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Cultural Wounds Find Release: Art Therapy and First Generation Immigrants' Mental Health

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Introduction

As of 2021, the United States is home to 45.3 million immigrants, making up 13.6% of the population. Immigrants face post-migration stressors like language barriers, limited job opportunities, and limited access to healthcare. In a study conducted on first-generation immigrants, high rates of depression (35%), anxiety (28%), and PTSD (47%) were identified (Lindert et al., 2009).

Acculturation leads to detachment from an individual's cultural identity, which can result in internalized cultural identity conflicts. These conflicts can act as barriers to coping with mental health issues and post-migration stressors.

Factors like COVID-19, changes in border policies, and global political issues have exacerbated mental health challenges for immigrants. Therefore, there is an ongoing need for research to better understand and address the mental health of immigrants.

Art therapy has been used to help with identity challenges and mental health issues. However, no publications of peer-reviewed studies were found examining its use as an intervention for first generation adult immigrants in the U.S. experiencing cultural identity conflicts.



Hypothesis

Culturally sensitive art therapy will improve the mental health of first generation immigrants facing cultural identity conflicts in the US, as indicated by reduced psychological distress and increased cultural identity post art therapy.

Method

Participants:

- 20 first-generation immigrants in the United States aged 18 years and above who self-identify as experiencing mental health issues related to cultural identity.
- Recruitment through convenience sampling in community organizations, mental health clinics, and support groups.

Materials:

- Mixed-method study.
- Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R): a self-report questionnaire assessing psychological symptoms and distress.
- Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM): a self-report questionnaire examining ethnic/racial identity and group connection.
- Pre- and post-intervention surveys to assess changes in mental health status.
- Interviews with participants to gain insights into their experiences with cultural identity difficulties and art therapy.

Procedure:

- Total of 8 group sessions; 2 hours each session.
- Individual interpreters for each participant will be provided via headphones.
- First 4 sessions will include visual art therapy (drawing and painting).
- Next 4 sessions will include narrative art therapy. Each participant will go around sharing their art work.

Results

- A paired sample t-tests will be used to compare the pre- and post-intervention mental health scores.
- If a p-value is < 0.05 , it will mean that the null hypothesis can be rejected.
- For the quantitative data, a regression analysis will be used to show determinants of improvement in mental health.
- For qualitative data, thematic analysis of the interview responses will be used to identify key themes.

Conclusion

Cultural identity conflict is a complex topic that demands a comprehensive research approach. A mixed method study is best suited to explore the personal benefits of art therapy for first-generation immigrants grappling with cultural identity and mental health issues. Our motivation for this research is deeply personal, inspired by our own parents' struggles when they moved to the United States, the sense of isolation that comes with being far from home and family. Our research aims to highlight how cultural identity and mental health intersect for this diverse demographic and assess the potential of art therapy as an effective intervention.

In nursing, creating a supportive and culturally competent environment is crucial for quality patient care. Holistic care, which includes culturally tailored interventions, is at the core of our commitment to provide inclusive and compassionate nursing practices.