


Finding a voice

Art therapy as a path to disclosure – a South African perspective

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Bio

Gugulethu Manana is a dedicated Masters student at the University of Johannesburg, specialising in Art Therapy. With a passion for helping people explore their childhood influences, Gugulethu conducts research and implements arts-based interventions to promote emotional well-being and personal growth. Experienced in working with children, young people, and adults in individual, group, and community settings and combining psychological knowledge with a deep appreciation for the expressive arts. Guided by experienced art therapists, she is committed to making a positive impact in the lives of others through her work.

Abstract

This article examines the use of art therapy for facilitating disclosure among those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse (CSA) in South Africa. Disclosure of CSA as a process of exposing and discussing abuse is a difficult and complex process, and traditional therapeutic approaches are not always effective. Traditional talk therapy approaches to discussing experiences with a therapist in South Africa are often hampered by cultural barriers, a lack of knowledge and resources, and a tendency to view disclosure as a one-off event rather than a process. Art therapy, a form of psychotherapy that uses art in therapy, can provide survivors with a safe and non-threatening space to express their feelings, communicate their experiences, and process the complex feelings associated with CSA. This study sheds light on the mechanisms of change in art therapy and is a valuable resource for mental

health professionals working with survivors of CSA and researchers interested in the potential of art therapy as a therapeutic intervention. This article argues that art therapy can be a powerful tool to help CSA survivors find their voice to disclose and initiate the healing process.

Keywords: Art therapy, CSA, disclosure, South Africa

Introduction

The pervasive sexual abuse of children in South Africa causes significant physical, psychological, and social harm (Devries & Meinck, 2018; Ward et al., 2018), with survivors often struggling to disclose their experiences (Alaggia et al., 2019; Mathews et al., 2016). The disclosure of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is a complex process that requires a supportive and empathetic environment (Fouché, 2007). Though traditional talk therapy approaches have proven beneficial, their effectiveness is limited (Lev-Wiesel, 2008). Art therapy offers an alternative avenue for disclosure because the medium helps individuals convey experiences and emotions without relying solely on verbal communication (Fybish, 2019). Simply put, they can express themselves in a safe and non-threatening way, which is vital when dealing with victims of trauma or abuse (Laird & Mulvihill, 2022). The creative process involved in artmaking can also help individuals regulate their emotions and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression (de Witte et al., 2021).

The extent of CSA in South Africa is reflected in crime statistics and studies (Ward et al., 2018), which show that around 19.8% of female children and 2.6% of male children experienced CSA by age 18. According to Mathews et al. (2016), this devastating problem often results in physical, emotional, and psychological trauma. The stigma associated with CSA includes the fear of being stereotyped, labelled, judged, or blamed, , for example, religious factors in South Africa that may impact this; a female child may be married off when she hits puberty, and hinders survivors from speaking out and has long-term adverse effects on their mental and physical health (Devries & Meinck, 2018; Alaggia, Collin-Vézina & Lateef, 2019).

Literature confirms this stigma and has identified facilitators and barriers to disclosure (Alaggia et al., 2019; Collings et al., 2005). Lev-Wiesel (2008) and Collings et al. (2005) cite disbelief from others, concerns about negative consequences, and fear of retaliation as discouraging factors, while cultural and societal norms also have a significant bearing on victims' willingness to

disclose (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). Understanding and addressing these facilitating factors and barriers is important to creating a supportive and safe environment that encourages survivors to speak up, seek help, and get the support they need. The complexity of the process means that traditional therapeutic approaches are not always effective, hence the need for alternatives (Lev-Wiesel, 2008). Art therapy is a relatively new way of treating CSA, and there is limited research on its effectiveness in a local context (Laird & Mulvihill, 2022). This paper considers its potential as a therapeutic approach to aid disclosure by reviewing local and international studies on CSA, conventional therapy, and art therapy (Laird & Mulvihill, 2022; de Witte et al., 2021).

When considering the South African context, the COVID-19 lockdown measures of 2020/2021 heightened the risk of CSA due to closed schools, limited access to support services, and reduced safe spaces outside the home, such as playgrounds, recreational centres, and mental health facilities. The increased reliance on technology for remote learning and social interaction also opened avenues for online grooming and exploitation. As an art therapist in training at a community-based art therapy centre in the inner city of Johannesburg, I have witnessed the effectiveness of online open studio sessions in addressing these risks. While these sessions were not specifically focused on treating CSA in children, they provided a therapeutic artmaking environment, allowing children to explore emotions, reflect on experiences, and express anxiety through art. They have proven valuable resources for children, parents, and professionals, extending the therapeutic space beyond physical locations (Author, 2020). While my community engagement and art therapy sessions with inner-city children at the community-based art therapy centre reflect my longstanding concern with CSA, it does not relate to my master's dissertation, which covered art therapy interventions for adult survivors of CSA, which is the basis for this article. I mention this connection to highlight the shared experiences of inner-city individuals in terms of disclosing their traumatic lives and experiences of sexual abuse, which is consistent with the aims of this study. Children in South Africa's inner cities face challenges such as high population density, limited services, inadequate infrastructure, poverty, unemployment, crime, and social inequality. Many come from marginalised communities, have limited access to education, health care, and recreational facilities, and are more exposed to social risks. Understanding their context is crucial to designing interventions that support their well-

being and safety (Ramaphabana, 2021, Berman, 2012). I found that arts-based responses in therapy are effective for healing and deepening critical awareness for both the art therapist and the children who have experienced CSA. Through artmaking, survivors can express their feelings and experiences in a non-verbal way, process their trauma, gain insight, and develop coping skills. Additionally, arts-based responses provide a platform for survivors to share their stories and experiences with others, raise awareness about the impact of CSA, challenge societal norms, and foster a sense of community and connection.

In order to explore how art therapy can enable disclosure, this article delves into the existing literature on conventional and art therapies to identify and consolidate information around the promoters and barriers to disclosure. This article also considers how art therapy provides a safe and creative way for adolescents or adults to disclose their experiences. As such, this study is significant for clinicians, researchers, and policymakers seeking to provide effective interventions and adds to the current knowledge on using creative arts therapies in treating childhood sexual trauma. As for the study's contribution to research, the comprehensive literature analysis sheds new light on the benefits of using art therapy for CSA survivors and practical recommendations are made on how mental health professionals can design effective art therapy interventions. Examples include the use of developmentally appropriate art materials, establishing a safe and non-judgmental therapeutic environment, and the importance of culturally sensitive interventions that consider the unique experiences of various populations.

The findings of this review can help guide the development of art therapy as a viable intervention to address the barriers to CSA disclosure in South Africa. As an emerging black South African art therapist, I see a significant gap in art therapy practice. Art therapy rollout and other kind of therapy or availability is especially limited in rural areas, with few trained art therapists, few resources, and few other forms of therapy. Other challenges include stigmas around mental health, cultural differences not aligning with the Western models of art therapy, and economic disparities such as the high cost of art therapy services. Also, a lack of medical insurance makes it unaffordable and inaccessible to most South Africans.

Literature review

Current approaches to disclosure and conventional therapy

Traditional talk-based therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic therapy were developed to encourage disclosure and help survivors cope with psychological trauma. However, these approaches have limitations. The verbal recounting of traumatic experiences can be challenging and distressing for survivors, potentially reactivating their trauma responses and leading to re-traumatisation (Alaggia et al., 2019; Collings et al., 2005). Overlooking the emotional and somatic aspects of trauma is another factor identified by Ozor (2022). Art therapy, in contrast, allows non-verbal expression, accessing implicit memories (de Witte et al., 2021) and addressing nonverbal trauma aspects (Ozor, 2022; Fybish, 2019). Cultural empathy is used in art therapy settings to exploring cultural symbols, myths, and narratives to facilitate self-expression and communication identities (di Maria Nankervis et al., 2013). Through the use of culturally relevant materials and images, individuals can convey their unique experiences, values and perspectives. Art therapy sessions can provide a platform for people from different cultural backgrounds to share their stories and experiences. This process fosters dialogue, empathy, and understanding between participants, fostering a sense of connectedness and shared humanity identities (di Maria Nankervis et al., 2013). Art therapists can adapt their interventions and approaches to the cultural contexts and needs of their clients. This may involve incorporating cultural art forms, traditions, or rituals into the therapeutic process to honour and affirm participants' cultural identities (di Maria Nankervis et al., 2013; Dyche and Zayas, 2001).

Art therapy provides safety, control, and distance from trauma, enabling the symbolic expression of complex emotions (Laird & Mulvihill, 2022). In addition, art therapy embraces the non-linear nature of trauma processing, allowing personalised exploration, unlike the structured and linear approaches of conventional therapies (Ozor, 2022).

When survivors choose not to disclose their experiences of abuse, they forego the needed support to heal and move forward. Family dynamics often play a role in preventing disclosure, with factors like mistrust and victim-blaming being common hindrances (Ramphabana et al., 2019). Professional support provides a safe and non-judgmental space for survivors to process

their experiences, develop coping strategies, and manage trauma-related symptoms, promoting empowerment, validation, and connection (Ozor, 2022). The disclosure also contributes to improved mental health outcomes and increased access to support services (Meinck et al., 2017; Pereira et al., 2020), making it imperative to expand the range of treatment options to promote disclosure and address the psychological effects of CSA. Research shows that art therapy does this by offering a non-threatening means of expressing difficult emotions and experiences (Sebelo, 2021; Laird & Mulvihill, 2022).

The literature highlights that CSA disclosure is a complex process influenced by factors like fear, shame, and guilt. Traditional talk therapy is limited in its effectiveness as some survivors find it hard to verbalise their experiences. Mathews et al. (2016) argue that a lack of understanding of the cultural context of CSA can also limit the effectiveness of conventional therapies in facilitating disclosure. Cultural practices and beliefs significantly impact CSA disclosure through stigma, distrust, victimisation, taboos, myths, and lack of awareness (Mathews et al., 2016; Ozor 2022). These factors may discourage survivors from sharing their experiences because of fear of judgment, fear of not being believed or suffering adverse effects, and cultural beliefs that downplay the importance of CSA (Mathews et al., 2016). Limited knowledge and understanding of CSA in the cultural context further complicate disclosure rates (Ramphabana et al., 2019; Ozor 2022). Recognising and addressing the influence of cultural practices and beliefs is crucial to developing culture-sensitive support systems and interventions that combat stigma, promote awareness, and provide safe spaces for disclosure so survivors can seek help and support.

Art therapy as a therapeutic approach in a South African context

As a relatively novel treatment approach, art therapy uses art materials and creative expression to explore emotions and traumatic experiences. Art therapy offers CSA survivors an alternative way to share their experiences without relying solely on verbal communication, and it is considered a safe, non-invasive method that allows clients to work at their own pace and manner. Laird and Mulvihill's (2022) study argues that art therapy can be beneficial in treating the psychological and emotional symptoms of CSA, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Art therapy is also an empowering approach that allows survivors to take control of their healing process. Ozor (2022) studied

the lived experiences of CSA victims in South Africa and found that art therapy helped individuals express themselves when traditional talk therapy was insufficient due to difficulties in verbally expressing trauma, the possibility of re-traumatisation, and a limited focus on emotional and somatic aspects of trauma (Alaggia et al., 2019; Collings et al., 2005; Ozor, 2022). Given the ethnic diversity of South Africa's population, various factors must be considered when designing therapeutic interventions, such as language, traditions, cultural practices, and beliefs. Fontes and Plummer (2010) believe these factors can influence disclosure rates and responses to abuse. Ramphabana (2019) found that familial factors played a significant role in the disclosure of CSA among the Vhavenda community. In exploring the experiences of adult male survivors in Ga-Matlala in South Africa's Limpopo province, Sebelo (2021) identifies the therapeutic relationship established with the therapist as contributing to the creation of a safe and supportive environment in which to share their experiences, bearing in mind the traditionally patriarchal setting where matters are discussed and decided at tribal council.

Gender and age have a significant impact on CSA disclosure (Alaggia et al., 2019). Women tend to disclose CSA experiences more often than men (Alaggia et al., 2019; Mathews et al., 2016), although societal factors such as stigma affect both genders (Sebelo, 2021; Ramphabana et al., 2019). Younger children may have difficulty articulating and understanding their experiences, while older children and adolescents face barriers such as disbelief, consequences, and conflicts of loyalty when disclosing CSA, particularly when the offender is a family member or an acquaintance (Fouché, 2007; Ramphabana et al., 2019).

Writing about the barriers that survivors face, Fouché (2007) highlights fears of shame, stigma, or repercussions within a person's cultural context. Well-designed art therapy interventions can help address this by allowing individuals to express themselves in line with their beliefs and values. This requires understanding the impact of cultural values, communication styles, family dynamics, religious and spiritual beliefs, and gender roles regarding the experiences and reactions to abuse, both in childhood and later in adult years, considering the elapsed time between the abuse and disclosure.

Despite ongoing efforts to improve treatment, Ward et al. (2018) believe that a persistent lack of resources limits CSA survivors' access to the necessary support services, therapy programmes, and specialised professionals, which impedes the healing process. Some examples are inadequate funding for

mental health services, a shortage of trained professionals in trauma-informed care, and limited access to tailored therapeutic interventions. Continued research and advocacy are needed to address these and other challenges. Traditional talk therapy, for example, may not always succeed in creating safe spaces for disclosure, especially for children. Play therapy and art therapy are alternative approaches for addressing the unique needs of young children who may not have the language skills to express themselves adequately (Fybish, 2019; Laird & Mulvihill, 2022). Play therapy is a specialised treatment that uses play as a language to help children understand and express their emotions in an age-appropriate way, promoting their well-being (Kool & Lawver, 2010).

Analysis and synthesis of the literature

Existing literature suggests that art therapy can be a valuable therapeutic treatment for CSA in South Africa. Art therapy is a more accessible, culturally empathetic approach because it uses visual and symbolic forms of communication to transcend the differences among diverse cultures and language groups. Given that trauma and abuse are often not spoken about, art therapy provides a safe and non-threatening way for survivors to express themselves and communicate their experiences without words.

Notably, art therapy incorporates community and cultural practices in the healing process by promoting resilience and honouring cultural heritage through rituals, ceremonies, storytelling, oral traditions, and art (Laird & Mulvihill, 2022; de Witte et al., 2021). This approach aligns with the South African value of Ubuntu, which emphasises community and interconnectedness (Berman, 2012). Artmaking can be a communal activity that provides a sense of belonging and connection. Art therapy also incorporates cultural elements and symbols, enabling survivors to express their cultural identity and draw from it on their healing journey. The shame and disempowerment resulting from systemic inequalities and trauma can be overcome through cultural practices promoting healing and empowerment (Fouché, 2007; Ramphabana et al., 2019).

The research considered here confirms the necessity of empathy for connection and emotional joining, while shame leads to disconnection and disempowerment (Jordan, 1989). Boys who experience sexual coercion and assault feel emasculated and struggle to disclose their victimisation (Hlavka, 2017). The shame women experience around sexual violence is shaped by

societal discourses and gender norms that encourage silence (Fleming & Kruger, 2016).

Art therapy could be a more empathetic therapeutic approach to CSA treatment in South Africa, as it offers a safe and accessible means of communication, values, community, and cultural practices. In the inner city of Johannesburg, for example, community art counselling has been used to support traumatised and displaced children affected by HIV/AIDS, poverty, and violence (Berman, 2012).

Themes and trends

The literature review reveals several key insights regarding the disclosure of CSA and the potential of art therapy to facilitate disclosure. Firstly, the literature underscores the complex nature of disclosure, influenced by various factors that impact survivors' decisions to speak out (Alaggia et al., 2019; Mathews et al., 2016; Meinck et al., 2017; Sebelo, 2021). Furthermore, it highlights the limitations of traditional therapy approaches in facilitating disclosure, particularly for survivors who struggle to verbalise their experiences (Fouché, 2007; Mathews et al., 2016). Cultural factors are also recognised as significant in the disclosure process (Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Ramphabana & Selengia, 2019). Additionally, the review emphasises that art therapy offers a unique and effective avenue for survivors to reveal their abuse, providing a safe and non-threatening space for expressing their experiences (Fybish, 2019; Laird & Mulvihill, 2022).

Unlike direct verbal communication about the abuse, art therapy allows survivors to exert control and agency, choosing materials and creating personal representations that can empower those who have experienced a loss of control during the abuse and its aftermath. The artmaking process facilitates the exploration and expression of emotions such as shame, guilt, anger, and fear, enabling therapists to support survivors in identifying and processing these emotions (Fybish, 2019; Laird & Mulvihill, 2022). Gradually, survivors may develop a language to articulate and comprehend their experiences. In clinical practice, art therapy offers emotional support and validation from the therapist, empowering survivors to develop coping strategies for healing and recovery (Fybish, 2019; Laird & Mulvihill, 2022). Through its unique characteristics and therapeutic processes, art therapy provides a valuable framework for supporting survivors of CSA in their journey

towards disclosure, emotional expression, and healing (Fybish, 2019; Laird & Mulvihill, 2022).

In the example of my work with vulnerable inner-city children in Johannesburg, the creation of community murals, mask-making, art literacy programmes, recycled art, and puppet-making were tailored to their unique needs and circumstances. I have witnessed first-hand the positive impact of these activities among vulnerable youth. At the same time, the literature also supports the notion that it is essential to help to restore a sense of empowerment and control over their lives.

Methodology

This article draws from my master's study on art therapy interventions with adult survivors of CSA in South Africa. The primary method of the study was a literature review involving a search of electronic databases such as PsycINFO, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar to identify local and international studies on disclosures related to CSA and conventional therapy, as well as art therapy research studies conducted abroad. The review focused on studies published between 2000 and 2022 and included both qualitative and quantitative studies evaluating the use of various art therapy modalities to encourage disclosure among CSA survivors. The review identified patterns and themes, including the effectiveness of art therapy in promoting disclosure of CSA, cultural adaptations of art therapy techniques, facilitators and barriers to disclosure, and implications of the findings. Participants included CSA survivors who received art therapy as part of their treatment in various settings. This study has implications for developing art therapy as a viable intervention to address the barriers to CSA disclosure in South Africa.

The study did not require ethics clearance as it did not include interviews and drew on literature and historical experience. This study did not involve the direct participation of human subjects.

Results

This literature review explored the use of art therapy as a route to the disclosure of CSA in South Africa, drawing on local and international studies concerned with CSA and conventional therapy and on examining art therapy research studies conducted abroad.

Summary of key findings

The use of art therapy to facilitate CSA disclosures is still in its infancy. However, several studies have shown it to be a useful tool. Laird and Mulvihill (2022) conducted a thematic analysis of published studies to assess the extent to which art therapy can help victims of CSA. The results show that it helps in various ways, including providing a safe environment for expression, facilitating communication, and promoting healing. Devries and Meinck (2018) found that sexual violence against children and adolescents in South Africa is a significant problem that often goes unreported due to fear and shame. Collings et al. (2005) found that disclosure of abuse is enabled when victims feel safe and able to express themselves. Fybish (2019) suggests that art therapy can benefit adult survivors of CSA trauma. In addition, Laird and Mulvihill (2022) highlight how it allows individuals to express their feelings and experiences non-verbally.

Alaggia et al. (2019) identify the factors and barriers to CSA disclosure, finding that lack of certainty and trust in the disclosure process can be a significant impediment, while supportive and non-judgmental responses from professionals can facilitate disclosure. This study found that art therapy is helpful for disclosure and healing from CSA in South Africa, as participants reported feeling more comfortable expressing themselves through art rather than traditional talk therapy, allowing for a deep exploration of emotions and experiences. Additionally, participants reported feeling empowered by the process of creating art and sharing their stories, which helped to counteract feelings of shame and self-blame. The existing literature suggests that cultural factors and fear of retribution from family members may contribute to the reluctance of survivors to disclose their abuse. This study builds on previous research on disclosure patterns and barriers among CSA survivors in South Africa (Collings et al., 2005; Mathews et al., 2016; Meinck et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2018; Devries & Meinck, 2018; Alaggia et al., 2019; Selengia et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2020; Ozor, 2022).

The findings of this study will help inform therapeutic interventions for children who have experienced sexual abuse and contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve access to abuse response services and promote disclosure. The findings also have implications for policymakers and service providers in implementing effective strategies to prevent and respond.

Integration and adaptation of art therapy techniques in South Africa

The value of the findings on art therapy techniques in South Africa lies in the possible integration of the art therapy techniques into the more traditional methods of treating CSA survivors. The findings in the literature are congruent with my own experience in counselling using art, highlighting how art therapy can be used to promote communication and expression. Art therapy embraces the non-linear nature of trauma processing, addresses non-verbal aspects of trauma, and provides survivors with a safe and empowering space to explore and process their traumatic experiences, encouraging a sense of control, agency, and empowerment in their healing journey (Fybish, 2019; Laird & Mulvihill, 2022).

For example, collaborative community art counselling creates spaces that encourage social cohesion, empathetic listening, and empowerment of the ego. This approach is about training community members to act as role models for internalised resilience and healthy relationships (Berman, 2012).

The literature provides a basis for critical thinking and the application of the readings in this context. Mathews (2019) proposes a taxonomy of CSA reporting requirements and highlights legal developments that offer new opportunities to facilitate disclosure. In addition, Fybish (2019) conducted a thematic analysis of art therapy use with adult survivors, highlighting its effectiveness in providing a safe, non-threatening environment in which to express themselves. Laird and Mulvihill (2022) found that art therapy is a vehicle for expression, trauma processing, and resilience building. Fouché (2007) developed a forensic interview protocol to facilitate disclosure among children of primary school age. Mathews et al. (2016) found that cultural norms influence the decision to disclose. Furthermore, Sebelo (2021) and Meinck et al. (2017) point to barriers in accessing abuse response services, highlighting the importance of alternative therapies such as art therapy. Alaggia et al. (2019) call CSA a widespread problem in South Africa, citing barriers and facilitators to disclosure, as does Meinck et al. (2017), who identified the lack of access to abuse services as an impediment to disclosure. Ozor (2022) found that secrecy is most often the result of fear, shame and lack of trust in authorities. Pereira (2020) and Ramphabana and Selengia (2019) found that supportive family members and traditional healers can facilitate disclosure. Ward (2018) expresses the need for comprehensive prevention strategies and

the inclusion of alternative therapies. Overall, these findings serve as a basis for critical analysis and application of art therapy in addressing the needs of CSA patients. The findings also highlight the potential benefits and practical considerations for implementation.

Limitations

My findings of the literature suggest that art therapy can be a valuable tool for survivors of CSA in South Africa to disclose and process their experiences (Alaggia et al., 2019; Fybish, 2019; Laird & Mulvihill, 2022). This study has several limitations. Mental health professionals and service providers should be aware of these limitations and work to overcome them to facilitate disclosure and provide the appropriate support.

Limitations include cultural barriers and limited accessibility in certain areas, which can impede widespread implementation (Alaggia et al., 2019; Meinck et al., 2017). Cultural norms, beliefs, and values significantly shape individual perceptions and responses to abuse, influencing their willingness to disclose (Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Selengia et al., 2020).

Further limitations are that the study does not assess the various therapeutic interventions' effectiveness, impact on disclosure rates, or outcomes for CSA survivors (de Witte et al., 2021). Therefore, while art therapy shows promise in facilitating disclosure and supporting survivors, further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of different therapeutic interventions and their impact on disclosure rates and outcomes.

Implications of the results

There is still a need to examine the effectiveness of art therapy in the South African context. Notably, art therapy is not a substitute for conventional talk therapy but a complementary approach to aid healing in individuals who have experienced CSA. Art therapy is intended to be used alongside talk therapy as an additional tool or procedure to support the healing process. Art therapy is seen as a valuable adjunct to the therapeutic process, particularly for those who have experienced CSA. The results of this review add to the growing body of literature on art therapy as a therapeutic approach for treating CSA, with some important implications for clinical practice and policy in South Africa. The results highlight the need for culturally sensitive and trauma-informed approaches to working with CSA survivors and the importance

of providing access to specialised services for survivors and their families. Additionally, the results suggest that incorporating art therapy into existing mental health services may more effectively support survivors in their healing process by providing a safe and non-invasive way to express their emotions and experiences. Integrating art therapy into existing mental health services and treatment plans while collaborating with other professionals can provide a more comprehensive and holistic approach to care.

Conclusion

The techniques used in art therapy have been shown to facilitate the disclosure of and healing from CSA, bearing in mind that cultural factors have a bearing on the therapeutic process and its efficacy. This article addresses the need to improve and adapt interventions in the South African milieu. As an emerging black art therapist, I hope to work with children and adults in rural and urban settings by providing individual or group therapy sessions, community-based interventions, and training community members to provide ongoing support. I am also excited about the use of digital technologies that will increase access to care and support. Additionally, I advocate for increased investment in mental health services and developing policies that promote integrating mental health care into primary care settings.

Future research

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples of survivors, incorporate multiple art therapy programmes, and incorporate additional measures such as observer ratings or physiological measures to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of art therapy on disclosure and healing. Research has identified the importance of familial and cultural factors in the disclosure of CSA, and future research should consider how these factors interact with art therapy interventions. Additionally, research on the experiences of male survivors of CSA is limited.

Art therapy has emerged as a promising form of psychotherapy to help treat CSA, particularly where there are high levels of abuse and low levels of disclosure. The programmes at Lefika La Phodiso use artmaking as a tool for self-expression and healing and provide a safe and supportive environment for children to process their experiences, express their emotions, build resilience, and connect with others, as most are from migrant or refugee parents, or

orphaned. This therapeutic approach allows the survivors to communicate their traumatic experiences non-verbally, bypassing the difficulties they may face in verbalising their experiences.

Art therapy also helps integrate the different aspects of a survivor's experience, including the emotional, cognitive, and physical, which may have been fragmented or dissociated as a result of the trauma. By integrating these aspects, survivors gain a more holistic understanding of their experience, which can facilitate their healing and recovery. Art therapy can also be adapted to suit the cultural and linguistic needs of survivors, making it a culturally sensitive approach to trauma treatment. Visual metaphors and symbols in artmaking can also be particularly helpful in contexts where disclosure may be difficult due to cultural norms around silence and secrecy.

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