



Impact of a Creative Engagement Course on Emotional Well-Being, Perceived Stress, and Resilience: A Pre–Post Study

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Abstract: Creative engagement or activity is now being recognized to foster emotional well-being and reduce stress. Young adults, have immense pressure placed upon them in relation to their academic and vocational studies, as well as the rigors of daily life. This paper investigated the implications of taking a Creative Engagement Course, on the emotional well-being, stress and resilience of 58 young adults, aged 18-25 years. The participants were asked to complete the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) before and after the 4 week Creative Engagement Course. The Course consisted of a range of creative engagement activities including reflective drawing and art, journaling, symbolic representation and mindfulness-based creative engagement tasks. The findings indicated that there was positive influence on the emotional well-being of the participants, resilience and the perceived stress levels after the intervention. The study suggests that participation in creative engagement activities can be an effective and accessible strategy for fostering good mental health and enhancing emotional resilience in young adults.

Keywords: *Creative Engagement; Emotional Well-Being; Perceived Stress; Resilience; Young Adults; Art-Based Intervention; Psychological Well-Being; Mental Health Promotion.*

1. Introduction

Emotional well-being is a concept that is part of psychological health, and it significantly impacts on the operations of an individual and the quality of life that an individual lives. It includes the capacity of an individual to perceive, comprehend and control his/her emotions and have a favorable attitude to life. Individuals with healthy emotional well-being tend to cope with stress better, adapt well to change and various aspects of life, and have better psychological well-being compared to others without such a state. A lack of emotional well-being results in mood fluctuations, feelings of worry, lack of motivation and lower levels of satisfaction with life.

Young adulthood, in which significant life transitions and important life tasks such as academic work, potential career development, social pressure, and identity exploration are being made and dealt with may create additional pressure and stress on psychological well-being compared to other life stages. In light of this, there is a great need to develop creative and enjoyable interventions aimed at enhancing mental health and psychological well-being. Creative engagement is a novel and promising concept that it is assumed will enhance emotional well-being and alleviate psychological stress. Painting, drawing, writing, and other creative activities help an individual to communicate his/her thoughts and feelings in ways that are sometimes not easy to express in verbal words. These activities can strengthen self-awareness and the ability to express emotions as well as relax. It is assumed that these activities may also help an individual to manage emotions that may be perceived as challenging better. Even though considerable attention is given to the effects of creative engagement on the lives of young adults there has been minimal investigation into the effectiveness of a structured Creative Engagement Course on young adults through standard measures of psychological processes. This study was designed to test the impact of a structured Creative Engagement Course on the emotional well-being, perceived stress and resilience among young adults with a pretest and posttest design.

1.1 Research Questions

On the basis of the objective of the study the following hypotheses were obtained:

H1: Emotional well-being will significantly improve among young adults participating in a Creative Engagement Course relative to young adults who do not.

H2: Perceived stress will significantly decrease among young adults participating in a Creative Engagement Course relative to young adults who do not.

H3: Resilience will significantly increase among young adults participating in a Creative Engagement Course relative to young adults who do not.

Creative activity has already been observed as a useful method of improving mental health and emotional well-being. The use of creative engagement activities for fostering emotional regulation and resilience in an individual has been examined through numerous studies (Malchiodi, 2012). Expressive and creative interventions are thought to give people access to and encourage them to express difficult to verbalize emotions; to enhance one's self-awareness and ability to express emotions; to improve coping skills; and to support a process in which it becomes safe and non-judgmental for an individual to experience challenging emotions (Malchiodi, 2012). Similarly, Stuckey and Noble (2010) posited that engaging in activities like painting, drawing, or writing effectively enhanced positive emotion and decreased negative emotionality (stress and worry); and that they increase positive emotions, relaxation and promote psychological healing etc. Kaimal et al. (2016) discovered that creating art reduced stress levels as measured by reduced levels of the hormone cortisol and improved emotional self-regulation in participants. Fancourt and Finn (2019) stressed the benefits of structured creative engagement activities for resilience and well-being by promoting self-reflection, emotional awareness, and psychological flexibility. Studies on journaling and expressive writing has also highlighted their importance in enhancing mental well-being by improving emotional processing following distressing experiences (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). According to all this literature on creative engagement, creative engagement is a significant aspect in boosting positive emotions and self-awareness and decreasing negative feelings, especially stress. However, there is very little investigation conducted so far regarding the effect of Creative Engagement Courses on the young population.

1.2 Limitations in Current Literature

Although creative involvement is a promising concept regarding mental health and emotional well-being, the existing literature has several limitations. Most studies have focused on individuals with clinical backgrounds. Studies focusing on creative engagement interventions on non-clinical young adults are lacking. Most of these studies were small, involved qualitative as opposed to quantitative data (standard measures of psychological processes), and even in cases where pre- post experimental studies have been conducted, they have rarely measured the specific outcome variables of this study.

1.3 Rationale and Significance of the study

The present research was aimed at assessing the efficacy of structured Creative Engagement Course on emotional well-being, perceived stress and resilience among young adults. The widespread prevalence of stress among students and young adults necessitates studies investigating effective and engaging interventions aimed at increasing emotional well-being and resilience. Creative engagement activities are inexpensive, accessible, and easy to implement; these features allow it to be effectively integrated as a therapeutic tool in a variety of personal, educational, and professional contexts such as the school system, clinics and counselors. This research study is supposed to give significant information that would be used to develop creative engagement intervention courses.

1.4 Research Aim

The objective of the study was to evaluate a structured Creative Engagement Course in its impact on young adults' emotional well-being, perceived stress and resilience.

1.5 Objectives of the study

Investigate the impact of a Creative Engagement Course on young adults' emotional well-being.

To examine the effect of a Creative Engagement Course on young adults' perceived stress.

To study the impact of a Creative Engagement Course on the resilience in adults.

2. Method

This study used a quantitative pre-post research design to assess the influence of a structured Creative Engagement Course on young adults' emotional well-being, perceived stress and resilience. Standardized psychological measures were administrated before and after the intervention to measure psychological functioning of the participants. This design allows us to assess the extent to which participation in the Creative Engagement Course enhances emotional well-being and resilience while reducing perceived stress.

2.1 Participants

The sample of 58 young adults aged 18-25 years enrolled in a Creative Engagement Course was recruited via convenience sampling, and all participants received an informed consent before data collection. Data collection was voluntary, and participants were briefed on

the nature and intent of the study, including the confidentiality of their responses, and the freedom to terminate participation in the study at any given time. Inclusion criteria stated participants must be 18-25 years old and currently enrolled in a Creative Engagement Course and interested in participation in the research study. Exclusion criteria included anyone who did not complete both a pre- and post-assessment.

2.2 Materials

Emotional well-being was measured using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index (WHO-5 Well-Being Index). This measure, which comprises five items using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1=At no time, 6=All of the time) assesses positive emotional functioning.

The 10-item **Perceived Stress Scale** (PSS-10; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) was used to measure perceived stress. This scale employs a 5-point Likert scale (1=Never, 5=Always) to assess the stress experienced by participants.

The 6-item **Brief Resilience Scale** (BRS; Smith et al., 2008) was used to measure resilience in participants. This measure employs a 5-point Likert scale (1=Not at all, 5=Very much).

Basic demographic information regarding age and educational background were also gathered.

2.3 Procedure

Before the Creative Engagement Course, everyone took the pre-assessment, which included the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). The Creative Engagement Course, consisted of the following structure: expressive writing, drawing for self-reflection, symbolic representation, journal making, and mind-based creative activities aimed at facilitating emotional awareness, self-expression, and coping mechanisms. Upon completion of the Creative Engagement Course, the participants completed a post-assessment that was identical to the pre-assessment in composition. Data were compiled in a ready format for analysis in order to measure a change in participants' psychological functioning.

2.4 Data Processing and Analysis Strategy

We put the numbers into Jamovi so that we could do statistical analysis. We calculated descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for all the measures taken before and after the test. We used paired samples t-tests to see if there were any big differences between the

measurements before and after the intervention. Significance was determined at the .05 alpha level, and results were analyzed in order to determine any impact of the Creative Engagement Course on participants' emotional well-being, perceived stress, and resilience.

3. Results

In order to measure the effectiveness of Creative Engagement Course, the following statistical tests were performed: descriptive statistics, normality test and paired sample t-test. The differences between pre- and post-intervention emotional well-being, perceived stress, and resilience were assessed and compared. Assumptions regarding normality were checked before carrying out the inferential statistics in order to decide if parametric tests were appropriate.

Normality of the difference scores (Post-test - Pre-test) of emotional well-being, perceived stress and resilience was checked by using the Shapiro-Wilk test, values of skewness and kurtosis and the visual check of Q-Q plots. The Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the emotional well-being scores were not normally distributed, $W = 0.943$, $p = .009$, since the p-value was less than .05. Nevertheless, perceived stress, $W = 0.969$, $p = .148$, and resilience, $W = 0.968$, $p = .130$, showed normal distributions since their p-values were greater than .05. Even though the emotional well-being scores were not normally distributed, the sample size ($N=58$) was large enough (over 30), so based on Central Limit Theorem the parametric test paired sample t-tests are robust. Paired sample t-tests were therefore performed.

Table 1. *Shapiro–Wilk Test of Normality for Difference Scores*

		W	p
WHO5_0	WHO5_1	0.943	0.009
PSS_0	PSS_1	0.969	0.148
BRS_0	BRS_1	0.968	0.130

Pre and posttest descriptive statistics for each variable (emotional well-being, perceived stress, and resilience) are presented below. Emotional well-being improved significantly from pre-test to post-test; this can be observed as the mean went from 22.83 (SD = 5.299) to 75.17 (SD = 7.408). Similarly, perceived stress decreased from pre-test ($M = 20.88$, $SD = 2.471$) to post-test ($M = 16.48$, $SD = 2.430$), suggesting a lower stress level after the intervention. Lastly, resilience also increased from pre-test ($M=2.52$, $SD=.299$) to post-test ($M=3.91$, $SD=.333$).

Standard deviations are generally small across variables, demonstrating that the participants improved consistently.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for pre- and post-intervention scores*

	N	MEAN	MEDIAN	SD	SE
WHO5_0	58	22.83	24.00	5.299	0.6957
WHO5_1	58	75.17	76.00	7.408	0.9727
PSS_0	58	20.88	20.50	2.471	0.3245
PSS_1	58	16.48	16.00	2.430	0.3190
BRS_0	58	2.52	2.50	0.299	0.0392
BRS_1	58	3.91	3.83	0.333	0.0438

Paired sample t-tests were run to determine if the change from pre- to post-intervention was statistically significant. The change from pre- to post-intervention scores on the emotion subscale, $t(57) = -41.51$, $p < .001$, was significant and found that the mean difference was -52.34 and the effect size was very large (Cohen's $d = -5.45$). The change from pre- to post-intervention scores on perceived stress was significant, $t(57) = 9.19$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of 4.4 and a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.21$). The change from pre- to post-intervention on the resilience subscale was also found to be statistically significant, $t(57) = -24.08$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of -1.38 and an effect size of a very large size (Cohen's $d = -3.16$). It appears that participants of the Creative Engagement Course increased in their emotional well-being and resilience and experienced a decrease in perceived stress.

Table 3. *Paired Samples t-Test Results*

										95% confidenc e interval	95% confidenc e interval
			Statistic s	df	p	Mean differenc e	SE differenc e		Effec t size	Lower	Upper
WHO5_0	WHO5_1	Student' s t	-41.51	57. 0	<.00 1	-52.34	1.2610	Cohen' s d	-5.45	-6.460	-4.42
PSS_0	PSS_1	Student' s t	9.19	57. 0	<.00 1	4.40	0.4782	Cohen' s d	1.21	0.865	1.54
BRS_0	BRS_1	Student' s t	-24.-8	57. 0	<.00 1	-1.38	0.0574	Cohen' s d	-3.16	-3.793	-2.53

4. Discussion

The present study examined how the Creative Engagement Course influenced the well-being, stress levels and resilience of young adults. It indicated increased well-being and resilience, while indicating a decrease in stress levels after the intervention, the results of which are consistent with the idea that the creative engagement activities might be helpful.

The study's primary goal was to ascertain how the Creative Engagement Course influences emotional well-being and found that after the intervention the participants improved in their well-being. This could be due to the fact that creative activity has components of self-expression. Drawing and journaling, for instance, giving participants an opportunity to think about their own feelings inside themselves, leading to emotional self-awareness and positive moods.

The second purpose of this study was to observe how the Creative Engagement Course influenced perceived stress. It was found that after the Creative Engagement Course there was a decrease in perceived stress. This could be explained by the relaxing environment that the Creative Engagement Course created, giving the participants the chance to address the stressful events happening in their lives and create a new perspective for themselves through the process of creation.

Another aim of this research was to examine the impact of Creative Engagement Course on resilience and found an increase in resilience after the Creative Engagement Course. This is probably due to the fact that when engaging in a creative process, the participants had the chance to experience mastery, find and focus on their strengths and developed a problem-solving perspective which is believed to enhance resilience.

These findings of the present study are aligned with the research performed on Creative Engagement and its effectiveness. Research has indicated that creative and art-based interventions enhance emotional well-being and decrease stress. Malchiodi (2012) has pointed out that artistic activities help in building Emotional Self Awareness and Stuckey and Nobel (2010) have stated that creative activities are known to increase emotional well-being. Research also suggests that art-based interventions reduce stress (Kaimal et al., 2016).

Even though positive results were obtained there are few limitations. The study's sample size was relatively small, restricting its generalizability to other young adults or diverse

populations. The study's participants were restricted to young adults, employing a pre-post design that excluded a control group.

Further studies can be conducted with larger and diverse samples of participants with a control group included in the study to support and further validate the present findings. Additional studies could investigate the long-term effects of the Creative Engagement Course or analyze its effectiveness with other age groups or in a variety of contexts like schools, colleges or clinics.

To sum up, the Creative Engagement Course improved emotional well-being and resilience of the young adults, as well as the participants' stress levels decreased, demonstrating that creative engagement is an accessible intervention tool that could be utilized in assisting with mental health concerns.

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