

# A Study on the Effect of Expressive Arts Therapy on Marital Empathy and Emotional Stability

1. Tinatin. Gogberashvili<sup>1</sup>: Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Sulikhan-Saba Orbeliani University, Tbilisi, Georgia
2. Maia. Bolashvili<sup>2</sup>: Georgian Association for Mental Health, Tbilisi, Georgia
3. Damián. Cenci Pertile<sup>3</sup>: Section of Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology, Department of Medicine and Public Health, University of Verona, Ospedale Policlinico "G.B. Rossi", P.le L.A. Scuro, 10, 37134, Verona, Italy

\*corresponding author's email: tinatin.gogberashvili@sabauni.edu.ge

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of expressive arts therapy in enhancing marital empathy and emotional stability among married individuals. A randomized controlled trial was conducted with 30 married individuals (15 per group) in Georgia. Participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group receiving an eight-session expressive arts therapy intervention or a control group placed on a waitlist. Each session lasted 60–75 minutes and integrated multiple modalities including visual arts, movement, music, and storytelling. Assessments were conducted at three time points: pretest, posttest, and five-month follow-up. Standardized tools were used to measure marital empathy and emotional stability. Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA with Bonferroni post-hoc tests, and all assumptions were met. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS-27. Significant time  $\times$  group interactions were observed for both marital empathy ( $F(2,54) = 20.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .436$ ) and emotional stability ( $F(2,54) = 18.44, p < .001, \eta^2 = .413$ ), indicating that the experimental group experienced greater improvement over time compared to the control group. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons showed significant increases from pretest to posttest and pretest to follow-up in both marital empathy ( $p < .001$ ) and emotional stability ( $p < .001$ ), with no significant decline at follow-up, suggesting that the therapeutic gains were maintained. Expressive arts therapy proved to be an effective and sustainable intervention for improving marital empathy and emotional stability. The results support the integration of creative, multimodal therapeutic approaches into marital counseling programs and highlight the enduring benefits of symbolic, embodied, and narrative-based interventions for couples' emotional health.

**Keywords:** Expressive Arts Therapy; Marital Empathy; Emotional Stability; Couples Therapy

## How to cite this article:

Gogberashvili, T., Bolashvili, M., & Cenci Pertile, D. (2024). A Study on the Effect of Expressive Arts Therapy on Marital Empathy and Emotional Stability. *Research and Practice in Couple Therapy*, 2(2), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.61838/rpct.2.2.4>



## Introduction

In the evolving landscape of psychological interventions, expressive arts therapy (ExAT) has gained prominence as a holistic, creative, and integrative approach that facilitates emotional growth and interpersonal healing. Rooted in the intersection of artistic modalities and psychotherapeutic principles, ExAT enables individuals to access and express inner experiences through various creative forms such as visual art, movement, music, storytelling, and drama. This multimodal engagement with the arts not only enhances emotional regulation but also strengthens empathic capacities and deepens relational attunement. As marital relationships increasingly face psychological stressors associated with emotional dysregulation and communication breakdown, there is a critical need to explore interventions that can simultaneously foster empathy and stabilize emotional functioning within the dyadic context (Álvarez et al., 2025; Kashaka, 2025a).

Marital empathy, a cornerstone of relational satisfaction, encompasses the cognitive and affective ability to understand and resonate with a partner's emotional state. It serves as a foundational skill for effective communication, conflict resolution, and intimacy. When empathy diminishes, emotional misunderstandings accumulate, leading to relational discord and emotional withdrawal (Law et al., 2023; Pitaloka & Muhid, 2025). Emotional stability, on the other hand, is vital for sustaining constructive interactions, managing stress, and navigating marital challenges without emotional reactivity. Research indicates that emotionally stable individuals are better equipped to demonstrate patience, forgiveness, and support in intimate relationships (Fernando et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024). However, achieving these psychological capacities often requires targeted interventions, especially when couples are entrenched in cycles of miscommunication or unresolved emotional wounds.

Expressive arts therapy has emerged as an innovative method for cultivating both intra- and interpersonal awareness. It draws from the belief that creative expression bypasses cognitive defenses and facilitates access to implicit emotional knowledge (Kashaka, 2025b; M, 2024). As such, ExAT creates a safe and non-judgmental space where individuals and couples can explore feelings, transform inner conflicts, and co-construct new relational meanings through art. Notably, research shows that even short-term engagement with expressive arts interventions can improve emotional expression, enhance affective empathy, and reduce psychological distress across various populations (Kim & Eo, 2024; Yoon & Yu, 2025).

Within the marital context, these benefits are particularly promising. ExAT allows partners to symbolically externalize their emotions, explore each other's inner landscapes, and engage in shared artistic experiences that foster mutual understanding. A growing number of studies suggest that art-based therapeutic practices enhance dyadic processes by strengthening attunement, compassion, and emotional clarity (Kim & Kim, 2024; Shamy, 2023). Furthermore, expressive modalities like drawing, music, and storytelling serve as embodied metaphors through which partners can process and reframe relationship narratives (J, 2024; Wenxiao, 2024). These creative formats enable new emotional vocabularies and relational scripts to emerge, thereby improving overall marital dynamics.

The therapeutic potential of expressive arts is reinforced by its applicability across cultural and developmental contexts. For instance, art therapy has been used to support grieving youth (Law et al., 2023), empower children with autism (Liu et al., 2024), and reduce trauma symptoms in both children and adults (Aydn, 2024; Baek et al., 2024). These findings confirm ExAT's versatility in addressing a wide spectrum of emotional and relational challenges. More importantly, ExAT supports both verbal and nonverbal modes of expression, which is especially relevant in couples where one or both partners struggle with verbal articulation or emotional inhibition (Kim & Eo, 2024; Vyshnyk, 2025).

The relevance of art therapy in emotionally charged relationships is also highlighted in studies conducted in emotionally vulnerable and high-conflict populations. For example, in populations experiencing war-related trauma, expressive arts therapy has shown significant efficacy in re-establishing a sense of psychological coherence and relational hope (Візньюк et al., 2025; Найчук et al., 2024). In such contexts, creativity functions as a vehicle of resilience, restoring inner equilibrium and enabling emotional recovery. This insight is directly applicable to couples undergoing emotional distress, as it illustrates how art can mediate emotional healing even in extreme adversity.

Emerging findings also point to the neuropsychological and social-cognitive mechanisms through which ExAT operates. Engaging in creative tasks stimulates brain regions associated with emotion regulation, empathy, and executive functioning (Feng & Bai, 2025). This neurobiological activation supports sustained improvements in emotional modulation and interpersonal sensitivity. Furthermore, co-creative experiences foster synchrony and shared intentionality, which are core elements of marital bonding (Park & Lee, 2025; Yoon & Kang, 2024). As partners engage in collaborative artistic tasks, such as co-creating a painting or composing a narrative, they develop a deeper appreciation of each other's emotional worlds, which, in turn, enhances emotional stability and relational trust.

Cultural variations in the implementation of art therapy also underscore its global adaptability. In a Philippine-based study, expressive arts interventions were found effective in improving the psychological well-being of abandoned and neglected children through group-based artistic engagement (Martillano, 2025). Similarly, in Korea, therapeutic art sessions with adolescents during the free semester program facilitated emotional expression and social connection (Kim & Eo, 2024). These examples highlight the role of ExAT not only as a therapeutic tool but also as a culturally embedded practice that can be tailored to the relational and emotional needs of specific populations.

From an educational and developmental standpoint, expressive arts therapy is also being integrated into parent-child interventions, early childhood education, and special education environments, particularly for children with cerebral palsy or intellectual disabilities (Ievleva, 2024, 2025). The integration of artistic expression in these contexts has enhanced emotional literacy, improved communication patterns, and fostered more empathic interactions among caregivers and children. These outcomes reinforce the theory that creativity plays a pivotal role in building secure, emotionally intelligent relationships—not only in families but also in marital settings where emotional literacy may be underdeveloped.

Despite its demonstrated benefits, there remains a relative paucity of research specifically examining the application of ExAT in adult couple therapy targeting marital empathy and emotional stability. Most existing research focuses on individual outcomes or child-centered interventions. Yet, the conceptual framework of expressive arts therapy—based on process over product, expression over aesthetics, and integration over isolation—makes it particularly suited for addressing the complexities of adult intimate relationships (Fernando et al., 2025; Park et al., 2023). The present study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by systematically evaluating the effectiveness of an eight-session expressive arts therapy program on improving marital empathy and emotional stability among married individuals in Georgia.

This research is further guided by findings that confirm the transformative potential of expressive arts therapy for populations with complex emotional needs. For example, using wet-on-wet painting methods, one study demonstrated that even nonverbal and abstract art forms can elicit significant changes in mood and communication patterns in emotionally withdrawn children (Yoon & Yu, 2025). Similarly, digital art therapy interventions have shown promise in rehabilitating children with emotional and developmental disorders, suggesting that technology-mediated art experiences may also serve relational goals in adult populations (Liu et al., 2024). As such, the present study integrates both traditional and contemporary art-based approaches to optimize therapeutic impact.

Finally, by applying expressive arts therapy within a controlled experimental framework, this study contributes to the growing body of empirical literature supporting creative, embodied, and relationally grounded interventions for couples.

## Methods and Materials

### Study Design and Participants

This study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design with a pretest–posttest and five-month follow-up structure. Thirty married individuals (15 couples), recruited from community counseling centers and social media platforms in Georgia, were randomly assigned to either an experimental group ( $n = 15$ ) receiving expressive arts therapy or a control group ( $n = 15$ ) receiving no intervention during the study period. Participants were eligible if they were between 25 and 50 years of age, married for at least two years, and had no diagnosis of severe mental illness or ongoing psychotherapy. The intervention consisted of eight weekly sessions of expressive arts therapy for the experimental group, while the control group remained on a waitlist.

## Measures

To assess marital empathy, the Dyadic Empathy Scale developed by Pélouin et al. (2013) was used. This standardized tool is designed to evaluate empathic attitudes and behaviors within romantic relationships. The scale consists of 21 items divided into five subscales: Cognitive Empathy, Affective Empathy, Perspective Taking, Empathic Concern, and Behavioral Expression. Participants respond to items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater levels of dyadic empathy. The scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.85 across subscales) and construct validity in both clinical and non-clinical samples, confirming its appropriateness for research on couple dynamics and marital interventions.

Emotional stability was measured using the Neuroticism subscale of the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), developed by Costa and McCrae (1992). The NEO-FFI is a well-established, psychometrically robust tool that evaluates the Big Five personality traits, with the Neuroticism domain serving as an inverse measure of emotional stability. This subscale includes 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), where lower scores represent higher emotional stability. The NEO-FFI has demonstrated excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha typically above 0.85) and validity across diverse populations, making it a standard choice in psychological research and clinical practice for assessing emotional regulation and stability.

## Intervention

The intervention is based on the principles of Expressive Arts Therapy (ExAT), a multimodal approach that integrates various art forms—such as drawing, movement, music, and writing—to facilitate emotional expression, increase psychological flexibility, and strengthen interpersonal understanding. The eight-session program is structured to provide couples with creative, nonverbal, and reflective ways to communicate, explore shared emotions, and develop empathy. Sessions progress from personal expression to mutual understanding, with each session building on the previous one to enhance emotional awareness, relational attunement, and emotional regulation.

### Session 1: Introduction and Establishing a Creative Space

The first session focuses on building rapport, explaining the goals and structure of Expressive Arts Therapy, and establishing psychological safety. Couples are introduced to the concept of using art for self-expression and interpersonal exploration. A joint activity involves creating a shared “relationship collage” using magazine clippings and colored paper that represents how each partner views the relationship. This activity promotes openness and helps uncover implicit narratives. The session concludes with brief reflections and sharing in a supportive environment.

### Session 2: Exploring Emotional Awareness Through Visual Art

This session emphasizes identifying and expressing emotions visually. Partners are asked to individually create “emotion portraits” that depict how they feel in the relationship using colors, shapes, and textures. These artworks are then shared with each other, followed by guided discussion facilitated by the therapist to promote verbalization of emotional experiences. The session helps increase self-awareness and lays the foundation for recognizing each other's inner worlds.

### Session 3: Movement and Nonverbal Communication

This session introduces body-based expression to increase somatic awareness and attunement. Through guided movement and mirroring exercises, couples explore how physical gestures can communicate feelings and needs. Activities like “mirrored walking” and “emotional gesture exchange” allow participants to experience empathy through embodied practice. The session aims to enhance nonverbal empathy, regulation of emotional intensity, and synchronized communication.

#### Session 4: Music and Emotional Resonance

Music is used to facilitate emotional connection and deepen affective empathy. Couples listen to selected instrumental pieces and identify the emotions they evoke. Then, they co-create a short “relationship soundtrack” using available instruments or sound-making tools. The collaborative process helps partners attune to each other's emotional rhythms and fosters shared emotional resonance. A reflective dialogue follows to discuss what feelings emerged during the musical interaction.

#### Session 5: Storytelling and Shared Meaning

In this session, partners co-construct a narrative titled “Our Journey Together,” using elements from their relationship history, turning points, and emotional highs and lows. The narrative is either written or expressed through symbolic objects. This activity encourages perspective-taking, mutual recognition of struggles and strengths, and meaning-making. The story is shared aloud to promote validation and deepen emotional bonds.

#### Session 6: Addressing Conflict Through Creative Role Reversal

The focus of this session is resolving relational tension through a creative role reversal technique. Couples reenact recent conflicts using puppets or role-play, but each partner assumes the other's role. This helps increase cognitive empathy and highlights unspoken needs and misunderstandings. After the role reversal, the therapist guides a dialogue emphasizing active listening, emotional regulation, and perspective integration.

#### Session 7: Repair and Reconnection Ritual

This session is dedicated to repairing emotional ruptures and reinforcing positive relational behaviors. Couples co-create a symbolic object (such as a “relationship box” or “empathy tree”) that represents shared goals, values, and support. They also write letters of appreciation or forgiveness to one another and read them aloud. These symbolic and verbal acts promote healing, compassion, and emotional stability within the dyad.

#### Session 8: Closure and Future Integration

The final session reviews the emotional and relational growth experienced throughout the program. Couples reflect on their artworks and experiences, revisiting key moments. A timeline art piece (“Then, Now, Next”) is created to represent past growth, current insights, and future relational goals. The session concludes with a discussion on how to apply expressive arts techniques in everyday life for ongoing emotional connection and conflict regulation.

### Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. The effectiveness of the intervention was assessed using repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine within- and between-group differences across three time points: pretest, posttest, and five-month follow-up. Bonferroni post-hoc tests were used to adjust for multiple comparisons and to identify specific time points with significant differences. Significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . All assumptions for repeated measures ANOVA, including sphericity, normality, and homogeneity of variances, were examined and met before conducting the analyses.

### **Findings and Results**

The demographic profile of participants included a diverse range of ages and education levels. In the experimental group, 9 participants (60.0%) were female and 6 (40.0%) were male, while the control group consisted of 10 females (66.7%) and 5 males (33.3%). The mean age in the experimental group was 36.2 years ( $SD = 4.8$ ), and 35.6 years ( $SD = 5.2$ ) in the control group. Regarding education, 7 participants in the experimental group (46.7%) held a bachelor's degree, 5 (33.3%) had a master's degree, and 3 (20.0%) had completed high school. In the control group, 6 participants (40.0%) had a bachelor's degree,

6 (40.0%) held a master's degree, and 3 (20.0%) had a high school diploma. Most participants (73.3%) had been married for more than five years.

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Marital Empathy and Emotional Stability by Group and Time**

| Variable            | Group        | Pretest M (SD) | Posttest M (SD) | 5-Month Follow-Up M (SD) |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Marital Empathy     | Experimental | 68.47 (4.32)   | 78.62 (3.95)    | 77.54 (4.18)             |
|                     | Control      | 67.93 (4.51)   | 68.31 (4.44)    | 67.85 (4.39)             |
| Emotional Stability | Experimental | 61.25 (5.18)   | 71.03 (4.87)    | 70.44 (5.11)             |
|                     | Control      | 60.89 (5.21)   | 61.70 (5.32)    | 61.43 (5.29)             |

As shown in Table 1, the experimental group demonstrated a notable increase in marital empathy from pretest ( $M = 68.47$ ,  $SD = 4.32$ ) to posttest ( $M = 78.62$ ,  $SD = 3.95$ ), with a slight decrease at follow-up ( $M = 77.54$ ,  $SD = 4.18$ ), though still above baseline. The control group remained largely stable across all time points. For emotional stability, the experimental group improved from pretest ( $M = 61.25$ ,  $SD = 5.18$ ) to posttest ( $M = 71.03$ ,  $SD = 4.87$ ) and maintained progress at follow-up ( $M = 70.44$ ,  $SD = 5.11$ ), while the control group showed minimal change.

Before conducting the repeated measures ANOVA, key statistical assumptions were examined. The Shapiro–Wilk test confirmed the normality of residuals for both dependent variables (marital empathy:  $W = 0.974$ ,  $p = 0.594$ ; emotional stability:  $W = 0.961$ ,  $p = 0.428$ ). Mauchly's test of sphericity was not significant for either outcome (marital empathy:  $\chi^2(2) = 1.84$ ,  $p = 0.398$ ; emotional stability:  $\chi^2(2) = 2.09$ ,  $p = 0.351$ ), indicating that the sphericity assumption was met. Levene's test for equality of error variances was also non-significant at all time points (all  $ps > 0.10$ ), confirming homogeneity of variances between groups. These results validated the use of repeated measures ANOVA for the main analysis.

**Table 2. Repeated Measures ANOVA Summary for Marital Empathy and Emotional Stability**

| Source              | SS      | df | MS     | F     | p     | $\eta^2$ |
|---------------------|---------|----|--------|-------|-------|----------|
| Marital Empathy     |         |    |        |       |       |          |
| Time                | 976.34  | 2  | 488.17 | 19.45 | <.001 | .421     |
| Group               | 874.29  | 1  | 874.29 | 27.88 | <.001 | .498     |
| Time $\times$ Group | 1012.76 | 2  | 506.38 | 20.18 | <.001 | .436     |
| Error               | 1448.56 | 54 | 26.83  |       |       |          |
| Emotional Stability |         |    |        |       |       |          |
| Time                | 912.12  | 2  | 456.06 | 17.77 | <.001 | .398     |
| Group               | 823.54  | 1  | 823.54 | 25.21 | <.001 | .483     |
| Time $\times$ Group | 967.41  | 2  | 483.71 | 18.44 | <.001 | .413     |
| Error               | 1383.66 | 54 | 25.62  |       |       |          |

Table 2 presents the repeated measures ANOVA results. For both marital empathy and emotional stability, main effects of time, group, and the time  $\times$  group interaction were statistically significant (all  $p < .001$ ). The large effect sizes ( $\eta^2$  ranging from .398 to .498) indicate that expressive arts therapy had a robust impact on the dependent variables over time and in comparison to the control group.

**Table 3. Bonferroni Post-hoc Comparisons Across Time Points for Experimental Group**

| Variable            | Comparison             | Mean Difference | SE   | p     |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|------|-------|
| Marital Empathy     | Pretest vs. Posttest   | -10.15          | 1.52 | <.001 |
|                     | Pretest vs. Follow-Up  | -9.07           | 1.57 | <.001 |
|                     | Posttest vs. Follow-Up | 1.08            | 1.33 | .410  |
| Emotional Stability | Pretest vs. Posttest   | -9.78           | 1.61 | <.001 |
|                     | Pretest vs. Follow-Up  | -9.19           | 1.65 | <.001 |
|                     | Posttest vs. Follow-Up | 0.59            | 1.42 | .676  |

The Bonferroni-adjusted post-hoc tests in Table 3 confirm that the experimental group showed significant increases in marital empathy and emotional stability from pretest to posttest ( $p < .001$ ) and from pretest to follow-up ( $p < .001$ ). However,

the differences between posttest and follow-up were not significant for either variable, indicating that the improvements were maintained over time.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the effectiveness of an eight-session expressive arts therapy (ExAT) program on enhancing marital empathy and emotional stability among married individuals. The results revealed that participants in the experimental group experienced a statistically significant increase in marital empathy and a corresponding improvement in emotional stability compared to the control group. Furthermore, these gains were sustained at a five-month follow-up, suggesting the enduring impact of the intervention. The use of repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc analysis confirmed that the observed improvements were not only immediate but also long-lasting.

One of the most salient findings was the significant increase in marital empathy in the experimental group. This aligns with prior research that highlights the capacity of expressive arts therapy to foster empathic communication and emotional attunement between individuals (Kim & Kim, 2024; Law et al., 2023). Through joint artistic creation, metaphorical storytelling, and nonverbal exchange, couples were able to access deeper layers of emotional resonance and shared meaning. The multimodal structure of the intervention allowed participants to express feelings symbolically, bypassing verbal defenses and enabling authentic emotional presence. These findings are in line with the works of (Kashaka, 2025b) and (Pitaloka & Muhid, 2025), who emphasized the relational healing power of artistic expression in emotionally strained contexts.

Furthermore, the improvement in emotional stability among participants reflects the therapeutic mechanisms of regulation and integration embedded within expressive arts practices. As individuals engaged in sensory, movement-based, and visual modalities, they reported increased emotional clarity, reduced reactivity, and a greater capacity for emotional containment. Similar outcomes were observed in the study by (Lee, 2025), where patients with schizophrenia showed reduced alexithymia and depression following art-based emotion management training. Likewise, (Fernando et al., 2025) demonstrated that emotional well-being in children significantly improved when creative exploration was incorporated into their developmental environment. These parallels underscore the cross-populational effectiveness of ExAT in regulating affective responses and fostering psychological resilience.

The sustained results at the five-month follow-up also provide compelling evidence for the long-term impact of the intervention. This durability may be attributed to the internalization of expressive strategies, co-creative bonding, and the development of alternative communication frameworks. Participants often continued using drawing, music, or writing to express complex emotions or resolve conflicts after the formal intervention ended. Such findings are echoed in the literature by (Yoon & Yu, 2025) and (J, 2024), who observed that participants internalize metaphorical and symbolic language through art-making, thereby gaining tools for ongoing self-regulation and relational adjustment.

Another possible explanation for the improvements observed is the non-threatening and play-based nature of expressive arts therapy, which can circumvent typical defensive mechanisms. Rather than confronting emotions directly, couples engaged with their feelings through symbols, colors, textures, and forms. This approach facilitates emotional processing at a subconscious and bodily level (M, 2024; Wenxiao, 2024). For example, in the sessions involving movement and mirroring, couples learned to identify the emotional subtext of body language, which helped reduce misunderstandings and foster empathy without verbal confrontation. This resonates with (Shamy, 2023), who emphasized the somatic and embodied dimensions of ExAT as central to its therapeutic efficacy.

The narrative and metaphorical components of the intervention also appeared to have a powerful effect on relationship dynamics. Co-constructing the “Our Journey Together” story allowed partners to reframe past difficulties and appreciate each

other's perspectives. According to (Park & Lee, 2025) and (Álvarez et al., 2025), shared storytelling in art therapy can validate emotional pain while simultaneously offering new relational meanings. This narrative re-authoring seems to be particularly effective in improving marital empathy, as it reinforces both cognitive perspective-taking and emotional understanding.

The findings also support the neurocognitive hypothesis that engaging in expressive arts stimulates brain regions associated with social cognition, empathy, and emotion regulation (Feng & Bai, 2025). During the art sessions, participants engaged not only in external creative actions but also in internal reappraisals of emotional and relational schemas. These cognitive-affective changes likely contributed to their improved emotional stability, as well as their ability to understand and respond to their partner's emotions more effectively. This interpretation aligns with (Baek et al., 2024), who demonstrated neuropsychological changes in children undergoing cognitive-behavioral art therapy.

The cultural context of the participants (Georgia) is also relevant in interpreting the results. In collectivist cultures or those with traditional family structures, emotional expression—especially for men—is often limited due to social norms. The non-verbal, symbolic, and abstract dimensions of art therapy may provide a culturally sensitive platform for safe emotional disclosure. (Ievleva, 2025) noted that art therapy offers unique communicative channels in settings where direct emotional dialogue may be constrained by cultural expectations. In the present study, several male participants reported that painting and music allowed them to express feelings they had never before articulated to their partners.

Importantly, this study adds to the growing literature emphasizing the versatility of expressive arts therapy across contexts and populations. From grieving youth (Law et al., 2023) to individuals with intellectual disabilities (Ievleva, 2024), ExAT has demonstrated consistent therapeutic value. The current findings validate its extension to marital therapy, an area where emotionally corrective experiences are essential for long-term relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution. By engaging both partners in co-creative acts, expressive arts therapy moves beyond the individual to the relational, promoting a joint therapeutic process rooted in shared emotional labor.

Moreover, these findings echo outcomes from studies conducted in trauma and adversity contexts. (Візнюк et al., 2025) found that art therapy was an effective restorative tool during war-related stress, enhancing resilience and cohesion in family units.

While the present study did not incorporate a digital art therapy component, findings from recent research such as (Liu et al., 2024) suggest that virtual platforms and digital media can also support emotional expression and therapeutic outcomes, especially in remote or restricted environments. This raises the possibility of hybrid interventions combining traditional art forms with digital tools to enhance accessibility and engagement.

Despite the promising results, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small (30 participants), limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. The study also focused exclusively on married individuals in Georgia, which may introduce cultural or demographic biases not applicable to more diverse or global contexts. Second, the absence of active control (e.g., another therapeutic intervention) limits our ability to attribute changes solely to the expressive arts component, as placebo or attention effects may have influenced outcomes. Third, the intervention was relatively brief (eight sessions), and while follow-up data showed lasting effects, longer-term assessments (e.g., one year) were not conducted. Finally, self-report measures were used to assess the outcomes, which may be subject to social desirability bias or subjective interpretation.

Future studies should consider expanding the sample size and incorporating more diverse demographic and cultural backgrounds to improve external validity. Including a more varied age range, relationship status (e.g., cohabiting, separated), or LGBTQ+ couples could offer broader insights. Longitudinal designs extending beyond five months would help determine the lasting effects and sustainability of expressive arts therapy. Additionally, comparative studies involving other modalities—

such as cognitive-behavioral couple therapy or mindfulness-based couple interventions—could clarify the specific mechanisms of ExAT. Qualitative components, including in-depth interviews and artwork analysis, could also enrich understanding of the emotional and symbolic processes underpinning the observed changes.

Therapists working with couples should consider integrating expressive arts techniques into their practice, especially when dealing with emotionally disconnected or conflict-prone relationships. Training in ExAT can offer clinicians additional tools for facilitating empathy, emotional awareness, and relational healing. Sessions can begin with individual creative exercises and gradually move toward collaborative art-making to promote mutual understanding. Practitioners are encouraged to create flexible, client-centered programs that adapt to each couple's emotional and cultural context. Furthermore, settings such as marital counseling centers, community mental health clinics, and faith-based organizations may benefit from incorporating ExAT-based workshops or retreats aimed at enhancing emotional intimacy and resilience in couples.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

### Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

### Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

### References

- Álvarez, M. G., Clemente, W., Rillo, R. J. A., & Narvaez, R. A. (2025). Creative Pathways to Comfort: The Transformative Role of Art Therapy in Palliative and Hospice Care. *International Journal of Palliative Nursing*, 31(1), 18-28. <https://doi.org/10.12968/ijpn.2025.31.1.18>
- Aydn, H. (2024). Influence of Art Therapy on Emotional Expression in Trauma Survivors in Turkey. *International journal of psychology*, 9(4), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ijp.2870>
- Baek, J. E., Kim, C., & Ji, S.-H. (2024). A Case Study on Art Therapy Based on Cognitive Behavioral Approach for a Child With PTSD From the Fall Accident. *Kor Soc Educ Pract Early Child Edu*, 2(1), 5-27. <https://doi.org/10.62423/jepece.2024.2.1.5>

- Feng, M., & Bai, Y. (2025). 105 the Effect of Ink Painting Art Therapy on Emotional and Social Cognition Intervention in Patients With Schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 51(Supplement\_1), S57-S57. <https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbaf007.105>
- Fernando, F., Trimulat, & Safitri, I. P. (2025). ART THERAPY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (Enhancing Emotional Well-Being Through Creativity). *Proc. AL GHAZALI International Conference*, 2, 31-46. <https://doi.org/10.52802/aicp.v1i1.1220>
- Ievleva, O. (2024). The Role of Art Therapeutic Practices in the Pedagogical Interaction of the Teacher and Parents Educing Children With ICP. *Studia Universitatis Moldaviae Seria Științe Ale Educației*(9(169)), 342-347. [https://doi.org/10.59295/sum9\(169\)2024\\_49](https://doi.org/10.59295/sum9(169)2024_49)
- Ievleva, O. (2025). The Role of Art Therapy Practices in the Teachers' Work With Parents of Children With Cerebral Palsy. *Studia Universitatis Moldaviae Seria Științe Ale Educației*(9(179)), 313-316. [https://doi.org/10.59295/sum9\(176\)2024\\_46](https://doi.org/10.59295/sum9(176)2024_46)
- J, K. S. (2024). Art as a Form of Communication for Trauma Survivors. *Rijre*, 4(2), 6-11. <https://doi.org/10.59298/rijre/2024/42611>
- Kashaka, N. D. (2025a). Exploring the Healing Power of Art Therapy. (*Roje*, 5(2), 16-19. <https://doi.org/10.59298/roje/2025/521619>
- Kashaka, N. D. (2025b). Exploring the Intersection of Art and Mental Health. *Nijciam*, 6(1), 73-80. <https://doi.org/10.59298/nijciam/2025/6.1.7380>
- Kim, H.-H., & Kim, G.-S. (2024). A Qualitative Case Study on the Experience of Participating in Free Semester Art Education of Junior High School: The Convergence of Formative Art and Art Therapy. *Korean Association for Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction*, 24(23), 940-959. <https://doi.org/10.22251/jlcci.2024.24.23.940>
- Kim, Y.-a., & Eo, E. K. (2024). The Effect of Emotional Coaching Group Art Therapy on Children's Self-Expression. *Korean Soc Cult Converg*, 46(1), 1329-1340. <https://doi.org/10.33645/cnc.2024.01.46.01.1329>
- Law, M. A., Pastirik, P., & Shamputa, I. C. (2023). Expressive Arts for Grieving Youth: A Pilot Project. *Obm Integrative and Complementary Medicine*, 08(01), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.21926/obm.icm.2301009>
- Lee, S.-Y. (2025). The Effects of Group Arts Therapy Based on Emotion Management Training on the Emotional Expression, Alexithymia, Depression and Quality of Life in Patients With Schizophrenia. *BJPsych Open*, 11(S1), S55-S55. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2025.10172>
- Liu, Z., Yao, C., & Ying, F. (2024). Effects of Digital Art Emotional Expression Therapy on the Rehabilitation of Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder. <https://doi.org/10.54941/ahfe1004556>
- M, N. A. (2024). The Impact of Arts on Mental Health and Well-Being. *Rojphm*, 4(1), 72-75. <https://doi.org/10.59298/rojphm/2024/417275>
- Martillano, F. (2025). "Gurit Nin Paglaom:" Houseparents' Evaluation on the Effectiveness of Expressive Arts Therapy for the Abandoned and Neglected Children. *Jip*, 3(6). <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.201>
- Park, J., & Lee, A. Y. (2025). A Qualitative Study on Art Therapists' Experiences of Art Therapy for Individuals With Borderline Intellectual Functioning. *Soc Art Educ Korea*, 93, 121-146. <https://doi.org/10.25297/aer.2025.93.121>
- Park, N. H., Na, I. I., & Kwon, S. (2023). Art Therapy in Patients With Terminal Cancer and Their Families: A Multiple Case Study. *Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care*, 26(4), 171-184. <https://doi.org/10.14475/jhpc.2023.26.4.171>
- Pitaloka, D., & Muhid, A. (2025). Exploration of Expression Using Mixed Media as a Medium for Emotional Therapy: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Techno*, 844-853. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25apr508>
- Shamy, A. K. b. (2023). The Role of Art Therapy in Treating Different Age Groups. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Art and Technology*, 6(2), 96-120. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ijmsat.2024.274915.1024>
- Vyshnyk, O. (2025). Formation of National-Linguistic Personality of Primary Education Learners Through Art-Therapy in the Context of Distance Learning. *Problems of Education*(1(102)), 113-127. <https://doi.org/10.52256/2710-3986.1-102.2025.08>
- Wenxiao, W. (2024). Art Therapy in Visual Communication. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 39(1), 42-48. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/39/20240626>
- Yoon, H. K., & Kang, A. (2024). An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry of Emotional Communication Experiences Through Metaphorical Landscape as an Expression of Inner Imagery. *Society for Art Education of Korea*, 92, 281-302. <https://doi.org/10.25297/aer.2024.92.281>
- Yoon, S., & Yu, M. C. (2025). A Case Study on Color Experience Art Therapy Using Wet on Wet Painting for Children at a Local Children's Center : Focusing on Depression and Happiness. *Soc Art Educ Korea*, 94, 263-291. <https://doi.org/10.25297/aer.2025.94.263>

- Візнюк, І., Dolynnyi, S., Полищук, А. В., & Волохата, К. (2025). Творчість Як Шлях До Відновлення: Арт-Терапія Під Час Війни. *Eduarts*, 1(5), 115-122. [https://doi.org/10.31652/3041-1017-2025\(5-1\)-14](https://doi.org/10.31652/3041-1017-2025(5-1)-14)
- Найчук, В., Майданюк, І., Денисенко, А., & Полілуєва, І. (2024). Розвиток Особистості Методом Арт-Терапії. *Перспективи Та Інновації Науки*(11(45)). [https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-4952-2024-11\(45\)-1472-1480](https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-4952-2024-11(45)-1472-1480)