

Study shows benefit of art therapy in reducing psychological problems in Syrian refugee children

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Group art therapy shows promise in reducing a wide range of psychological symptoms commonly experienced by refugee children, according to a pilot study of Syrian refugee children living in Turkey, published in the journal, *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*.

Numerous studies have shown that refugee children are at [high risk](#) of a broad range of psychological problems including depression, behavioural problems, aggression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With almost 1.5 million refugee children from Syria currently living in Turkey, effective programmes to improve their mental health are sorely needed.

This study assessed whether group [art therapy](#) could reduce psychological symptoms in 64 Syrian refugee children (aged 7–12) who were living in Istanbul. Arabic speaking interviewers used standard questionnaires and scales to assess the children's traumatic experiences and to measure levels of depression, PTSD, and anxiety—both before and one week after—the five-day art therapy programme. The therapy used the Skills for Psychological Recovery programme to help children improve their problem solving skills, express and manage their feelings, and increase their social engagement and self-esteem through, art, dancing, and music.

At the start of the study, over half the children (35) were deemed at high risk of developing PTSD, around a quarter (14) already had PTSD symptoms, about a fifth (10) showed severe levels of depression and state (current) anxiety symptoms (6), and almost a third (13) had severe levels of trait anxiety symptoms (general tendency to be anxious; table 3).

One week after the programme, children reported

significant improvements in trauma, depression, and trait-anxiety [symptoms](#). No significant improvement was noted in state [anxiety symptoms](#) (table 4 and figure 1).

This study draws attention to the psychological impact of the refugee crisis on Syrian children and presents a potentially effective therapy. However, the authors caution that because of the limited number of participants and lack of control group, larger studies will be needed before definitive conclusions can be made about the therapy's effect on reducing [psychological symptoms](#) in refugee children.

More information: Nilay Ugurlu et al. An art therapy intervention for symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety among Syrian refugee children, *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* (2016). DOI: [10.1080/17450128.2016.1181288](https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2016.1181288)

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