention. Similarly, Garrett (2015) believes that art therapy supports individuals to "be sincere with themselves," "recognize their own values," "deem their own emotions," "inculcate self-concept," as well as "conduct overall life integration." Because when the individual is thoroughly immersed in the creative process, his or her physiology and mind will undergo profound changes and fee emotional release, as well as she or he feel the liberty to transcend space and time; her or his body and mind also be integrated (Horovitz, 2017). Art therapy is a unique psychological method of intervention that incorporates a distinctive visual imagery and is very functional, allowing university students to express themselves through many channels to assist them better their mental health or adapt to their social position (Van Lith et al., 2017).

It is important to study stress because the effects from life stressors play a role in the etiology of various mental disorders. High stress with low resilience in students may

give rise to violence, toxic substance addiction, demotivation, boredom, difficulties in relations with families and classmates and in some cases drop-out as well. Whereas, Islamic Art Interventions has been studied as effective to reduce stress and increase wellbeing. Thus, an aim of this research is to measure the efficacy of integrated Islamic art therapeutic interventions on stress and resilience of undergraduate university students from Karachi. Therefore, it is hypothesized that;

H1: There will be a significant difference in the pretest and posttest of stress level among undergraduate students after applying Islamic Art Interventions.

H2: There will be a significant difference in the pretest and posttest of resilience level among undergraduate students after applying Islamic Art Interventions.

Material and Methods

Research Design

It is a pre post research design. The current was planned as a pilot study to measure the efficacy of Islamic Art Interventions on Resilience, and Stress among undergraduate students.

Participants

The 10 participants from a public sector with moderate to severe stress were selected through screening of 100 undergraduate students and the selected participants were also reported low level of resilience. Individual sessions were given to the participants. The age range of the participants was from 18 years to 25 years and the mean of participants was ($M \pm SD$ 21.60 \pm 1.35). Sessions were conducted in the professional environment at place of psychological clinic. The participants who meets the inclusion criteria were welcomed to participate.

Inclusion Criteria

For current research inclusion criteria were the students who were studying in public or private sector University in Pakistan between 18 years to 25 years of age. They must fall in moderate to severe stress range and with low resilience level. Participants who are Muslims must be part of the research.

Exclusion Criteria

For an exclusion criteria Participants with any co morbid of mental illness or physical disability were excluded from study. Individual with already receiving psychological therapy for any mental illness were also excluded from this study as this could affect on the ongoing research.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

Basic information from the participants were collected by providing them with demographic form such as gender, age, marital status, family system (Nuclear; Joint), total number of earning family members, family's monthly income.

Student Stress Inventory

The university student stress level was measured through Student Stress Inventory (SSI), which is designed among university students. SSI encompassed 40 items with 4-point Likert response e.g. 'Never' (1) to 'Always' (4). The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of overall SSI was quite high at 0.86. When it comes to interpretation, the SSI recommended that those who scored in range from 122 to 160 indicate severe stress, 81 to 121 indicate moderate stress, and those who scored in range from 40-80 indicate mild stress. A study was conducted in Malaysia among university students with high validity of 0.805 and reliability of 0.857 (Arip et al., 2015).

The Brief Resilience Scale

The six items on the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) were developed by Smith et al. (2008). On a 5-point Likert-type scale, from "1" for "does not describe me at all" to "5" for "describes me very well," the participants were asked to rate the degree to which each statement accurately characterized their behavior and activities. The BRS's coefficient alpha was 0.71, indicating strong internal consistency. In a recent study, Furstova et al. (2022) reported the high reliability of BRS among Czech sample ($\alpha = 0.80$)

Procedure

The informed consent was signed from participant before pre testing and starting of therapy. After that the participants who full-fills the exclusion and inclusion criteria of the study were selected using students stress inventory and brief resilience scale. The pilot study of 10 undergraduate university students was done by giving them one to one sessions to see the effectiveness of Islamic Art therapy on resilience and stress. The total 10 one-to-one sessions of 60 minutes each were provided to the undergraduate students with Islamic Art Interventions. The first two sessions were related to pre assessment, rapport building and psycho-education. The third sessions till eight sessions were included the coloring on Islamic theme based Mandalas along the relaxation exercises. The last two sessions were summary, feedback and post- assessment.

Statistical Analysis

The findings of current study were analyzed using SPSS (26 Version). The results of the pretest and posttest for the experimental group were compared statistically using a pair sample T-test.

Ethical Consideration

The participants in the current research were aware of its purpose, and the study complied with American Psychological Association ethics and ethical standards. Additionally, they were informed that all the information would be confidential and was only used for research. Participants guaranteed that they were free to discontinue their participation in the study at any time. Participants in this study were informed that there was no fee for taking part in the research.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Demographic Information (N=10)

Respondent's Characteristics		f (%)
Gender	Male	2 (20.0)
	Female	8 (80.0)

Family Type	Nuclear	8 (80.0)
	Joint	2 (20.0)
CGPA	M (SD)	3.45 (0.47)

Table 1 showed the demographic sheet's percentage as well as frequency distribution. The gender of participants was like, only 2(20%) were male and remaining 8 (80%) were female, so majority of participants were female. Considering the family type of participants, majority respondent were from joint family e.g. 8(80.0%) participants were joint family and 2(20.0%) participants were from nuclear family. The CGPA of participants was measured, which found (M = 3.45 with SD = 0.47).

Table 2
Comparison of Pre-Post Testing Using Pared Sample t-Test with Islamic Art Therapeutic Intervention for Stress and Resilience (N=10)

Variable	Pre-Testing		Post-Testing		MD	t	p	95%CI	
	M	SD	M	SD				LL	UL
Stress	100.40	13.67	68.20	11.99	32.20	9.70	.00	24.69	39.71
Resilience	14.60	2.07	19.90	3.28	-5.30	-5.62	.00	-7.43	-3.17

The table 2 showed the significant differences at pre-post testing with Islamic Art Therapeutic Intervention for stress and resilience. The average (M = 100.40, SD = 13.67) score of stress was significant higher at pre testing than at post testing (M = 68.20, SD = 11.99, $t = 9.70$, $p < .001$) among participants. Its mean that Islamic Art Interventions decreased the stress level of participants. While, the average (M = 14.60, SD = 2.07) score of resilience was significant lower at pre testing than at post testing (M = 19.90, SD = 3.28, $t = -5.30$, $p < .001$) among participants. Its mean that Islamic Art Interventions increased the resilience level of participants.

Discussion

This research was aim to measure the efficacy of integrated Islamic Art Interventions on stress and resilience of undergraduate university students. Art therapy has been studied in previous researches in order to treat the mental health problems (Hu et al., 2021; Shukla et al., 2022). While the results of present research for the first hypothesis found that Islamic Art Interventions significantly decreased the stress level of participants and the average score of stress was significant lower at post testing than at pre testing. Several past studies have proven that art therapy plays an important role to reduce anxiety, stress and symptoms of depression (Hajra & Saleem, 2021; Hongtao, 2021). In an observational study, Gussak (2007) found that art therapy dramatically decreased the depressed symptoms. Likewise, single-blind and randomized controlled studies also proved that art therapy was effective for psychological distress (Ciasca et al., 2018). Very popular among students, art therapy has been shown in numerous studies (Hongtao, 2021) to dramatically lessen stress and symptoms of depression. Studies reported poor mental health with higher distress level and low quality of life and dissatisfaction with life among undergraduate students (Kamarunzaman et al., 2020). Painting is an effective way to express students' fear and anxiety, let out un-favorable feelings by projecting them, and so greatly elevate mood and lessen depressive and anxious symptoms in university students (Sandmire et al., 2012). The results of present research also supported through Pakistani study that confirmed the effectiveness of Islamic Art Interventions to reduce stress among university students (Hajra & Saleem, 2021). Religious practices and involvement in religious activities is also one of the strong reasons to reduce mental health issues such as stress (Hebert et al., 2007; Zimmer et al., 2016), therefore Islamic Art Interventions significantly effective in reducing stress among undergraduate university students.

The results of present research for the second hypothesis of resilience found that Islamic Art Interventions significantly increase the resilience level of undergraduate students. The average score of resilience was significant higher at post testing after 10

sessions of Islamic Art Interventions than at pre testing. Past studies also confirmed the effectiveness of art therapy to increase the resilience (Kim et al., 2018; Roghanchi et al., 2013). Hass-Cohen et al. (2018) believed that resilience can increase through creativity, imagination, as well as art therapy, therefore many past studies investigated the effectiveness of art therapy to boost resilience among students population (Li & Peng, 2022; Roghanchi et al., 2013). Past studies provide evidence that artistic expression improve emotional stability among students and emotionally stable students report more resilience (Lavric & Soponaru, 2023). Because the arts therapy provides chances to develop healthy coping mechanisms, which strengthens the ability to solve problems (Price & Swan, 2020), therefore resilience increases spontaneously. A review of the given literature provide that Islamic Art Interventions improve mental health and quality of life and resilience has affirmative relation with mental health and higher quality of life (Bastaminia et al., 2016; Hartley, 2013), therefore Islamic art Interventions are effective to increase the resilience of university students.

Conclusion

Considering the result of this pilot study, it is concluded that Islamic Art Intervention is effective in reducing the stress levels. Islamic Art Interventions are also effective to increase the resilience level among university students.

Recommendations

This research sample is limited to only 10 participants as a pilot study. Secondly, only pre post research group was studied in this research, so it is suggested for upcoming researchers to study Islamic Art Interventions with control and experimental group to generate more accurate findings. Thirdly, this current research only conducted on undergraduate university students so it should be conducted on different age groups as well.

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