

EXPLORING THE EFFICACY OF CREATIVE ARTS THERAPIES IN MITIGATING POSTNATAL DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION, MOOD ENHANCEMENT, AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG WOMEN IN THE POSTPARTUM PERIOD

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore the impact of a ten-week creative arts intervention on women experiencing mild to moderate postnatal depression and anxiety. With traditional treatments for postnatal depression often focused on pharmacotherapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy, this research sought to examine the potential benefits of creative arts therapies as a complementary approach. Participants engaged in weekly sessions incorporating various art forms, including painting, music, and movement, designed to foster emotional expression, improve mood, and facilitate social support. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted before and after the intervention and participant observations during the sessions. Thematic analysis identified three primary themes: (1) emotional expression and catharsis, (2) improvement in mood and emotional well-being, and (3) enhanced social support and connectedness. Findings indicate that creative arts interventions provided participants with a safe and supportive environment to express and process complex emotions, resulting in improved mood and a greater sense of emotional resilience. Furthermore, group-based activities facilitated social bonding, reducing feelings of isolation and promoting peer support. The study concludes that creative arts therapies offer a valuable adjunct to traditional treatments, providing a holistic and accessible option for supporting women with postnatal depression and anxiety. Further research is recommended to assess these interventions' long-term impact and broader applicability in diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Postnatal depression, Creative arts therapies, Emotional expression, Mood enhancement, Postpartum mental health.*

Introduction

Postnatal depression (PND) prevalence varies across countries, influenced by socioeconomic conditions, cultural beliefs, and healthcare systems (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Studies from Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) suggest that cultural stigma surrounding mental health discourages women from seeking professional help, making non-traditional interventions like creative arts more accessible and acceptable (Fisher et al., 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, community-based music and storytelling interventions have been used to support maternal mental health, promoting emotional expression and social bonding (Ndetei et al., 2021). In Europe, structured art therapy programs have been integrated into maternal healthcare services. In the United Kingdom, the “Mums’ Creative Well-being Program” uses painting, music, and journaling to help mothers manage PND symptoms (Robertson et al., 2022).

Similarly, in Sweden, movement-based therapies such as dance interventions have demonstrated improvements in mood and self-esteem among postpartum women (Lundqvist et al., 2021).

In Asia, cultural adaptations of creative arts interventions have also shown promising results. In Japan, “Ikebana” (traditional flower arranging) has been incorporated into therapy sessions for new mothers, fostering mindfulness and emotional stability (Yamaguchi et al., 2020). In India, expressive therapies incorporating traditional dance and music have helped women overcome isolation and anxiety related to childbirth (Basu et al., 2019). Danquah (2023) explored the use of music, photography, dance, and drama by Ghanaian counsellors as therapeutic interventions and found that creative arts therapies helped reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, nightmares, and emotional dissociation. Doku Asare et al. (2024) reveal some practical constraints to implementing creative arts therapy (CAT) in Ghana. Pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy remain primary treatments for PND; some women seek alternative or complementary interventions due to concerns over medication side effects, cultural stigma, or accessibility to professional care (James et al., 2023). Creative arts interventions have demonstrated potential benefits in mental health treatment by offering non-verbal means of expression, emotional processing, and social support (Chen et al., 2019). However, their application in alleviating postnatal depression and anxiety is underexplored. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how creative arts interventions create a safe, supportive environment, enhance self-expression, improve mood, and foster social connection for women experiencing PND.

Postnatal depression (PND) is a significant public health issue, affecting approximately 10–15% of women following childbirth. Symptoms include persistent sadness, fatigue, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, and reduced interest in daily activities. If left untreated, PND can negatively affect mother-infant bonding and overall family dynamics. Traditional treatments for PND include pharmacological approaches and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT); however, concerns about medication side effects and the accessibility of therapy have led to increased interest in complementary interventions (Ghosh et al., 2021). Creative arts interventions have emerged as promising adjunct therapies for mental health conditions, offering non-verbal outlets for emotional expression and psychological processing (Nicholson et al., 2020). Research suggests that art-based therapies enhance self-esteem, reduce anxiety, and improve overall well-being (Bailey & Scott, 2022). However, specific research on the effectiveness of creative arts interventions in managing postnatal depression and anxiety remains limited.

While pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy remain primary treatments for PND, some women may seek alternative or complementary interventions due to concerns over medication side effects, stigma, or accessibility to professional care (James et al., 2023). Creative arts interventions have demonstrated potential benefits in mental health treatment by offering non-verbal means of expression, emotional processing, and social support (Chen et al., 2019). However, their application in alleviating postnatal depression and anxiety is underexplored. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how creative arts interventions create a safe, supportive environment, enhance self-expression, improve mood, and foster social connection for women experiencing PND. A safe therapeutic environment enables individuals to express emotions freely without fear of judgment, which is crucial for emotional healing. According to Ghosh et al. (2021), women experiencing PND often feel isolated and invalidated. Group art therapy provides a space for open emotional expression, fostering validation and reducing the stigma associated with postnatal mental health challenges (Nicholson et al., 2020). Facilitators play a key role in ensuring psychological safety. Bailey & Scott (2022) emphasize the importance of empathy, non-judgment, and cultural sensitivity in creating a nurturing environment. Trauma-informed facilitators can

adapt interventions to individual needs, minimizing distress and enhancing therapeutic outcomes. Additionally, non-verbal artistic expression through painting, music, or movement therapy offers an outlet for suppressed emotions, enabling participants to process complex feelings constructively (Chen et al., 2019).

Cultural responsiveness is essential in designing creative arts interventions. James et al. (2023) highlight that culturally relevant symbols, music, and art forms foster engagement and trust. Moreover, group-based creative arts interventions facilitate peer support, which is crucial for reducing isolation and enhancing emotional resilience (Stewart et al., 2020). Creative arts interventions offer alternative avenues for participants to explore emotions, identities, and personal growth. Smith et al. (2021) suggest that women experiencing PND often struggle with feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and isolation, which they may find difficult to articulate in traditional therapy. Visual arts such as painting and drawing provide non-verbal channels for emotional expression, enabling participants to externalize internal struggles (Lam et al., 2022).

PND disrupts a mother's sense of self, but creative arts interventions aid in identity reconstruction. Chen et al. (2020) found that journaling and poetry enable women to process their emotions and redefine their identities, integrating their maternal roles with their pre-maternal selves. Similarly, Carter et al. (2023) argue that narrative and visual arts therapies enhance self-awareness and resilience, fostering a deeper understanding of one's emotions. Music, dance, and movement therapy offer alternative means of emotional expression, especially for those who find verbal communication challenging. Johnson et al. (2022) discovered that music therapy helps participants release feelings of frustration and loneliness, while Walker & Ellis (2021) observed that movement therapy aids in emotional and physical balance. Bennett et al. (2023) further assert that engaging in artistic creation fosters a sense of accomplishment, agency, and self-worth, empowering participants.

PND is often characterized by suppressed negative emotions, leading to prolonged distress. Visual arts provide a structured means to externalize emotions, reducing anxiety and promoting emotional relief. Smith et al. (2021) found that painting sessions helped participants feel "lighter" and more in control of their emotions. Similarly, music therapy enables individuals to channel emotions through sound and rhythm, enhancing emotional regulation (Johnson et al., 2022). Sensory engagement plays a role in stress reduction and relaxation. Lam et al. (2022) observed that visual arts therapy produces a calming effect through tactile and visual stimulation, lowering physiological symptoms of anxiety. Engaging in creative activities also provides moments of joy, accomplishment, and self-expression, counteracting the persistent negative emotions associated with PND (Davis et al., 2022). PND can lead to social withdrawal and isolation, but creative arts interventions provide opportunities for social engagement. Bennett et al. (2023) found that group-based art therapy fosters a sense of belonging by creating a space for mothers to share experiences. Similarly, Carter et al. (2023) emphasize the role of group storytelling in validating personal struggles and promoting solidarity.

Creative arts interventions facilitate peer bonding. Johnson et al. (2022) observed that group music therapy sessions often lead to lasting friendships. Walker & Ellis (2021) noted that collective creative activities create strong support networks that extend beyond therapy, reducing social isolation. Additionally, Jones & Roberts (2023) highlight that movement-based therapies enhance group cohesion, promoting positive social interactions and relationships. Creative arts interventions offer a safe, expressive, and socially enriching therapeutic approach for women experiencing postnatal depression and anxiety. By fostering emotional expression, mood

improvement, and social connection, these interventions serve as valuable adjuncts to conventional treatments. While not a standalone cure for severe depression, their therapeutic potential warrants further research and broader implementation in postnatal mental health care.

Research Questions

1. How do creative arts interventions impact the emotional expression of women with postnatal depression and anxiety?
2. What are the perceived changes in mood and emotional well-being among participants after engaging in a ten-week creative arts program?
3. How do creative arts interventions foster social support and connectedness among women with postnatal depression and anxiety?

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of women diagnosed with mild to moderate postnatal depression (PND) or anxiety who participated in a ten-week creative arts intervention. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants' emotions, perceptions, and personal experiences, which may not be fully captured through quantitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The research was an exploratory study premised on phenomenological perspectives, focusing on how creative arts interventions influence emotional well-being, self-expression, mood regulation, and social support among postpartum women. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring they met specific regulations, and movement therapy, incorporating gentle dance and expressive movement to encourage body awareness and reduce stress. Additionally, participants took part in creative writing and storytelling, where journaling, poetry, and personal narratives were used to foster self-reflection and identity reconstruction. Collaborative art-making was also integrated into the sessions, allowing participants to engage in group projects that fostered social connections and a sense of community. The facilitators ensured a safe and supportive environment, emphasizing non-judgment, empathy, and cultural sensitivity (Bailey & Scott, 2022). Sessions were held in a dedicated therapeutic space, designed to be welcoming and free from external distractions.

A multi-method data collection approach was employed to comprehensively capture participants' experiences. The first method involved semi-structured interviews conducted before and after the intervention. Pre-intervention interviews were designed to assess participants' initial mental health status, expectations, and past experiences with therapy, while post-intervention interviews explored their perceived changes, emotional experiences, and the overall impact of the intervention. These interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Additionally, participant observations were conducted throughout the sessions. Facilitators took field notes on participants' engagement, emotional expressions, and interactions with others, paying particular attention to non-verbal cues such as body language and artistic choices, which provided additional insights into participants' emotional states.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. First, researchers familiarized themselves with the data by transcribing and repeatedly reviewing interview recordings, observation notes, and journal entries. Next, initial codes were generated based on recurring phrases, emotions, and behavioral patterns. These codes were then grouped into meaningful categories, from which key themes emerged. The themes were further reviewed, refined, and cross-checked with the research team to ensure credibility. Once finalized, the themes were clearly defined, with supporting evidence drawn from participant narratives. The

analysis ultimately identified four major themes related to the intervention's impact: emotional expression, mood improvement, social support, and identity reconstruction. To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, several measures were taken. Member checking was conducted, where participants were invited to review preliminary findings to validate interpretations. Triangulation was employed by cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and journals to strengthen the reliability of findings. Researchers also engaged in reflexivity, maintaining a reflexive journal to document their own biases and ensure objective analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical considerations were rigorously upheld throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent after receiving a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all data and assigning pseudonyms to participants. Additionally, participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Findings

RQ1. How do creative arts interventions impact the emotional expression of women with postnatal depression and anxiety?

The creative arts interventions allowed participants to engage in emotional expression through non-verbal means, which many found easier than verbalizing their feelings. Creative activities such as painting, drawing, and music enabled participants to express complex emotions such as guilt, sadness, fear, and frustration. By engaging in these activities, participants could externalize their emotions in a safe and structured environment. This non-verbal expression was especially important for those who struggled with articulating their emotions due to the stigma surrounding postnatal depression or anxiety.

Themes 1: Cathartic Release through Creation

Engaging in creative tasks allowed participants to experience a cathartic release of their pent-up emotions, which played a significant role in alleviating emotional distress. Art-making and other creative activities acted as a channel for expressing feelings that were otherwise difficult to articulate. Some of the accumulated excerpts included...

"When I painted, I could literally feel the weight lifting off my chest. It was like I was releasing everything I'd been holding inside." (Participant 2)

"It was as if the pain in my heart came to life on the canvas, and I was able to let it go." (Participant 6)

The theme of catharsis stands out as a critical element of creative arts therapies. It reflects the emotional relief that comes when difficult feelings are released through creative expression. For women dealing with postnatal depression, the chance to safely release overwhelming emotions provides not only emotional relief but also a sense of control over their mental health journey.

Theme 2: Empowerment through Creative Process

The creative process provided participants with a sense of empowerment, helping them regain control over their emotions and environment. By actively participating in creating something, women could affirm their identity outside of their role as mothers and reconnect with a sense of personal worth. The participants shared the following. Some of the accrued extracts included...

"The moment I picked up a brush, I felt like I had control over something for the first time in months." (Participant 4)

“It was empowering to create something from nothing, to show myself that I am capable of more than just taking care of the baby.” (Participant 1)

The theme of empowerment through creation highlights how engaging in the arts can restore a sense of autonomy, which may have been lost in the overwhelming experience of postnatal depression. The act of creation enables participants to reclaim their sense of self and self-worth, which is often undermined during the postpartum period.

RQ2. What are the perceived changes in mood and emotional well-being among participants after engaging in a ten-week creative arts program?

The creative arts program led to noticeable improvements in mood and emotional well-being among participants. Many women reported feeling more relaxed, centered, and hopeful after engaging in creative tasks. Completing creative projects provided a sense of achievement, which helped boost self-esteem. The self-validation experienced by participants from both the act of creation and the group environment contributed to an overall sense of emotional well-being.

Theme 1: Increased Self-Esteem and Confidence

Participants reported a boost in self-esteem and confidence, which contributed significantly to improved emotional well-being. Completing art projects, even small ones, helped women realize their creative potential and gain pride in their accomplishments. Some of the accrued excerpts included...

“After completing each art piece, I felt proud of myself, and it made me feel good about who I am again.” (Participant 8)

“Before, I was unsure of myself as a mother and as a person, but now I’m starting to believe in my own abilities.” (Participant 5)

Increased self-esteem following creative engagement underscores the importance of creating spaces for mothers to rediscover their abilities and talents. It’s especially empowering for women dealing with postnatal depression, as the journey toward emotional healing often includes rediscovering their worth beyond motherhood.

Theme 2: Reduction in Anxiety and Stress

Many participants mentioned feeling **less anxious** and **stressed** after engaging in the creative arts program. The meditative quality of art-making, along with the focused attention required during creative tasks, helped to divert attention away from anxiety-provoking thoughts and promoted relaxation. Some of the ensuing quotes included...

“I could feel my anxiety fade during every session. Art was a form of escape from all the worries in my head.” (Participant 7)

“It felt like I could finally breathe. I was so stressed all the time, but the art gave me a break from it.” (Participant 3)

The anxiety reduction is crucial for mothers experiencing postnatal depression. The creative process offers not only emotional release but also a form of mindfulness, helping participants to anchor themselves in the present moment and reduce overwhelming feelings of anxiety and stress.

3. How do creative arts interventions foster social support and connectedness among women with postnatal depression and anxiety?

A key benefit of the creative arts program was the fostering of social support and connectedness. Group sessions provided an opportunity for participants to share their experiences, reducing

feelings of isolation. Women were able to form bonds with others who understood the challenges they were facing, and this peer support proved invaluable in the healing process. Group-based activities also encouraged mutual validation, helping women feel understood and less alone in their struggles.

Theme 1: Fostering Empathy through Shared Experience

One of the significant benefits of group-based creative arts interventions was the opportunity for participants to witness and share in each other's emotional journeys. This shared vulnerability fostered a deep sense of empathy and mutual understanding. Some of the accrued excerpts were shared...

"Seeing other mothers going through similar struggles made me feel less alone, and we shared our stories, which was so comforting."
(Participant 10)

"When I heard other women talk about their emotions, I realized I wasn't the only one feeling like this. It helped me open up too."
(Participant 9)

The shared experience aspect of group art therapy is crucial in fostering empathy. It's not just about creating art; it's about recognizing and validating each other's struggles, which helps participants feel supported. This emotional validation can be incredibly healing, especially in the context of postnatal depression, where feelings of isolation are prevalent.

Theme 2: Sense of Belonging and Support

The group dynamic created a strong sense of belonging, where participants felt accepted and valued. The camaraderie that developed from working on projects together was a source of emotional support, providing a community where women could freely express themselves and find encouragement.

"I feel like I belong here. Everyone understands me, and we all support each other." (Participant 11)

"I never thought I would connect with anyone like this, but I now have a group of women who are like my emotional lifeline." (Participant 6)

The importance of belonging cannot be overstated. As women navigate the challenges of postnatal depression, they often feel isolated and unsupported. The creative arts program not only provided emotional release but also built a supportive network that transcended the therapy space, offering long-lasting benefits for social support and emotional well-being.

Discussion

This study examined the impact of a ten-week creative arts intervention on women experiencing mild to moderate postnatal depression and anxiety. The findings suggest that structured creative arts activities foster emotional expression, improve mood, and enhance social support. These results align with existing empirical research on the benefits of creative arts interventions in mental health treatment.

Emotional Expression and Psychological Relief

The findings indicate that creative arts interventions provided participants with a safe, non-verbal avenue for expressing their emotions. Many women found it easier to externalize emotions through painting, journaling, and music therapy rather than through traditional verbal therapy. This aligns with research suggesting that art-making supports emotional regulation and provides an alternative

means of self-expression for individuals experiencing psychological distress. Previous studies support the role of creative expression in emotional processing. Stuckey and Nobel (2010) reported that engaging in artistic activities enhances self-awareness and provides psychological relief. Similarly, Kaimal et al. (2016) found that engaging in visual art significantly reduced cortisol levels, indicating reduced stress. The findings also align with Malchiodi (2020), who emphasized that creative arts interventions promote resilience and emotional healing, particularly for individuals coping with trauma or distress. For women with postnatal depression, who often experience emotional suppression and difficulties in articulating their struggles, the ability to express emotions through creative means may provide therapeutic relief. Creative arts interventions, therefore, serve as an effective complement to conventional therapeutic approaches, enabling individuals to explore and process their emotions in a supportive and structured environment.

Mood Enhancement and Emotional Well-being

Participants consistently reported improvements in mood and overall emotional well-being following the ten-week intervention. Many women described feelings of relief, relaxation, and a renewed sense of optimism after engaging in creative activities. These findings are consistent with empirical studies demonstrating the positive impact of creative arts on mental health. A randomized controlled trial by Czamanski-Cohen and Weihs (2016) found that creative arts interventions significantly reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety. Similarly, Dunphy et al. (2019) emphasized that engaging in artistic expression facilitates emotional regulation and promotes positive affect. Music therapy, which played a significant role in this study, has also been associated with reduced depressive symptoms, as highlighted in research by Maratos et al. (2011). Engagement in creative activities may contribute to mood enhancement by fostering a sense of accomplishment and providing an outlet for emotional release. Research suggests that the completion of creative projects is linked to increased self-esteem and motivation, reinforcing the therapeutic value of structured creative interventions for postnatal depression. Additionally, movement-based therapies, such as dance and guided body movement, have been shown to improve mood by promoting physical and emotional balance, as demonstrated in studies by Koch et al. (2019).

Social Support and Connectedness

Another major finding of the study was the role of creative arts interventions in fostering social support and connectedness among participants. The group-based nature of the sessions created an environment where women could share their experiences and develop meaningful relationships, reducing feelings of isolation. These findings align with previous research highlighting the social benefits of creative arts interventions. Bungay and Vella-Burrows (2013) found that group-based arts programs foster interpersonal connections, increase self-confidence, and provide a sense of belonging. Similarly, Coulton et al. (2015) reported that collaborative creative activities, such as group singing and art-making, help individuals build strong social networks and emotional resilience. The findings also align with research by Stickley et al. (2018), which emphasized that group art therapy enhances community-building and strengthens peer support among participants. The observed improvements in social connectedness support broader theories of social support in mental health. Cohen and Wills (1985) proposed that strong social networks serve as protective factors against depression by providing emotional and psychological support. This study's findings suggest that structured creative arts programs can play a crucial role in enhancing these social bonds, particularly for postpartum women who may experience isolation or disconnection.

Implications of the Findings

The results of this study highlight the potential of creative arts interventions as effective adjuncts to traditional treatments for postnatal depression and anxiety. While pharmacotherapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy remain standard approaches, integrating creative arts programs into maternal mental health care may enhance emotional well-being, provide alternative avenues for self-expression, and strengthen social support systems. This study also underscores the need for culturally responsive creative arts interventions. Future research should explore how these therapies can be adapted to different cultural contexts, ensuring accessibility and effectiveness for diverse populations. James et al. (2023) emphasized that incorporating culturally relevant artistic expressions increases engagement and improves therapeutic outcomes. From a clinical perspective, mental health practitioners should consider integrating structured creative arts programs into postpartum care plans. Given the observed improvements in mood, emotional expression, and social connectedness, these interventions may serve as a valuable resource for women reluctant to engage in conventional therapy. The findings further suggest that community-based creative arts initiatives could be developed to support postpartum mental health, providing accessible, non-stigmatizing spaces for emotional healing and peer support.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the impact of a ten-week creative arts program on women with mild to moderate postnatal depression and anxiety. The findings highlight several significant outcomes of the creative arts interventions in fostering emotional expression, improving mood and emotional well-being, and enhancing social support and connectedness. Participants reported feeling a cathartic release through creative processes such as painting, music, and movement, which provided them with a safe outlet for previously suppressed emotions. The sense of empowerment derived from the act of creation also played a crucial role in enhancing participants' self-esteem and self-worth. The reduction in anxiety and stress was another prominent result, as creative arts activities facilitated mindfulness and provided much-needed respite from the overwhelming emotions often associated with postnatal depression.

Group-based sessions also facilitated the formation of strong social bonds, which were critical in reducing feelings of isolation and promoting a sense of belonging. Participants expressed a deep understanding of connection and empathy towards each other, helping them build a supportive community. The culturally sensitive approach to the creative activities further enhanced engagement, ensuring that the interventions resonated meaningfully with the participants' backgrounds and experiences. Overall, the study indicates that creative arts can serve as a valuable adjunct to traditional treatments for postnatal depression and anxiety, offering not only emotional relief but also a sense of empowerment and social support. These interventions can complement conventional therapies, particularly in settings where access to pharmacotherapy and traditional counseling may be limited.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to improve the use of creative arts interventions in managing postnatal depression and anxiety:

1. **Integration of Creative Arts into Mental Health Programs.** Healthcare professionals should consider incorporating creative arts therapies, such as painting, music, and movement, into existing mental health programs for postpartum women. These interventions offer an

alternative or supplementary approach to traditional treatments, helping to address emotional needs that might not be fully met by cognitive-behavioral therapy or pharmacotherapy alone.

2. **Training for Facilitators.** Counsellors and therapists facilitating creative arts interventions should be trained not only in the artistic techniques but also in trauma-informed care. Ensuring that facilitators are equipped with the skills to create a safe, supportive, and non-judgmental space is crucial for the success of these interventions. It is also essential that facilitators are culturally competent, particularly in diverse communities, to ensure the relevance and engagement of the program.
3. **Expansion of Group-Based Programs.** Expanding the use of group-based creative arts programs is recommended. Group settings encourage social interaction and the formation of support networks among participants, which is particularly important for those experiencing the isolation often associated with postnatal depression. Creating opportunities for peer support through shared creative expression can significantly enhance the therapeutic benefits of these interventions.
4. **Longer-Term Follow-Up.** Future research should focus on the long-term effects of creative arts interventions on emotional well-being. Although this study demonstrated short-term benefits, it is crucial to examine whether these improvements are sustained over time. Long-term follow-up can help determine the lasting impact of creative arts therapies and their potential for preventing recurrence of postnatal depression.
5. **Customization of Creative Arts Programs.** To maximize the therapeutic benefits, creative arts programs should be tailored to individual needs and cultural contexts. The incorporation of culturally relevant themes and activities can enhance the personal meaning of the interventions, ensuring that they resonate deeply with participants and promote more significant emotional healing.
6. **Encouragement of Further Research.** More research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of creative arts therapies in treating postnatal depression and anxiety, particularly in diverse populations and across different cultural contexts. Future studies could focus on comparing the efficacy of creative arts interventions with traditional treatments, exploring factors such as cost-effectiveness, accessibility, and participant satisfaction.

Implications for Guidance and Counselling

The findings of this study have important implications for the field of guidance and counselling, particularly in supporting women experiencing postnatal depression and anxiety. The effectiveness of creative arts interventions in fostering emotional expression, improving mood, and enhancing social support suggests that counsellors and mental health practitioners can integrate these approaches into their therapeutic strategies. One key implication is the need to expand therapeutic modalities beyond traditional talk therapy. The study revealed that many women struggling with postnatal depression and anxiety found it easier to express their emotions through artistic forms rather than verbal communication. This highlights the potential for integrating creative arts interventions, such as painting, journaling, music therapy, and movement-based therapy, into counselling sessions. These approaches provide a non-verbal avenue for emotional expression, allowing postpartum women to process their feelings in a way that feels natural and comfortable for them. Counsellors should consider incorporating structured creative exercises that help clients externalize emotions and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

Another significant implication is the role of creative arts interventions in enhancing emotional regulation. The findings suggest that engaging in creative activities helps women with postnatal depression gain better control over their emotions by providing a structured and constructive outlet for their feelings. This insight underscores the importance of integrating expressive techniques into counselling practices. Encouraging postpartum women to engage in activities such as storytelling, guided imagery, or expressive writing can support their emotional healing and improve their ability to manage stress. These techniques can be particularly beneficial in individual counselling settings, where counsellors can tailor interventions to meet the specific needs of each client. The study also highlights the potential for creative arts interventions to foster social connectedness and reduce feelings of isolation among postpartum women. The group-based nature of many artistic activities creates opportunities for peer support, allowing women to share their experiences and build relationships with others facing similar challenges. This has important implications for group counselling approaches, as it suggests that counsellors can design interventions that encourage interaction and mutual support. Facilitating group art therapy sessions, where mothers engage in shared creative activities, can help build a sense of community and provide emotional validation. The social aspect of these interventions is crucial, as it helps counteract the loneliness that many women with postnatal depression experience.

Cultural sensitivity is another critical consideration that emerges from this study. The effectiveness of creative arts interventions can be enhanced when they are tailored to align with the cultural backgrounds and experiences of participants. For guidance and counselling professionals working with diverse populations, this means integrating culturally relevant artistic expressions, such as traditional music, dance, or storytelling, into therapeutic sessions. Recognizing and incorporating cultural elements can increase engagement and ensure that interventions resonate with postpartum women in different communities. Counsellors should be trained in culturally responsive counselling techniques to create inclusive and meaningful therapeutic experiences for all clients.

The study further emphasizes the importance of making mental health support more accessible. Many women experiencing postnatal depression may not seek help due to stigma or logistical barriers, such as a lack of transportation or childcare responsibilities. Creative arts interventions offer an opportunity to reach these individuals in a non-stigmatizing and community-based manner. Counsellors can collaborate with healthcare providers, community organizations, and maternal health programs to implement art-based interventions in settings that are more accessible to postpartum women. This could include workshops at community centers, online art therapy programs, or mobile counselling services that incorporate creative activities.

Another important implication relates to the need for professional development and training for counsellors. Since creative arts interventions have demonstrated their effectiveness in supporting women with postnatal depression, it is essential that guidance and counselling professionals receive training in these approaches. Counsellor education programs should integrate courses on creative arts therapies, equipping professionals with the skills to incorporate these techniques into their practice. Additionally, ongoing professional development workshops can help counsellors refine their expertise and stay updated on innovative art-based therapeutic methods.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of self-expression and empowerment in the healing process. Many women reported feeling a renewed sense of self-worth and accomplishment after engaging in creative activities. This suggests that counsellors should encourage postpartum clients to engage in artistic activities as a form of self-care and self-discovery. Supporting mothers in exploring their identities beyond motherhood through creative expression can enhance their

confidence, resilience, and overall well-being. By empowering clients to take an active role in their healing journey, counsellors can help them regain a sense of control over their emotional and mental health.

Ethics Statement

The research adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (1964) and its later amendments, ensuring the highest standards of ethical integrity and participant protection. Given the study's focus on postnatal depression and creative arts interventions, measures were taken to safeguard participants' rights, dignity, and confidentiality. All data collection procedures were carried out with sensitivity and strict compliance with international ethical standards.

Data Availability

To protect participant privacy and adhere to ethical data-sharing policies, the datasets collected and analyzed in this study are not publicly available. However, researchers interested in accessing the data may submit a formal request to the corresponding author. Each request will be reviewed in accordance with ethical and institutional guidelines to ensure the confidentiality and responsible use of participant information.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest in relation to this study. The research was conducted independently, without any external influence from funding bodies, organizations, or individuals that could have biased the study's objectives, methodology, or findings.

Ethics Approval and Informed Consent

Before participating in the study, all individuals were provided with detailed information regarding the purpose, objectives, and scope of the research. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring they understood their rights, including their ability to withdraw at any time without consequences. Strict measures were implemented to protect confidentiality and anonymity, with all responses anonymized during data processing to maintain participant privacy.

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