**Art-based Psychosocial Training after the Yolanda Typhoon in the Philippines**

**Abstract**

This study focuses on art-based mental health psychosocial support in the form of TOT (training of trainers) as conducted by IsraAID following the Yolanda typhoon in the Philippines in 2013. Interviews were conducted with ten female education and healthcare professionals, who drew pictures of their experience that were then used to draw conclusions about their perceptions of the significance of their training for themselves and their community. Analysis of the interviews and drawings using the principles of consensual qualitative research (CQR) suggests three areas: 1. Factors that helped and factors that impeded the interviewees’ participation in the training. 2. Factors that helped and factors that impeded implementation of their acquired knowledge among additional groups of participants. 3. Perception of the training’s benefits for the participants and their environment. The discussion focuses on the benefits of creative processes for the process, the importance of the group in terms of training and multiculturalism, and the significance of these factors in interventions using the TOT model.

Over the past decade many non-governmental organizations have engaged in addressing the impact of natural disasters, providing aid and support for coping physically and psychologically with situations of collective trauma. This study focuses on art-based mental health psychosocial support in the form of TOT (training of trainers), as conducted by the organization IsraAID following the Yolanda typhoon in 2013 in the Philippines, with the aim of learning about the significance of creative processes in this context, the importance of the group in terms of training and multiculturalism, and the significance of these factors in interventions using the TOT model.

The term “collective trauma” refers to a situation in which a group of people with a shared sense of belonging were subjected to frightening or painful events in which they witnessed or faced a threat or actual death that left a mark on their collective consciousness and memory (Kidane, & Van Reisen, 2017). The ecological approach to dealing with community trauma emphasizes the recognition of community strengths and appreciation of local knowledge, alongside collaboration with members of the community based on the understanding that the community has the ability and skills to care for itself (Norris et al., 2011). One of the methods proposed by the ecological approach for intervention following collective trauma is that of psychosocial intervention, which addresses the experiences of the individual in the context of that person’s social, cultural, and physical environment (Patel, 2014). The aim of this intervention is to support people, families, and groups negatively affected by a crisis, provide for their psychosocial well-being, and prevent a mental health crisis (Kalmanowitz et al., 2018). This support entails mobilizing social support networks, promoting collective action, strengthening cooperative efforts between various institutions and non-governmental organizations (Reifels et al., 2013), encouraging the community’s functioning, and cultivating the resilience and well-being of the individual (Kaminsky et al., 2007; Mooney et.al, 2011). Psychosocial interventions are based on group efforts to facilitate coping with disasters that, by their nature, disrupt social networks, organizations, and relationships (Linkov et.al, 2014; Miller & Pescaroli, 2018). Teamwork contributes to community resilience because groups foster community solidarity and alleviate loneliness. Engaging in collective efforts allows one to share the experience of trauma with others and reduces negative emotions such as embarrassment, shame, and hopelessness (Ghanem et al., 2016; Summerfield, 2000).

The inclusion of arts in psychosocial interventions following community trauma makes it possible to express and reprocess traumatic memories in a sensory, experiential, and non-verbal way (Bensimon et al., 2008; Malchiodi, 2008b; Sutton, 2002). The nature of artistic creation provides a remedy for traumatized people who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally – a difficulty that stems from the tendency of traumatic memories to remain stored in the brain as implicit memories, physical sensations, and images (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009; Hass Cohen & Clyde Findlay, 2018; King, 2016; Malchiodi, 2008a). The visual creative process makes it possible to alter traumatic thoughts, emotions, and memories by constructing a systematic, coherent narrative (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009) while also developing personal insights and perspectives that enable healing and growth (Gavron et al., 2020). Art therapists use creative processes involving trauma-focused models to build up internal resilience and try out new methods of coping (Gavron, 2020). The creative process in a therapeutic context may sometimes be experienced as soothing and even meditative in certain respects, which in turn can help reduce patients’ arousal symptoms and stress levels, foster a sense of control and self-regulation, and support neurobiological processing of traumatic representations (Hass-Cohen & Clyde Findlay, 2018; Kalmanowitz, 2016; Lev-Wiesel & Kissos, 2019; Sarid & Huss, 2010; Spiegel et al., 2006). Art-based psychosocial group interventions can serve concurrently as a means of both individual and collective non-verbal expression, manifesting in the development of shared metaphors that reflect traumatic memories, community and individual strengths, and collective hope. The processes of creating, observing the products, and sharing the resulting personal experiences in a safe environment contribute to community cohesion and resilience (Decker, Constantine Brown, & Tapia, 2017; Gavron, 2020).

Many of the psychosocial interventions following community trauma are provided by aid organizations from diverse parts of the world. This aspect necessitates attention to the fact that psychological characteristics, psychosocial constructs, and help-seeking practices are likely to vary across cultures (Watters, 2010). The cross-cultural encounter poses dilemmas relating to power dynamics (Kapitan, 2015; Watters, 2010), cultural differences, and different worldviews (Gavron et al., 2020; Watters, 2010).

Art-based psychosocial group interventions in communities after a natural disaster have received a good deal of attention (Huss & Sarid, 2010; Ho et al., 2017; Kalmanowitz & Potash, 2012). The research literature offers various models and support programs for intervention using expressive arts, as well as specific protocols for treating trauma through creative processes. Likewise, the role and unique contribution of artistic creation in psychosocial interventions, as a non-verbal means of treating natural disaster survivors, has been a focus of scholarly inquiry (e.g., Chilcote, 2007; Collier et al., 2020; Hass-Cohen et al., 2014; Hass-Cohen et al., 2018; Ho et al., 2014; Potash & Kalmanowitz, 2012). At the same time, evidence-based research on the subject is lacking, and very little has been written about the psychosocial training of trainers (TOT) as part of the ecological model (Kalmanowitz et al., 2018).

In November 2013, several areas in the Philippines were hard-hit by Typhoon Haiyan, known also as Yolanda. During the state of emergency, and at the request of the municipal health department, IsraAID oversaw the mental health and psychosocial services in the city of Ormoc and offered local professionals workshops on emergency care. A year or so later, in collaboration with the city’s social services, IsraAID also developed a training course for local professionals, including teachers, counselors, healthcare workers, and community volunteers. The course addressed the effects of trauma and proposed the expressive arts as an established tool for dealing with trauma. The training program provided support for groups that serve large segments of the population. Its aim was to promote the resilience and well-being of families through the provision of emergency psychosocial services in the city of Ormoc (Israaid, 2020). The art-based “training of trainers” (TOT) model on which this program drew allowed for the rapid dissemination of knowledge and abilities, indirectly reaching large numbers of people through the “waterfall effect” – that is, the training of a core team that trains additional groups, who then work with yet another population group (Kalmanowitz et.al, 2018). Thus knowledge and abilities were able to spread rapidly, reaching large numbers of people. The training program was aimed at enabling each of the participants to learn the basic concepts of the subject matter and receive training in implementing and transmitting the knowledge and tools required to various population groups (Kalmanowitz et.al, 2018). The present study examined IsraAID’s project in Ormoc and explored the question of how participants in this creative-processes-based psychosocial training perceived the influence of the intervention on them.

# **The Research Method**

The following is a qualitative study based on a constructivist approach that seeks to describe a phenomenon as well as examine and understand its complexity, its various contexts, and the unique experience of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The research method and data analysis were based on the principles of consensual qualitative research (CQR), whereby a research team analyzes the data with the aim of reaching consensus among auditors regarding organization of the information so as to enable examination from several perspectives and improve the quality of the data analysis (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). The study incorporated elements of art-based research by having the interview process include the task of drawing a picture, as another way of shedding light on the experience for the purpose of triangulation.

## **Participants**

The study participants were ten Filipino women: nine education professionals (teachers and educational counselors) and one nurse, a Ministry of Health employee. They ranged in age from 30 to 50, resided in the city of Ormoc in the Philippines, and had participated in the training. The interviewees were chosen using a directed sample selection of individuals with relatively strong skills of expression. Because those who volunteered for this study came from a small group of potential participants, and in order to protect their privacy as promised, no further information about their identity will be disclosed.

**Data Collection**

For the purpose of data collection we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews that relied on basic questions prepared in advance but open to expansion, elaboration, further inquiry, and adaptation to the issues raised by the interviewees (Hill et al., 1997). Through the interviews we sought to learn about the significance of the encounter for them, what they had learned, strengths they had acquired, difficulties that had surfaced, and the value of art-based intervention for them. In addition, we asked about the significance of the intervention for them as women who serve the community, and the ways in which this intervention influenced their work as service providers. At the conclusion of the interview we asked the interviewees to draw a picture that expresses their experience of self before and after the training, using white A4 paper, watercolors, oil pastels, and wax crayons. The interviews, which took place in February 2019 in the city of Ormoc, the Philippines, were conducted by author X and author Y of this article. Both are Israeli women who work as art therapists and conduct research in this field. X has extensive clinical experience and personally participated in conducting similar training in Japan.

**Data Analysis**

***Data analysis team***

The data analysis team included the two interviewers as well as a third researcher (author Z), a master’s degree student in art therapy who wrote her thesis on this study. Another researcher, a faculty member in the field of art therapy (also from Israel, author A), and two researchers from Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines (authors C and B) served as auditors.

***The analytical process***

The interviews were processed and analyzed in three steps, in accordance with the principles of consensual qualitative research (Hill, 2012; Kline et al., 2019). In the first step, the members of the auditors’ team separately identified the central domains that had emerged. At a meeting for collective deliberation and discussion, consensus was reached regarding the central domains that emerged from the interviews and pictures. After that, author Z classified each data unit according to one of the defined domains. In step two, each member of the analysis team identified the core ideas of each domain. Another consensus discussion then took place, and after agreement was reached on the core ideas, further analysis of these core ideas, as they emerged from the data, was conducted. As part of the process, the core ideas were conveyed to the Israeli auditor, and another collective discussion took place regarding the definition of the core ideas within each domain. The master’s degree student examined the frequency of the issues, which were classified by three levels in accordance with CQR analysis: the label “a majority of cases” describes a situation in which a phenomenon was expressed in more than 75% of the interviews, the label “some cases” applies to a frequency of 25-75% of all interviews, and “a minority of cases” refers to a frequency of less than 25% (Hill et al., 2005). When the description of the cases was complete, the report was conveyed to the Filipino auditors, who examined the description of the data relating to the domains and core ideas from their perspective, after which final adjustments were made.

## **Ethical Aspects**

The interviewees were approached through an intermediary – a resident of Ormoc who was not a participant in either the training project or the study – so that potential interviewees would not feel uncomfortable declining if they did not wish to participate. The interviews were transcribed without any identifying details. In approaching the interviewees, it was made clear that there was no obligation to participate in the study and that they could withdraw at any stage. Furthermore, they were promised that their privacy would be protected and that anything they said would be presented anonymously, so that their identity would remain confidential throughout all stages of the study and in the published results. The informed consent agreement signed by the participants included a separate clause granting permission for their drawings to be published. The study was approved by the ethics committees of Haifa University and Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines.

# **Findings**

## **Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors for Participation in Training**

***The use of art contributed greatly to participation and successful training, although it was also novel and slightly stressful***

Most of the study participants described the fun and playfulness, and humor and imagination, as a significant quality that characterized the training. According to them, their enjoyment of these activities facilitated collaboration, promoted their active participation, and fostered closer relations with group members and the facilitator. Imagination served as a means of distracting themselves from the harsh realities of daily life, and opportunity to use artistic materials re-created world of play from their childhood days. Most participants described the use of art as a non-verbal tool for self-expression that allowed them to say something about themselves and share experiences for which they lacked words. According to them, the act of creative expression constituted a physical manifestation of the emotions, desires, needs, and relations of the creators. Expression and emotional release helped ease psychological tension and offered a way of reducing stress levels and providing relief (2-3). “It’s hard for people – for us – to open up verbally. Sometimes art therapy is good because you can release your emotions, draw, express yourself through drama, or in another way.”

Despite reassurances in this regard, a salient factor cited by some of the participants as an obstacle to participation was concerns surrounding their artistic performance for lack of technical knowledge and lack of familiarity with the use of art for self-expression. Nonetheless, about half of the participants described how the training had emphasized the significance of the participants’ subjective experience rather than the aesthetic quality of their artistic work. They described the tone of the instructions as accepting, relaxed, and non-judgmental, noting that it was the participants rather than the facilitators who offered interpretations of the works – a fact that reduced anxiety and fostered a positive atmosphere. The facilitators created a space that invited gradual participation and self-expression, and the participants did not feel coerced to participate or engage in the various artistic activities. Some of the participants described the experiential nature of the training and the encouragement to be active and engaged. Most stated that they had not participated previously in such training, which increased their curiosity and excitement. Other characteristics that aroused or increased great curiosity and anticipation among the participants was the encounter with different facilitators, as well as facilitation that permitted structured and gradated engagement in the creative subject matter and activities. (5) “…Then they did it step-by-step…. That was good because this is new for us…. What are we going to do next? Why are we doing this? … And then when the activity as a whole ends, it has meaning.”

***The group work was a facilitating factor for participating in the training***

The group work and the group that formed during the training program were described as a characteristic that contributes to individual processes and encourages cooperation. Some of the training participants said that maintaining the same group composition throughout the year enabled them to build trust among themselves, open up, and talk about themselves more easily. The professionally diverse composition of the group allowed some of the participants to form community connections and collaborations. Participation in group was described as reinforcing a sense of belonging, responsibility, and personal commitment among members, and as facilitating the recognition that others are coping with similar problems, which in turn alleviates participants’ sense of loneliness, fosters mutual support, improves self-confidence, and enhances coping powers. (10) “People know that when they are in a group they are not alone, that others are going through the same experiences…. There are always those people who support you…. And this is a very positive feeling…. It reinforces your self-confidence; it strengthens our ability to get through problems more easily.”

***The multicultural aspects of the training process contributed to its success***

The interviews indicated that most participants were open and receptive to training from an Israeli organization. They all described the curiosity and excitement of meeting the foreigners, and most noted the existence of similarities between the Filipino and Israeli cultures, such as humanity or a common goal of providing aid, which are more unifying than differentiating. (1) “In fact we are similar and can easily get along with people from Israel… because we have only one goal. Our goal is… to train and help other people.”

***Demonstration of gratitude and appreciation***

During the interviews nearly half of the training participants expressed appreciation and deep gratitude towards IsraAID, noting that they regard themselves as fortunate to be able to participate in training for which they do not have to pay, and because they can share the knowledge they acquired with others. Importantly, the interview transcriptions indicate that the interviewers frequently emphasized that they do not represent the organization and are not affiliated with the training process, thus allowing for the expression of negative expressions and neutralizing any inclination towards appeasement. (1) “We felt respected/important! It was a privilege for us because traveling so far just to help the Filipino people is a blessing and an honor for us, especially because they shared their knowledge.”

***Language gaps are surmountable***

Some of the training participants, who were not native English speakers, stated that they were able to overcome language gaps between themselves and the foreign facilitators through non-verbal means such as body language, intuition, facial expressions, and the like, which made it possible to communicate the essence and gist of their emotional experience. (6) “You have to speak English because your facilitator will be left behind since he or she cannot understand us, even though they gave us the option of speaking our native language.” Whenever necessary, participants would switch to Tagalog and rely on others in the group to translate for the facilitators. Other participants said that they made an effort to speak English in order to gain confidence in their language skills. (9) “…This is my greatest challenge like speaking the English language, so my English speaking improved.”

***Western and local coping patterns in combination***

Participants described the Christian faith and the practice of living with one’s extended family as characteristic of Ormoc’s population and a source of coping powers and meaning. In general, according to one of the participants, Filipinos view themselves as resilient and able to withstand disasters, despite pain and loss. (5) “… We mourn…. But Filipinos usually continue to endure.” At the same time, the interviews indicate that half the participants perceived the combination that formed during the training – that is, learning Western patterns of coping with stress and trauma while also granting space and legitimacy to local coping patterns – as helpful in the construction and shared creation of individual and community resilience.

***Confidence as well as concern about working with foreign organizations***

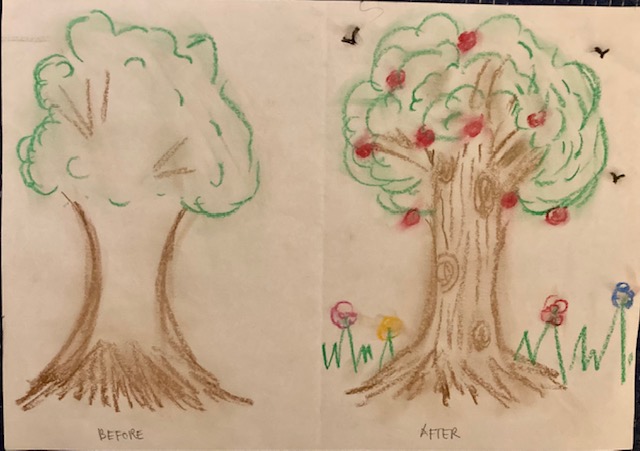
Alongside the anxiety that some participants described feeling at the start of the process, for fear of being criticized by foreigners, one of the interviewees observed that working with foreigners has had a positive impact on her self-confidence, sense of presence, and social status, as well as the way high-ranking people and the establishment regard her. According to her, Filipinos tend to grant preference and special treatment to foreigners, so she was easily able to advance the agenda and goals of IsraAID.

(9) When I am with a foreigner, I’m not just in the back… not like once when I was afraid to talk… Now I can coordinate with people even if they are high-ranking… but also work with foreigners because they also like a strong presence…. Filipinos are very welcoming, and when they see that foreign visitors are involved…they receive preference, they are granted special treatment….

## **Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors for Participants’ Implementation of the Training Goals in the Local Community**

The impact of psychosocial intervention has spread to diverse circles of influence and has been implemented across a wide range of groups. Initially the training was implemented mainly within the Department of Education, including among counselors, teachers, and principals, and partially within the Social Services Department, Department of Health, Police, and Fire Department. Subsequently, a core team of trained mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) staff were selected from among the early training participants and sent to schools in other districts, in order to assist members of teaching faculties affected by the earthquake and train them in conducting such interventions among students. In addition, some of the participants were tasked with conducting the training among various communities such as addicts, at-risk youth and potential school dropouts, prison inmates, women and children who were victims of violence, senior citizens, and the staff of psychiatric wards. Notably, most of the participants implemented these interventions within their nuclear and extended families, and some used them among social circles such as church women’s groups. (2-3) “I conducted an intervention and offered psychosocial support for survivors of violence against women and children…. And then at my school I also applied the techniques that I’d learned at the training among my students, and personally in my family I applied them with my children.” Representation of the training’s impact was also evident in a large number of the drawings (Participant 3’s picture). “The fruits, the environment, what I shared, it’s bearing fruit. The flowers beneath the tree are perhaps the people waiting for me, for me to be part of their journey; I think the flowers are my students who are waiting for me, for when I will be with them.”

**Insert Picture 1 here**



Picture 1: An abundant tree. The tree on the right represents the participant after training, with the powers she discovered in herself, surrounded by her students

***The formulation of cultural adaptations, establishment of a core team, and provision of guidance and materials helped the participants implement the training in their communities***

According to most participants, the establishment of a local core team was the key factor in helping them implement the training they had received among additional groups of participants, and it served as a source of mutual support for its members. (10) “This is the core team, yes, so sometimes when someone needs help or… we meet… then we go to drink coffee, we talk, and it’s a very good group because we trust each other.” The core team conducted some of it work in the local dialect, thus reinforcing use of the local language in subsequent interventions. (1) “He [the facilitator] always viewed us as facilitators. He never made us feel that something was missing…. They empowered us, because now I can already implement what I learned from them without asking for help from IsraAID.”

Another factor that facilitated the transition to local administration of the program was IsraAID’s ongoing consultation, support, and professional assistance through the provision of creative art supplies and psychosocial reference material. In addition, the support for their work as independent facilitators was empowering for the participants, and it gave them the confidence to carry out activities among other groups.

The ability to make cultural adaptations to the training material was an important part of the process. In continuing to implement the training, most participants evidently made slight cultural adaptations to the psychosocial activities while preserving the basic structure of the training. The adaptations included flexible timeframes and the formulation of instructions that are culturally sensitive in terms of emotional openness. (2-3) “Filipinos talk a lot, and they find time limits difficult.” In addition, a number of participants incorporated cultural elements, such as children’s songs and local lullabies, into the training.

### ***Heavy workload, limited cooperation, and the need for further guidance hampered participants’ implementation of the training in their communities***

One of the difficulties for the teachers and trained counselors in the shift to implementing the training among additional groups of participants was the heavy workload of their jobs in the schools and the personal commitments in their private lives, which left them no free time to implement the training. In addition, some of the trained participants met with a lack of cooperation and with resistance to the psychosocial training on the part of other teachers at their school, once the latter realized that they would then have to conduct the training among their students. Even when the teachers did complete the training, the trained counselors had to persuade the trained teaching staff to implement and conduct the training among students, and they had to supervise the process. One of the interviewees claimed that, unlike the counselors, the teachers were not trained in handling students’ problems as a matter of routine, and perhaps for this reason they refrain from conducting the psychosocial activities. Furthermore, continuous guidance in the program is not as close as it had been in the past, because some of the participants in the core team are supervisors in the Ministry of Education and therefore responsible for other programs. An additional difficulty is the attitude of the Filipino people to counseling or mental health care. According to some of the participants, people in the Philippines are less accustomed to sharing their feelings, and they regard seeking treatment as non-normative behavior. (2-3) “For them, speaking to a therapist means that something is wrong with you, it’s crazy…. After we completed the training, we were able to help the teachers. Some were interested, but others were not interested in sharing their feelings.”

## ***Criticism of the support for the training implementation phase, and suggestions for improvement***

Alongside overall satisfaction, a minority of the interviewees themselves voiced criticism of the training with regard to local IsraAID representatives’ supervision of the training’s implementation. According to these interviewees, the representatives sometimes urged them to conduct psychosocial interventions even when these were not actually necessary. The same interviewees claimed that there were situations in which the organization had trouble respecting the local concept of time surrounding agreed-upon schedules, and it ascribed much weight to the outcomes of the psychosocial program rather than the process. (9) “When they want it to happen, they want it; sometimes they push too much… and are not considerate enough, for example, of the local sense of time… which foreigners sometimes do not understand.”

In addition, some of the participants described criticism they received in their professional environment, for example because the training does not provide any sort of financial compensation for participating teachers, which is something that other organizations do, and limited its workers participation in the training. One of the participants postulated that resistance to the training in their professional sphere stems from a lack of understanding as to the essence of psychosocial training. (4) “I had to get in touch and speak with them [the parents], and ask them if they really knew what IsraAID is all about.”

A minority of participants said that the psychosocial intervention drew criticism within their academic environment. The claims were that the training was not sufficiently grounded culturally, that it was intrusive for its participants, and that it was not backed by therapists. However, the participants refuted these claims, insisted that sharing was by invitation rather than coercion, and pointed out that the aim of the group is not therapeutic but rather the provision of group support and the acquisition of skills of self-awareness and self-care. (5) “Most of the people who make such comments have not really undergone the process in the program itself…. Because inside a person, the soul does not really heal immediately, it’s a process…. Maybe they were not good at expressing themselves or did not want their faces to be recognized by other people.”

Another participant, whose professional occupation was as a supervisor of the program on behalf of the local Ministry of Education, expressed an interest in further research on the impact of the training, to assess how it benefited students and whether it had an influence on the students’ familial circles.

**The Training Benefited and Empowered the Participants**

***Enhancement of interpersonal communication skills***

Most of the training participants said that as a result of the activities, communication within their interpersonal, familial, and even marital relations improved significantly. This manifested in the establishment of intimate and open communication and deeper interpersonal contact and emotional relationships. Some of the participants also said that their listening skills improved. In their words, they stopped giving advice and learned to listen in an accepting and less judgmental way aimed at understanding the other and enabling him to find ways of coping independently. Moreover, some observed that their parenting style had changed from authoritarian parenting based on their children’s obedience, to authoritative parenting based on listening and open dialogue. (8) “For example in disciplining my child. So I should not be too hard on him, and I should not yell at him all the time….”

***Improved self-confidence***

Some of the training participants described how the creative experiences they had during the psychosocial training provided a safe space that reinforced their self-confidence and self-worth, allowing them to express weaknesses and seek inner strength. Four of them drew themselves after the training as a tree with fruit and roots (see, for example, Picture 1). Interviewee 10 drew herself after the training as a sailboat, thus expressing her growing power to effect change and cope with difficulties along the way. “The flag represents the knowledge and skills I gained…. This boat represents the fact that whatever happens, even if there are strong or powerful winds, I will be able to go in the direction I’m headed, no matter how stormy the weather. The boat will stay afloat and continue on its journey….”

**Insert Picture 2 Here**

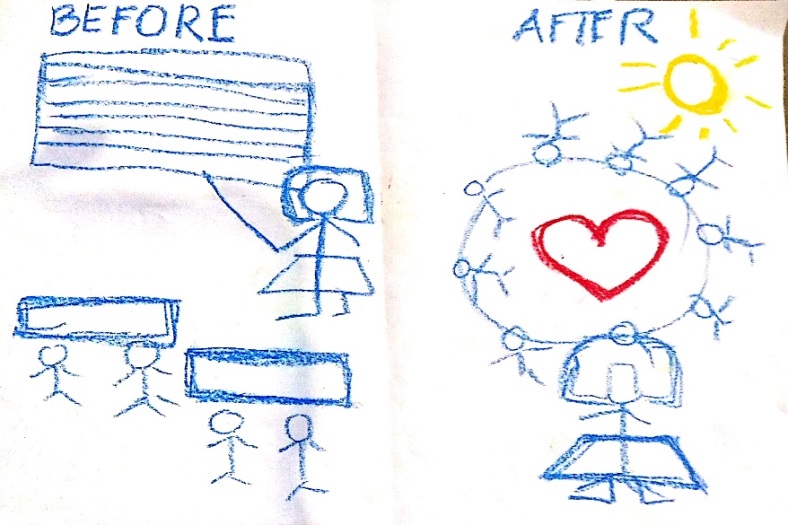


Picture 2: A sailboat. The picture represents the participant’s growing power to withstand any challenge

***Extension of learning abilities and professional skills***

All the study participants stated that the training helped them grow and develop professionally. In this context they reported that their interpersonal communication skills with their students had developed and improved through the formation of deeper relations and a stronger sense of belonging and connection with them. (4) “First I understood how to listen, and it’s very important that a teacher be a good listener…, and I also draw this heart to represent what I have… I really need to have a big heart, in order to contain everything my students need….” (See Picture 3). Some of the teachers described how the tools they had acquired helped them improve their teaching methods in the classroom, enabling them to convey educational material in an experiential and active way, which in turn also changed the classroom dynamics, as reflected in a drawing by Participant 4, Picture 3. (7) “I understood that I really need to connect with my students, and by connecting and sharing I personally feel that I’m already a big part of their lives.”

**Insert Picture 3 Here**



Picture 3: A Big Heart. The participant is expressing the different dynamics in her classroom before and after the training

As a result, according to the participants, art-based psychosocial activity infused playfulness and enjoyment into the classroom, or inspired it in the counselor, enabling the students to feel comfortable expressing themselves with figures of authority. (5) “… When you face a student as a facilitator who uses expressive art, which is a kind of game, they do not look at you as a teacher who grades them or whatever…. They can express themselves freely….”

Most of the participants began to see themselves as a significant figure in the children’s lives, as someone who is also responsible for their psychological well-being and for problem solving beyond their role as educators, and as an integral part of the class group. Their observation of the students’ inner world through the use of creative tools infused emotional significance into their students’ behavior and, accordingly, allowed them to determine the appropriate intervention.

Some of the training participants said that the psychosocial activities they relayed to teachers enabled those teachers to conduct relaxing and “clearing-the-mind” activities for students after intense study or when the level of concentration in the classroom dropped. Interventions among teachers had a calming effect on their work, which is inherently fraught with tension and attrition. Moreover, according to the participants, members of the teaching staff had also suffered personally from the collective natural disaster, and it is therefore important to provide them with psychological means of support and coping. One of the participants pointed out that the psychosocial training also supports counselors in their work, because it provides teachers with tools to resolve students’ behavioral problems on their own, thereby reducing the burden on the counselor. (6) “… Because we have 6000+ students, and only one of me, I told the teachers: you can also be a counselor for your students, sometimes you don’t have to bring students with behavioral problems to me. You can resolve problems yourself.”

***A significant desire among the training participants to give to others***

About half the training participants reported that the training reinforced their feeling that they had something to give the other, and most expressed a sense of commitment and dedication to sharing the information and tools they had acquired. Thanks to their sense of gratitude for the experience and personal process they had undergone, (5) “…the desire to help other people grew stronger during the training and then when we were called upon to facilitate it grew even stronger…. It’s like telling others who are not full of the knowledge I have.”

### ***A change in perspective and in outlook on life***

Most of the participants said that after the psychosocial training, they noticed that they were looking at the world and perceiving their own lives more optimistically and expansively, as fuller. They are more aware of their environment and more attuned to the needs of those around them. (3) “…It made my life more colorful; my life is fuller; I have a broader horizon…. After the intervention, the tree is taller and can see its surroundings, and it understands that in order to get somewhere else, it has to go through the ocean.”

**Insert Picture 4 Here**



Picture 4. A taller tree.

After the training, the tree is more grounded and able to see its surroundings, the sunlight and the preplanned surrounding it, which represent its service recipients.

**Discussion**

The aim of the present study was to shed light on the significance of a training program in psychosocial intervention through art. The study participants were service providers who had experienced a collective natural disaster. The study examined how the training participants perceive the impact that the training had on them and the uniqueness of this intervention.

The study’s findings indicate that overall the participants viewed the training favorably, and that the effects of the training reverberated beyond its direct impact on the participants themselves. From the participants’ perspective, the training enabled them to experience significant learning and development, and enhanced their abilities to be aware of and respond to their own psychosocial needs as well as those of their surrounding community. The training supported their use of the arts as a tool with students and family members, and this in turn had an impact on how these circles cope with trauma. Consequently, the participants developed a significant desire to implement the training, which manifested in a sense of commitment and in wanting to share the information and tools they had acquired. Although the primary goal of the training program was to cultivate the participants’ resilience and coping skills in the face of trauma and to train them in providing support for the local community, the study’s participants reported that the training also had an impact on many spheres of their life, beyond coping with the trauma itself. The participants described positive changes in their marital, parental, and familial, as well as professional, relations, as a result of which the training program created wider circles of influence on their lives and their personal and professional environments.

A central theme that emerged from the study’s findings is the of art in psychosocial intervention as a tool for self-expression and personal development. The participants stated that the personal and collective creative processes that took place in the training group enabled them to express and share the experiences they had following the trauma, thus lending support to the theoretical argument that creative processes enable expression and understanding of a non-verbal traumatic experience (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009; Gavron et al., 2020; Green, 2011; Hass-Cohen, 2016; Hass-Cohen & Clyde Findlay, 2018; King, 2016).

A salient motif, which the participants emphasized as a significant aspect of the intervention, is the use of playfulness, imagination, and humor, as reflected in their various forms of engagement with the arts. Participants described the playful creative processes as enjoyable and experienced them as reducing anxiety, sparking positive feelings, promoting closer relations, and facilitating new emotional experiences. Their experience supports theoretical arguments according to which coping with traumatic situations through creative activities can help in adapting to any situation and developing psychological resilience (Lahad et al., 2010; Malchiodi, 2008b).

From the participants’ perspective, one of the factors that enabled playfulness was the message that the activity does not entail experience or knowledge, but only expression and play. Similarly, McNiff (2015) argued that coping with a traumatic experience in a manner that does not include limitations or fear of artistic failure allows for more spontaneous and playful coping. As such, it appears that the participants were able to focus on the creative processes in a relaxed, spontaneous, and enjoyable way, which allowed them to experiment safely with re-creating and changing their experiences of reality (Gavron, 2020). The playful-humorous use of creative processes may also be compatible with the Filipino culture because it uses humor as a coping mechanism (Cara…), which would mean that creative processes such as these are suitable for working with this culture.

In addition, participants emphasized the non-verbal quality of the arts as something that allowed them to express their emotional experience more broadly, beyond the story conveyed by words. They described how the emotional expression that took place in the creative processes was accompanied by motion, drama, and music, which allowed them to release tension stored in their body, thus reducing emotional stress and creating a sense of relief. This finding reinforces the importance of the sensory, motional, and playful quality of creative processes in art-based psychosocial intervention, as means of promoting trauma coping processes and building resilience (Hass-Cohen, 2008).

Another key finding relates to the importance of the group in art-based psychosocial intervention. According to the training participants, the trust that developed in the training group allowed them to express themselves and share freely, reinforced their sense of belonging, and constituted a source of support that bolstered their self-confidence and coping powers. The core team that was created served as a source of support later as well, after the training, when they began teaching the skills they had acquired in the groups to the community. The importance of groups in coping with trauma is also described in the literature, according to which belonging to a range of social and community groups has a significant effect on the probability of an individual’s post-traumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999) and increases the opportunities for a variety of supportive social interactions (Benight, 2004). The literature also points out that group-based creative activities can help in processing community trauma and developing individual and collective resilience (Gavron et al., 2020; Grege & Penderson, 2017; Kometiani & Farmer, 2020; Ma & Penner, 2018). A training group based on the TOT model fostered a sense of cohesion as a leading group that influences and contributes to the community. Moreover, the training group’s provision of a meaningful space for the participants, in which they could deliberate collectively and express themselves collectively and individually in a safe and reciprocal manner, may also be attributable to the fact that belonging and contribution to the community are important values in Filipino culture (Cara….). That is, it appears that beyond the fact that psychosocial intervention usually takes place in a group, there is also a significant aspect here that makes it suitable to the unique cultural context of the Philippines.

A key aspect that emerged in the study is the participants’ attitude towards the cross-cultural encounter, between Filipino culture and Israeli culture. The findings indicate that the overall attitude of the participants to the cross-cultural intervention was characterized by openness and receptivity to new information, alongside efforts to identify similarities between the cultures, and perceived as an opportunity to acquire skills that they lacked. The interviewees recounted that they had experienced the encounter with the foreigners as positive and egalitarian, characterized by good communication, and exciting. In addition, about half the participants expressed deep gratitude towards IsraAID, and for the privilege of taking part in the psychosocial training. It may be possible to interpret this deep gratitude as the expression of a cultural value discussed in the professional literature (Algoe et. al, 2008; Matienzo, 2017; Saito et. al, 2010). Alongside the positive experience of the cross-cultural encounter, a small percentage of the participants described feelings of concern in advance of their interaction with a “foreigner” – feelings that were sometimes accompanied by a sense of anxiety or reluctance. These aspects, too, might be related to the manner in which the encounter with a foreigner is depicted in this culture (see, for example, Saito et. al, 2010).

Despite the training participants’ inclination towards openness and receptivity to the cross-cultural encounter, the findings reveal that participants felt the need for a number of cultural adaptations in implementing the psychosocial training within the local community. Examples include flexible scheduling and the concept of time (a characteristic discussed in the professional literature by Bernad, 2002; Mercado, 2001; Santos, 2014). It appears that despite the present efforts to construct a psychosocial intervention adapted to the local culture, the stated need for adaptations may indicate that there remain various gaps stemming from the cross-cultural encounter. To promote the cultural suitability of psychosocial interventions, it is necessary to study the manner in which the population describes local culture and its needs. By conducting a critical evaluation of the intervention with local professionals, it should be possible to fine-tune the intervention and accommodate the effect of different values or cultural biases (Kapitan, 2015; McNiff, 2009). Evidently, because the international intervention was structured so as to provide training to service workers within the community, with the intention of having group members acquire and construct tools, it avoided the perpetuation of class differences and colonialism in the manner that Watteres (2010) cautions against. On the contrary, it actually served as a bridge and a means of reducing gaps, given that the power granted by the foreign organization was transformed into power in the hands of the local community – a power it could draw on in the future as well.

**Implications for Future Interventions**

The study’s results indicate that art-based interventions that use play, humor, and creativity can constitute an important element of future psychosocial interventions in Filipino society and perhaps others as well. It also emerges from the study’s results that it will be important for future interventions to emphasize the spontaneous nature of artistic creation, as a way to anxiety and enable playfulness. Another element that appears critical for future interventions is that of working in a group, which seems to provide a safe space and allow participants to share difficult experiences while also trying out processes of change and development. This points to the importance of developing a strong core team that will continue to lead the interventions locally, in a manner that perpetuates further spread of the knowledge developed in the group to additional communities. Such a team could continue adapting the interventions to the local culture and dialect, and could also provide guidance and supervision suited to the local community. The inclusion of training graduates in future delegations in the Philippines and other countries (as the local IsraAID organization in Japan, JISP, has done) could be important and effective in overcoming the challenges posed by the cross-cultural encounter.

**Conclusions and Limitations**

The present study is the first of its kind, as not much has been written about art-based cross-cultural psychosocial training of trainers. The study’s findings enhance our understanding of the impact of training on many spheres of the participants’ lives and on other circles – familial, professional, and social – in their lives.

The results of the study highlight the significant role art can play in promoting personal and collective resilience and coping strategies in situations of collective trauma and in cultural contexts. Specifically, it appears that the contribution of creative processes to the training was related to cultural aspects unique to this culture, such as the use of play and humor as well as the work in a group. This points to the importance of working jointly with local professionals who can broaden our understanding of the local community’s response to art-based psychosocial intervention (Gavron et al., 2020). Indeed, it appears that the art-based interventions were specifically adapted to the Filipino culture and designed in cooperation with the core team. Because the training process with the core team continued over time, participants were able to apply and develop the knowledge in a manner culturally suited to the population with which they worked.

One of the limitations of this study stemmed from the fact that the researchers who interviewed the participants were Israeli, and therefore sometimes perceived by the interviewees as partnered with the intervention providers, which might have influenced the way they responded to questions. It appears that the cross-cultural issue was felt during the interviews, and by implication perhaps differences in status and power as well. This raises questions about the legitimacy of the cross-cultural encounter during the study itself, and about the possibility of bias in the study’s results (Hocoy, 2006; Kapitan, 2015; Potash et al., 2017). To address this challenge we partnered with Filipino researchers in identifying and approaching participants, repeatedly emphasized during the interviews that we do not represent IsraAID, and invited the participants to share with us what they saw as the difficulties and points for improvements in the interventions, in order to learn about and better understand how such trainings should be conducted. Because the participants were inclined to describe the difficulties they experienced during the training program, it is possible that this study does provide a comprehensive picture of the interventions despite the cross-cultural challenge. A follow-up study, conducted as a collaborative study with a larger number of participating researchers, might be able to moderate cross-cultural biases. In addition, because the interviewees selected for this study were education professionals, who represent only one sector of the local professionals who participated in the training, a future study could provide space for the inclusion of additional subjective experiences on the part of participants from other professions.

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