

## Exploring Mandala – Art as a Form of Therapy

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### ABSTRACT

The declining trend of mental well-being among university students is a serious concern. Finding ways to curb the issue before it becomes out of hand is the main objective of this study as it assesses the effectiveness of using Mandala art as a therapeutic method in reducing the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among students. Art has been around for thousands of years, and this study tests the claim specifically on the effectiveness of Mandala art as an emerging field of psychotherapy. This study uses quasi-experimental quantitative research method. Meanwhile, 72 participants from University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) are recruited and the participants are administered the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) before and after the Mandala colouring activities. The effectiveness is measured in terms of the pre- and post-scores of DASS-21 through paired sample *t*-test using the SPSS v26.0. Results of the research showed a significant difference between the mean of the pre- and post-test scores ( $p < 0.05$ ). The findings of this research supported the hypothesis that involving oneself in therapeutic art activity can reduce depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms.

Keywords: anxiety, art as therapy, DASS-21, depression, Mandala, stress

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### INTRODUCTION

A majority of the world population is at risk of having mental health problems. Due to the Covid-19 pandemics, in the first year of its outbreak, the prevalence of mental illness has experienced a 25% spike globally (World Health Organisation, 2022). As of today, living with psychological problems lead to a life that is less fulfilled with disrupted daily basic routine. This situation affects people from various walks of life which includes university students. University students are known to juggle with a lot of obstacles during their time attending to lessons and daily routines. Moreover, the workload, expectations, family issues, and financial problems that the students experience also contribute to pressure and stress. Hajra and Saleem (2021) suggest that among students, their overall psychological well-being is greatly affected with the presence of anxiety, stress, and depression. Psychological problems that the students experience will also affect their competencies and performances (Zahit et al., 2022). Hence, it is no denying the fact that the rise of mental health problems among students are at an alarming rate and quick decisions need to be taken to resolve the problems. One of the ways that might help students in their mental well-being is through having therapeutic hobbies. Finding things that one enjoys doing help them to become happier and unwind from daily strenuous asks. A study done by Jenkins *et al.*, (2019) has highlighted that students who are able to pursue their hobbies are less stress, and have better work-life balanced compared to those who do not. The study also highlighted that having hobbies is one of the supports that protects students from overwhelming stress and better mental health.

In recent years, art therapy is a new and progressive way to deal with mental health problems through having hobbies and art-making. Art has been around for approximately 300,000 years, and it has been explored and utilised for different purposes in various cultural and religious expressions. However, in this research the term art as therapy is used instead of art therapy. The term art as therapy is defined as therapeutic art-making which primary goal is to make beautiful appealing artwork that indirectly helps the doers to be relaxed and gain catharsis (Worden, 2020). Art therapy on the contrary is an evidence-based intervention that integrates the use of art and creative processes while being assisted by an art therapist within a psycho-therapeutic relationship (American Art Therapy Association, 2017). Art as therapy and art therapy are two terms that are commonly used interchangeably despite having different meanings. Hence, this research will be highlighting on the former term which is art as therapy. By using art as therapy, it acts as an impeccable route for the less fortunate party who cannot afford to get the expensive mental health treatment. In this research, Mandala art is the focus and the therapeutic tool investigated.