

Creative Therapies for War-Traumatized Children: 1991-95 Croatian Experience

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Aim. Presentation of the rationale, design, methods, specific goals, and major empirical findings of a series of art therapy programs aimed at helping war-traumatized children from Croatia and other parts of ex-Yugoslavia. The programs, conducted from 1991 to 1995, covered a large number of children and their natural helpers within community, both during and after intensive warfare.

Methods. The programs provided help for over 100,000 children in Croatia, as well as for many refugees living abroad. They included a wide range of creative workshops which enabled the children and their helpers (teachers and librarians) to express themselves, share their experiences, and help each other recover from the traumatic experience. An extensive evaluation study was made of the expected impact of these programs on the children's well-being, particularly on the changes in a number of specific mental health measures for treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other types of disorder.

Results. In general, the children benefitted from these recovery programs at the rates of 75-100%, regardless of their age, gender, or residential status.

Conclusion. More in-depth research is necessary for a better understanding of the use of art therapy approach in preserving children's well-being and the growth of their creative powers during and after mass disasters such as war.

Key words: art therapy; child; Croatia; war