

Comparing the Effects of Group Art Activities and Individual Art Activities on the Psychological Resilience of Junior High School Students

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Abstract: With the increasingly fierce competition in modern society and the accelerated pace of life, the detection rate of psychological problems such as depression and anxiety among adolescents is high, and the mental health of adolescents is becoming more and more prominent, which has become the focus of attention of all walks of life. The purpose of this paper is to compare the effects of group art activities and individual art activities on adolescents' mental health, especially focusing on the application of expressive art therapy and its enhancement of adolescents' mental resilience, and to explore the effects of art activities on adolescents' mental health by using the literature analysis method. The study found that both group and individual art activities have positive effects on adolescents' mental health. Group activities enhanced social skills, teamwork, and emotional resonance and increased psychological resilience, while individual activities deepened self-knowledge and emotional expression and gained a sense of fulfillment through creativity, which also enhanced psychological resilience. The mechanisms are different: group activities focus on group dynamics and social learning and promote emotional connections and support networks, while individual activities rely on intrinsic motivation and self-reflection to achieve self-healing and growth.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been committed to advocating mental health in recent years by developing a global universal healthcare coverage (Universal Health Coverage) initiative for mental health for 2019-2023. This initiative stems from the fact that about 1 billion people worldwide suffer from mental health disturbances, including depression, anxiety disorders, and adolescent suicide (World Health Organization, 2019). In 2021-2022, under the impact of the new Crown Pneumonia epidemic, the mental health risk has risen to be one of the top ten risks globally. Against this backdrop, the concern for mental health has increased substantially. Adolescence is a critical growth stage with rapid physical and mental development and facing

multiple issues, and globally, adolescents have a high prevalence of mental health problems. According to a study by the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Report on National Mental Health Development in China (2021-2022) [1], the risk of depression is higher in the adolescent population than in the adult population. Therefore, improving the mental health literacy of adolescents not only contributes to their mental health but also is of great significance to the healthy development of society as a whole.

Art includes both verbal and non-verbal art. Art creation is therapy in itself [2], and the process involves reconstructing emotions and the self. The left side of the human brain is responsible for verbal processing, logic, and categorization, while trauma, childhood memories, and emotional memories are stored in the right side of the brain, which is responsible for non-verbal memories. It is difficult to reach the psychological, emotional, and cognitive problems that are stuck in the heart of a teenager through verbal means alone. Art activities, as a non-verbal means of communication, are considered to have the function of revealing the subconscious mind and are a non-traditional means of mental health education that is increasingly used to promote adolescents' psychological development and health maintenance.

Art therapy is a form of treatment that utilizes the process and creation of art to support, restore, and enhance mental health. It provides individuals with a non-verbal means of expression, enabling them to express their inner world through art forms such as painting, music, dance, and drama and to express emotions that are difficult to express thoroughly in words through artistic creations, thereby achieving emotional release and self-understanding. Nonverbal psychotherapy, represented by visual art, auditory art, and somatic dance art, can not only stimulate creativity and imagination, but also provide channels for emotional expression and stress release, which positively impacts adolescents' mental health, especially their mental resilience.

After carefully reviewing the literature on expressive arts therapy in building adolescent mental health and resilience, the researcher found that most literature explored different organizational forms of arts activities. In particular, group and individual arts activities are distinctive in their design and implementation. Further analysis revealed that there may be significant differences in the impact and effectiveness of these two art forms of art activities on middle school students' mental resilience. Therefore, an in-depth discussion of the specific effects of these two forms of art activities on adolescent mental health is of great significance for optimizing the educational strategies for mental toughness for junior high school students [3].

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Through systematic literature collection and review, the paper understand the current research status of art therapy in group art activities and individual art applied to middle school students' resilience.

To understand whether art therapy can effectively promote the psychological resilience of junior high school students through the method of integrative analysis, which in turn can effectively promote the stability of learning-related performance and help junior high school students maintain the quality of mental health.

Based on the above objectives, the questions to be answered in this study are as follows:

What are the significant differences between the specific effects of group arts activities and individual arts activities in promoting mental toughness among middle school students?

What are the mechanisms of action between group arts activities and individual arts activities in enhancing the mental toughness of middle school students?

1.3 Research Overview

Mental resilience, also known as resilience and mental flexibility, is the ability of individuals to adapt effectively and recover or even surpass their original state when facing adversity, pressure, and challenges. Although there is no uniform definition in the academic world, it is generally agreed that it involves the positive adaptation process under the interaction of individuals' internal resources, external support, and the two. Mental resilience is also one of the most important signs of adolescent mental health and development and has attracted much attention from the psychological community in recent years. Although researchers have not yet reached a consensus on how to measure resilience, some simple and effective resilience scales have been widely used [4]. In junior high school, as a critical period of the physical and mental development of adolescents, students are faced with multiple challenges such as academic pressure, peer relationships, self-identity, and so on, and the development of their psychological resilience is particularly important.

Art activities, whether in group or individual form, are seen as an effective way to promote adolescents' mental health and enhance emotional regulation and social skills [5]. Expressive art therapy, which is more convenient and functional than traditional talkative counseling, is well suited to be promoted among adolescents, and its professional and appropriate use can enhance the level of mental health education work in primary and secondary schools [6]. The main purpose of adolescents' art creation is self-expression and exploration, and adolescents' expressions of their feelings, thoughts, expectations, fears, and reactions to the world around them reflect the ever-changing, growing, and energized state of this stage. Therapeutic artwork, which emphasizes the sense of experience, requires the engagement of all the senses. Young people are exposed to a variety of media materials, observe various colors, lines, and shapes, enjoy different tunes and rhythms, touch rich textures, smell different scents, and promote the linking of the five senses with the sense of reality when creating art. Art therapy can inspire individual creative sensitivity in the age of virtual reality AI networks and help adolescents feel happy with real living [7]. Group art activities emphasize cooperation, communication, and co-creation, while individual art activities focus on self-expression, emotional catharsis, and independent thinking. These two forms of art activities may have different mechanisms of action and effects in promoting the development of mental toughness in middle school students.

By promoting mutual support, emotional resonance, and complementary skills among members, group art activities provide a safe socialization environment for junior high school students, which helps them learn how to effectively cope with conflicts, build positive interpersonal relationships, and enhance their self-confidence and sense of belonging in the process. These positive experiences help develop middle school students' mental toughness, enabling them to be more resilient in the face of life's challenges. In contrast, individual art activities provide a private space for middle school students to explore themselves deeply, express their inner world, and achieve emotional regulation and self-healing through the process of art creation. This process of self-reflection and expression helps to enhance junior high school students' self-awareness, emotional management ability, and problem-solving strategies, thus indirectly improving their psychological resilience.

For junior high school students, academic and interpersonal relationships are the greatest threat to their school career. Academic achievement and performance are the greatest sources of stress for students. Parents' and teachers' concern and high expectations for their children's academic achievement and performance also affect their anxiety and mental toughness. Learning-related anxiety has become an almost universal social emotion that not only students but also parents cannot avoid experiencing, posing a considerable challenge to the mental toughness of adolescent middle school students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Great Challenges and Pressures of Adolescence

Junior high school students are in the middle of puberty, when hormonal changes lead to significant changes in physical appearance, including maturation of reproductive organs, rapid growth in height and weight, and accentuation of secondary sexual characteristics; at the same time, the prefrontal lobes and emotional control centers of adolescents' brains are not yet mature, which makes their emotions extremely unstable. Dealing with these drastic changes is quite challenging for any age group, especially when the pressures of midterm studies and competition accumulate at the same time, bringing overloaded psychological pressures and challenges to junior high school students from the inside out and from the individual to the environment at the same time.

2.2 The Complexity of Psychosocial Development Tasks in Adolescence

According to Erikson's eight-stage theory of psychosocial development [8], the main task of adolescence is “self-identity”, i.e., exploring the sense of identity and unity that inquires “who am I”, a sense of being different from others and separate and independent from parents. Feelings. The process of defining who I am also involves the search for who I am not, and Erickson (1963) points out that because early adolescents tend to position themselves as rebels against authority, they often view the kindness of parents and teachers as hostile. The well-known phenomenon of “middle child” summarizes this period when adolescents, in order to show that they are different, tend to envision themselves in the role of “antagonist, defender” and behave in a way that is different from that of childhood.

2.3 Complexity of Adolescent Peer Relationships

Adolescents' relationships with friends become much more complex than in childhood. Middle school students receive the simultaneous physical and psychological drive to separate from their parents (family) and begin to be independent but are often unable to be truly independent due to various reasons. Therefore, peer groups provide them with sufficient security and acceptance in this separation-independence process. In the selection test of the secondary school examination, schools and families often use the academic results as a single evaluation standard so that school students of the same age group have to fall into the situation of “vicious competition”, in the face of the internal and external, from the environment to their complex overload of pressure, it is difficult for adolescents to form an excellent psychological resilience and healthy peer relationships.

2.4 The Necessity of Group Art Activities

As typical social animals, humans do most of their social learning in groups during adolescence, so group art activities construct a field for middle school students to do exercises in a relevant situation.[9]

Middle school students often have similar needs, so group art can provide members with the ability to support and assist each other in solving problems. In a group, each member's state of being can be presented, reflected upon, cared for, and understood, knowing that it is possible to be oneself, that one has potential, that one's limitations are acceptable, and that one is allowed to move at one's own pace. Class members can learn from the responses of other members, try new roles and new perspectives, imitate learning, and get support and enhancement from them. The group can catalyze and promote the youth's potential to be fully developed and establish deeper emotional

links and a sense of identity so as to complete the process of positive adaptation under the interactions of the individual's internal resources, external support, and the interaction of the two, and to achieve the purpose of cultivating psychological resilience.

2.5 Feasibility of Integrating Art Therapy into School Art Education

There are two major models of art therapy, the first of which emphasizes that the process of intention-making contains potential healing in itself, and the second focuses on the therapeutic relationship established with the therapist, the visitor, and the work. From the viewpoint of art as healing, art education, psychology, and counseling are inextricably linked and intertwined. The nature of art education already includes the function of counseling students' mental health, which can guide young people to identify their emotions, channel and regulate stress, cultivate mental resilience and a positive mindset, and provide safe and professional guidance in the school community, so as to prevent early intervention and avoid unfortunate occurrences [10].

3. Comparison between Group Art Activities and Individual Art Activities

The study results showed that both group art activities and individual art activities positively impacted adolescents' mental health. Group art activities significantly enhanced adolescents' social skills, teamwork abilities, and emotional empathy, which helped them find a sense of belonging and support in the group, thus improving psychological resilience. Individual arts activities, on the other hand, explored adolescents' inner world more deeply, helped them better recognize themselves, express their emotions, and gain self-affirmation and a sense of achievement in the creative process, which also positively affected the enhancement of psychological resilience.

Further analysis revealed that the mechanisms of the two types of activities in promoting adolescents' mental health have their focuses. Group art activities promote the establishment of emotional ties and social support networks among adolescents through group dynamics and social learning mechanisms, while individual art activities rely more on individual intrinsic motivation and self-reflection to realize self-healing and growth through the process of art creation.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the psychological resilience of junior high school students during adolescence and found that both group art activities and individual art activities were effective in enhancing their psychological resilience. Group activities enhance psychological resilience by promoting emotional connection, social skills, and a sense of belonging, while individual activities promote self-awareness, emotional release, and a sense of achievement through artistic expression, which also have a positive impact on psychological resilience. These findings have important implications for educational practice. They suggest that through a well-designed arts education program, schools can provide students with emotional support and space for growth, helping them to remain resilient in the face of adolescent challenges. At the same time, arts activities not only promote mental health but also stimulate creativity and aesthetic ability among adolescents, laying the foundation for their all-round development.

The education sector should further explore how to better integrate arts education with mental resilience development. Consideration could be given to integrating art therapy into the daily school curriculum to provide more personalized support to students in need. In addition, with the advancement of technology, emerging forms such as virtual art platforms and online art communities should also be taken into consideration to expand the boundaries of arts education and bring it closer to the reality of students' lives and interests. Through continuous innovation and

practice, we have reason to believe that art education will play a more important role in cultivating the mental toughness of junior high school students and promoting their overall development.

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