

Healing through E`xpression: How the Arts Transform the Experience of Syrian Refugees in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the perspectives of Syrian refugee youth in Jordan who are involved in the arts, including visual artists, musicians, and actors, through semi-structured interviews. The participants shared their thoughts, opinions, and stories in this process. This study used existential phenomenological qualitative research methods. Results: The results of this study strongly indicate that the arts positively impact refugees' wellbeing in terms of connection to their culture and their mentality in Jordan, and to their empowerment by giving an added sense of purpose to their experience in Jordan. The evidence shows that the arts contribute significant psychosocial benefits, such as happiness, confidence, self-worth, and mental health. Research further suggests that there exists a significant stigma attached to the arts that often hinders Syrian refugees' ability to be involved in the arts.

Keywords: Refugee, Social Work, Fine Arts, Folklore, Mental Health.

Introduction and Statement of the problem

Humans have always told, and in turn been moved by, stories. From the time early humans painted vivid scenes on cave walls to the plethora of art mediums that exist today, this emphasis has always existed. The arts, whether they are in the form of drawing, sculpture theatre, dance, music, film, and other forms of expression, have long served as platforms for storytelling and human expression. What makes the arts unique is that they exist in most every culture, and they tend to connect to something inherent within humanity. This connection can often lead to transformation in thought, attitudes, and wellbeing. This could be in the form of the production of a film highlighting the plight of Syrians integrating into Jordan, musicians being given the instruments, training, and resources to perform, or participatory theatre where both the audience and performers work together to brainstorm solutions to a certain plight. These forms of expression are implemented for refugee communities and are often organized by refugees themselves, and their impact could potentially be of great significance.

Too often analysts focus on the number of refugees and less on the individual wellbeing and dignity of refugees. This is certainly so regarding Syrian refugees in Jordan. Activities involving the arts can reach refugees that both observe and participate in these artistic media in a unique manner, mainly because they have the potential to empower refugees within the situations they face and in turn to improve their wellbeing. A thorough analysis of perceptions regarding how these platforms affect the state of refugees could help expose an important intervention method to empower and improve the livelihood of displaced peoples. Such an analysis could also help to overcome the social stigma common in the region towards participation in the arts by showing their potential impact. Evidence of how the arts empower and improve wellbeing could remove misconceptions refugees themselves might have about participating in these activities, ultimately to their benefit, as well as increase support for artistic interventions from individuals and groups across the world.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to answer a basic question: do refugees in Jordan perceive that the arts affect their wellbeing and empowerment? To answer this, interviews were used to focus on the opinions of Syrian youth refugees

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who are artists and performers, aged between 17 and 27. The study aims to bring out the stories of these young artists to see how their experiences in the arts have impacted them, integrating existing research regarding this topic. The study aims are to highlight what facilitating organizations are doing to provide refugees access to the arts, and what their opinions are regarding the impact of the arts on refugees. The hypothesis of this study is that Syrian refugee youth artists in Jordan do feel that the arts positively affect their wellbeing and empowerment.

For the sake of this study, wellbeing is defined by psychosocial indicators including happiness, self-worth, confidence, self-awareness, and other factors of mental health. Empowerment is defined by engagement, a feeling of control over one's situation, and an added sense of purpose or direction in life. (Andemicael, 2011). For the original research conducted, references to refugees refer to Syrian youths in Jordan.

Literature Review

The concept of the arts as being an effective means to improve lives, to help give voices to those lacking a platform to communicate, and to provide a way to connect with one's past or culture, especially for refugees, is well documented in sources within numerous fields. Whether it is for therapy treatments, humanitarian action, human rights law, people and groups from a wide spectrum of backgrounds have listed the arts as a useful tool in health and humanitarian contexts.

Alqudah (2016) recommends developing training for social workers who work directly with refugees that aligns with international standards and best practice methods. It also suggests emphasizing the role of social workers in within all sectors that work with refugees including governmental organizations and NGOs. the integration of social workers, refugees and host communities in the planning, designing and execution of policies and programs involving the integration of refugees. Such a move will ensure programs and policies are aligned with the real needs of all three actors and increase the level of trust and success of similar policies and programs.

Support for the arts is well known, protected, and even encouraged by international law. The United Nations 1948 Declaration of Human Rights states, "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."(Universal, Article 27.1, 1948). Additionally, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) states in its Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights that refugees have the right to "take part in cultural life" (International Covenant, Article 15.1, 1966). It further articulates the need for states to take steps to seek the "conversation, development, and diffusion of science and culture", as well as to hold responsibility "to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity". (International Covenant, Article 15.1-3, 1966) The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child elaborates this point in reference to youth, asserting the right "to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" and "to respect and promote full participation in cultural and artistic life and to encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activity". (Convention, Article 31.2, 1989) There is little question that UN bodies hold involvement in the arts for all people as an essential human right.

In 2011, a thorough report was written for the UNHCR covering artistic activities that take place in refugee camps. Citing examples from across the world, including Jordan, the report highlights how artistic activities, both formal and informal, take place in a variety of ways. This included organized music rehearsals, street theater used as protests, drawing and other forms of art as educational tools. The report also notes important psychosocial benefits of the arts for refugees, including the ability to express oneself despite displacement, to find a purpose in their new countries after their lives have been significantly altered, and connection to culture, among others. It also discusses important individuals and the roles of organizations in Jordan that support the arts such as the Danish Centre for Culture and Development which has aided refugees particularly through music involvement. (Andemicael, 2011)

Extensive research exists regarding the link between the arts and people's wellbeing in general, but this link is particularly significant regarding refugees because of the arts' intrinsic connection to culture. There exists extensive commentary about the link between the arts and culture, especially memory of culture. One theater practitioner, Marvin Carlson, emphasized this point by saying, "Drama... seems to be associated in all cultures with the retelling again and

again of stories that bear a religious, social, or political significance for their public.” (Carlson 8, 2003) This “retelling” in theater provides those who are estranged from their culture with an important link. To further iterate his point, Carlson mentions, “the retelling of stories already told, the reenactment of events already enacted, the re-experience of emotions already experienced, these are and have always been central concerns of the theatre in all times and places.” (Carlson 3, 2008) This idea is not confined to Western theatre, and it extends to Arab culture as well, especially for Syrians. Discussing the role of the Hakawati, storytellers of Syria, one author noted, “Storytelling in Syria is more than a form of a popular art, it is a continued living tradition that is integrated in family gatherings and social gatherings.” (Sheiker 1, 2016) Regarding Arab and Syrian history, it is no wonder that storytelling and theatre connect Syrians to their home culture, and this idea of cultural connection is not just limited to these arts. Visual artists find their craft is a valuable way to connect to their home culture as well. One report titled “Immigrant Arab Artists: Themes of Alienation” noted, “Connecting visually and intellectually with the homeland is most essential for the morale of an artist.” (Khoury, 1989) The research in the following section provides examples of artwork that demonstrates this point. Drawing based on memories contributes enormously to refugees’ sense of wellbeing and an anchoring to the life they once had.

In addition to this cultural connection, the arts have been shown to impact mental health of refugees in positive ways. The Interagency Standing Committee recognized the wide-ranging effects the arts can have on refugees when it stated the group “endorses the use of artistic activity as an aid to wellness, as a part of a minimum response to emergency situations. The use of songs, dances, drama, drawing, and other artistic means is recommended under three of the four of the committee’s core mental health and psychosocial support domains: community mobilization and support, education, and dissemination of information.” (Inter-agency, 2007) In addition, arts are well known to be of benefit to individuals from a psychosocial perspective. Art therapy is used across the world, including the Middle East, as a way to translate thoughts and feelings in a direct and healing manner. (What, 2013) There is a similar connection between dance and therapy as a form of healing expression, which has been utilized successfully for refugee populations settled throughout Arizona in the United States. (Vissicaro et. All, 2004) The UNHCR report on the arts also mentions the essentiality of the arts as a psychosocial tool to give refugees in camps a purpose in a space where they often lack productive ways to occupy themselves for large amount of times. The boredom or lack of direction can lead to serious mental health issues. The report notes that the arts have the strong potential to provide meaningful ways for refugees to be engaged and to break from the monotonous rhythm of everyday camp life, as well as to exercise a unique form of expression through the arts. (Andemicael, 2011)

Moreover, research shows that unlike other psychosocial tools, refugees’ involvement in the arts can lead not only to healing, but to empowerment as well. The arts can give refugees, and humanity for that matter, a way to voice one’s thoughts, emotions, and stories that is difficult to express in other ways. The arts contribute to their dignity and sense of humanity that other ways not always can and contributes a sense of agency that can inspire aspiration and a purpose over and despite hardship. Famed theater practitioner Augusto Boal once wrote, “As we know, to speak is to take power: whenever we become the speaker we are empowered.” (Boal xx, 1985) The power of the arts to inspire others to know that they indeed have a voice is a remarkable trait of the arts, and one that has been proven time and again. In a South African school attended by many refugees, the school’s principle commented about music, “...what we realized is that when [the children] beat upon a makeshift instrument or create a lyric or two, their outlook on life changes. It is like music is the key to opening up and releasing the burdens their young hearts hold, so this is important to me.” (Rulashe et. all, 2004) This phenomenon is not limited to South Africa: music as a tool for empowerment is essential for youth and all people, especially in the cultural and linguistic context of the Middle East. Samer Zaki Shafqa, a rising Amman-based artist, came to Lebanon to help the Danish Centre for Culture and Development run a program training refugees in hip hop. He noted,

"Like most of those people, I first heard hip-hop on the TV and the radio as a kid. Very early on I remember thinking, 'I want to do that.' The problem was that what I saw and heard was not about me. I am not American. My family is from Gaza. We live in Jordan, but in many ways, we are still on the outside here. Life can be hard, and I wanted to talk about

that, to tell my stories in my own language. Making music has given me a voice." (Stelfox, 2010)

Despite hip-hop originating in the West, artists like Shafqa note that the rhythmic nature of Arabic fits well with the style of hip-hop. Arabic possesses a rich heritage of storytelling, and hip-hop is often considered a modern twist on this tradition and in recent years, hip-hop has come to occupy an important place in Middle Eastern youth culture. The workshop he helped give in Lebanon led to a performance a short time afterwards Shafqa noted the sense of accomplishment refugees experienced because of how hip hop helped these individuals express themselves in a way that words alone perhaps could not have. (Stelfox, 2010) In addition to music, there are many examples of theatre being used as a tool for empowerment in the Middle East. Whether the shows incorporate the stories of Syrian women in Lebanon, or stories of life in a Palestinian refugee camp, the platform of theater offers an invaluable way to connect with the rich Arab tradition of storytelling. One performer involved in a theatre workshop in Beqaa Refugee Camp in Jordan noted, "The workshop taught me to be confident and be daring. I learned how to think on my feet; in addition, the workshop makes me aware that I am part of a group and I can lean on my friends in times of stress." (Skeiker, 2016) The added confidence, the sense of dignity, and the platform to express one's own stories, are just some of the ways theater and other creative forms of expression can and have empowered refugees.

The arts as an avenue for social change, wellbeing, and empowerment is very well documented in many areas, but it is not enough. Very little of the available research focuses on the performing arts in areas outside of refugee camps: those in host communities. This is a glaring gap in the documentation of refugees' involvement in the performing arts, especially in countries like Jordan, where 80% of Syrian refugees live outside of refugee camps. (Al Emam, 2015) There is also a lack of research concerning informal expressions of the art in local communities. What is particularly significant is that there is a serious lack of focus on the encouragement of refugees to be a part of the arts outside of these formal settings. In contrast to schools in the United States and elsewhere in the developed world, inclusion of the arts in the curriculum in schools often does not exist in less well-funded schools which many refugees attend. This is an issue that is only starting to be addressed by outside funders for groups such as Iraqi refugees in Amman, Jordan. (Seeley 1, 2010) This lack of support for the arts in places outside of refugee camps and the lack of research regarding the arts outside of refugee camps can result in a lack of encouragement for refugees to be involved in the arts. This cuts them off from a valuable tool that can lead refugee youth to be connected to their home culture, help their mental wellbeing, and give them a valuable sense of voice or purpose in their new environment. This lack of knowledge is a serious shortcoming of the research, in addition to the existing little relevant material culture regarding the analysis of the performing arts specifically for Syrian refugee youth in the context of Jordan.

Methodology

This study used existential phenomenological qualitative research methods. The purpose of this approach is to uncover and descriptively express individuals' experiences. Using this approach, the goal of the researcher is to gain an understanding of the phenomena being studied to achieve a deeper comprehension of the lived experience of an individual or group of individuals (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008). Data for this study consisted of the transcripts made from the audio-recorded interviews that were held with 13 participants.

Selection of Participants

Recruitment and interviewing were conducted by the researchers and Inclusionary criteria included being: 1) Syrian male or female, 2) age 17-27 years old, and 4) having refugee status in Jordan. The researchers approached the youth from university students who are in the north of Jordan. All subsequent participants were recruited via the snowball method, starting with initial participants making referrals to others, and so on. A description of the study in Arabic was given to potential participants, which explicitly stated the purpose of the study. Interview times were arranged at the participant's convenience in a private setting, such as their home or the researcher's private office., though occasionally interviews were made in more public settings such as a restaurant). A maximum of 30 to 45 minutes was scheduled for

each interview.

Data Collection

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the Informed

Consent document, which was in Arabic. The participant was then given the opportunity to ask questions. The researcher also notified the participants that pseudonyms would be used and that identifying information, such as references to specific individuals, would be removed. When each participant's concerns and questions had been addressed, they were asked to sign the Informed Consent document. The researcher then began the interview following a semi-structured interview guideline with questions concerning these issues:

- 1) What do artistic activities look like for refugees?
- 2) How and in what ways do refugees feel empowered or benefited by their experiences in the arts? If they do not feel empowered or benefited, why?
- 3) How are international and nongovernmental agencies facilitating the performing arts in refugee camps and host communities? Are they effective?

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed in Arabic and then translated partially by the researchers. An inductive method was used to allow codes and themes to arise from the data itself. Each researcher read the data multiple times over time to become familiar with and immersed in the content, and then individually coded the data to identify content relevant to the questions posed. The coded data was then reviewed to identify themes representative of the shared meanings expressed by the participants. This independent review of the data was conducted to enhance the reliability of the findings (Riessman, 2002). Two of the researchers then separately re-reviewed and collated data pertinent to each identified theme. Two of the team members were involved in the final selection of direct quotes from the transcripts to exemplify participants' narratives. These quotes were chosen for their ability to represent the experiences, thoughts, and depth of emotion expressed.

Results

The data collected showed a vast array of intriguing, valuable information regarding the impact of the arts on refugees' empowerment and wellbeing. The aspect that is most pertinent to the findings was that in all sources, whether from interviews, or the material culture, most respondents answered overwhelmingly of the positive impact of the arts, no matter if they were an artist, a dancer, a photographer, a musician, a filmmaker, or an actor. In all, the bulk of the data collected was the 13 interviews completed mostly in Arabic with Syrian refugees' artists involved both in formal and informal settings, whether in organized groups or completely self-funded. The primary question going into this research was, do in fact refugees perceive the arts as being beneficial for refugees' wellbeing and empowerment? The answer was overwhelmingly clear: it does.

Interviews (refugee participants)

The interviews with the thirteen refugee youth participants aged between seventeen and twenty-seven contributed the bulk of the qualitative data collected in this study. From a wide range of disciplines, these artists and performers told their own personal stories, each from their own perspectives regarding displacement. Each of them spoke of the benefits their involvement in the arts had given them. Each of them was given questions specifically relating the arts to their displacements, and each participant spoke of how the arts have affected his or her transition to Jordan, most of the time for better, and rarely in a negative way as well. Some were more neutral on how the arts impacted them while others were much more positive, but the impact of the arts in some way was clear in the participants' narratives. This paper will discuss the three themes most broadly addressed the interviews in conjunction with wellbeing and empowerment. These categories can be narrowed down to three main effects that the arts have had on the refugee artists' lives: cultural connectivity, mental wellbeing, and an increased sense of purpose.

Cultural Connectivity

Nine of the thirteen refugee interviewees mentioned how important the arts were for cultural connectivity, defined

by the feeling of connection with one's home culture. One of these individuals is Maj, a Syrian actor and filmmaker from Damascus. An accomplished artist, he has written for television shows in Jordan and has acted in performances across Jordan, including before the Jordanian Ministry of Culture. Maj arrived from Syria suffering greatly, having experienced the horrors of war and then losing his father to lung cancer shortly after arrival. But his love of Sufi dancing, whose involvement with started in Syria, Maj explained, was what made the difference for him. Sufi dancing is a traditional form of dance out of the Sufi tradition of Islam, combining physical movement, mysticism, and spirituality into a beautiful form of dance. Maj explained the effect dancing had on him regarding his displacement by saying, "When I was forced to leave Syria, I lost my family, my friends, my loved ones, my dear ones... the only thing that I brought... when I left Syria was the Sufi dancing. So, when I came here... I feel that [dancing] and my friends are the only things that make me feel like I'm still home." This connection to the traditions of home, evoked by performing in this artform, created a significant impact on Maj's experience after moving to Jordan.

Maj was not the only one to feel the effects involving the link between culture and the arts. Mohammad explained himself as an eighteen-year old musician. He became interested in playing music in Syria for Mawlid al Nabi, the celebration for the Prophet Mohammad's birthday, and he is involved in singing and playing music for traditional Syrian weddings in Jordan. He also learned how to play an instrument called the Tableh, a type of drum that is forbidden by many Syrians, including his father. Yet Mohammed nonetheless continues playing in bands. He mentioned that one day, his band was asked to play songs in an airport for a Syrian woman passing through. Mohammad explained the reaction of those who stopped to listen to their band play Syrian music, "It was very appreciated that we held on to these traditions and that we performed them in front of everyone." Those even in Jordan felt this appreciation for traditional Syrian music.

This reminder of the Syrian homeland, even to a slight extent, was mentioned as being essential by another eighteen-year-old refugee, this one an artist. This refugee, who for the purposes of anonymity will be called K, is a student and an artist. K was asked questions about his involvement in the arts, but his responses were different from all the others. His body language and manner suggested discomfort or lack of confidence, and his story confirmed this anxiety. From the age of four, K had a love for drawing. He loved and still loves drawing, and he revealed beautiful examples of his sketch work. But as time went on, he mentioned that he received little support from his parents, who instead urged him to pick a more "practical" career rather than pursuing his dream of becoming an art teacher. He had tried to submit his artwork to various competitions and centers, which he said never gave him responses. His displacement strengthened the criticism from his family, but his love of art remains. Despite his manner, he explained that whenever he draws something beautiful, such as buildings in Syria, he feels like he is "living at that time and dealing with people that live there". He sees that beauty with his own eyes when he draws. He mentioned, "it makes me feel like I am living there... not only connecting with words", but that he is in fact "living everything" that he draws. Even a glance at his sketchbook depicting clear images from his upbringing in Syria shows the importance this connection to Syria has to him. The connection artwork can maintain to one's home culture is not unique to K. A Syrian artist and art teacher mentioned to me that in his experience children often draw "specific places or symbols... food, a market" so they can keep those memories from Syria in mind. It is undoubtedly evident that the arts in many forms can leave Syrians a sense of belonging to Syrian culture, even if physically they are not there.

Nidal is Syrian young man (26) years old who left school while he was in Syria and became a tailor, he work with permit in Jordan since 2016 and he expressed that being away from home is something can't be healed but at least making yourself busy is the only way to go on in life, he try to attend the weddings for his friends including both Syrian and Jordanian and he enjoys being part of a "Dabka"team, he said, "While I do Dabka I feel like home, I recall all memories, feel so connected to my home country while the Syrian songs been running at the wedding. The wedding party is more beautiful back home because we have at least three nights of celebrations before the wedding not like here only one day before the wedding party and sometimes only the wedding takes two or three hours at a hall and that it. When he was asked how he feels while he practices " Dabka" he answered I feel like I am home! I feel disconnected from all negative emotions and just happiness and nothing else enjoy it also because its group performance, when my

friends and I hold each other hands I feel this sense of community and strength, "Dabka" is my favorite art and I enjoy it a lot. It makes me feel like being at home.

Mental Health/Wellbeing

In other ways apart from cultural connectivity, all the refugee interviewees commented that their involvement in the arts affected their mental health and wellbeing in general. Whether it affected their happiness, especially in relation to displacement, or from specific psychosocial benefits brought by the arts, or an increased sense of confidence, all the participants recognized the personal benefits that their involvement arts had brought them. Although there are other existent and effective forms of psychosocial counseling and help, these surveys revealed that the arts have a unique ability to address issues that medicine or words might not always be able to reach, impacting them in ways that address both their wellbeing and empowerment. Included are examples of refugees' stories regarding this unique impact of the arts.

Sami is an eighteen-year-old and a comedian hailing from Damascus. Sami, unlike the individuals in the previous section, became involved with comedy only after he had migrated to Jordan. But very quickly, Sami found the stage to be a way to increase his mental wellbeing in the context of being a refugee. He mentioned that whenever he performs comedy "I feel that I am proud of myself because it is something I love, and I make people happy because of something that I am capable of doing." He is not alone in feeling this way. Returning to Sami, however, he mentioned that becoming a comedian affected his view of himself and forced him to look introspectively to improve his performance. This lesson known well in visual and performing artists in the world, yet this ability to look inside be self-aware, and have the ability to rise above that difficulty is a skill that is of immense difficulty to anybody facing hardship, notably refugees. In agreement with Sami, one musician interviewed started playing the Tableh during protests against Bashar al-Assad's regime, but in continuing it in Jordan, he has found the playing the Tableh (Drum) gives him a source of improved self-confidence.

K, the talented Syrian artist, mentioned another essential psychosocial benefit of the arts: positive effects on mood. During the interview, K communicated his feeling of lack of direction, a loss of his dream due to pressure from his family and others, and a general sense of misery. So, it was quite notable that in answering a question on how his involvement in the arts affects his mood, K answered that whenever he draws and starts visualizing that beauty in his mind and on paper, "I feel this happiness and beauty... I feel that life is good and whenever I draw I remember the good things..." The way in which the simple act of drawing and expressing his feelings in an artistic manner affected his moods a significant indicator of the benefits that arts can have for refugees.

One individual clearly articulated this link between psychology and her own involvement in music. Mawadda is a psychology student who moved from Syria because of the war. Mawadda had been involved in music ever since she was a child, but around the age of twelve she started playing the guitar. She talked of overcoming the stigma attached to her involvement in music, with many saying that it was religiously forbidden, thinking it appropriate only for men or women "who did not wear scarves, or non-Muslims". Yet she continued with her music, even when moving to Jordan. In speaking of what music meant to her, speaking from a psychological perspective, she mentioned, "I think that music helps me to make the balance between the external world and the internal world. It provides a connection between me and the external world and provides attention to my internal world, so I can care about myself and my feelings and everything inside..." Similar to the introspective message of Sami, this balance between these two worlds, the external world, which she mentioned included her being forced from Syria, and the internal world, her feelings. She went on to elaborate about her guitar "It's like someone I talk to, my guitar, for example understands what I feel and understands what I went through." The unique form of expression Mawadda recognized from her guitar affects her in many ways including her mood. She mentions that when she is sad, she becomes "more able to continue what I'm doing without sadness... [Music] helps me to transform my mood." Whether addressing psychosocial needs or boosting confidence, Mawadda and other artists and performers showed in their interviews a definite linkage between mental wellbeing and the arts. Ahmad is a 22-year-old Syrian refugee who joined a Jordanian Governmental university recently and got a scholarship to study fine arts clearly declared that being an artist itself is a relief regardless if one is a refugee or not. He explained, "Art is way of healthy expression, and I can't imagine myself studying any other major "I feel I was born as an artist ...through art you can

send messages and be always connected with the world"

Purpose

Connected with the psychosocial effects of the performing arts on refugees,¹¹ of the thirteen refugees talked about how their involvement in the arts contributed to a valuable sense of purpose and engagement in Jordan, despite their displacement. Again, examples of this sense of purpose extended across the lines of various art disciplines but empowered most of these refugees in a way that gave them a voice in a way that words alone might not have been able to do.

Jamal is 19 years old, was not able to join school because he needs to earn money, and he works currently illegally in a restaurant. In his free time he practices photography as a talent and he took a training course through an NGO that gives short term training, he said " Photography is my passion. I collect money to buy new camera although I have my modern phone and it works but I prefer camera, I am sure the photos will be more beautiful, I like to take photos for my friends, nature and special events and whenever I post any on Facebook, I receive hundreds of sweet comments on them. He also added " I feel free all time when I take photos, nothing stops me from doing that. Very simple action but it has huge positive impact on my day".

Abdullah is a Syrian actor who performs with a theater troop, with whom he has traveled around Jordan, performing in various centers and schools. A relaxed and well-spoken individual, he described the benefits he saw both himself and audience members in terms of his performing. When asked if he feels a sense of purpose regarding the performing arts, his answer of a story confirmed that it certainly was. He explained how they played a scene at a school about a Syrian refugee who entered the school, and other children laughed at him and mocked him because he was Syrian. They bullied him and taunted him, saying he would leave the school with no one to help him. The scene included the refugee child running to the principal to tell him what happened, but he did not do anything. When the situation became bad enough, the child left the school. What much of the audience did not realize, Abdullah explained, was that this very incident had taken place in that school. They proceeded to bring the real Syrian child onto the stage, in front of the school. It affected the audience, and the child was able to return to the school. It was clear that Abdullah was proud of being able to represent his culture and portray a scene that led to meaningful change. Theatre in this instance provided him the opportunity to profoundly affect the wellbeing of this child.

Mawadda, the Syrian guitarist, explained the ability of the performing arts to give a platform for her voice, a means of communication not limited by words, and a way to reach out to others. She explained to me, regarding other musicians she has performed with, "...even though we are in different cultures and know different languages... all the borders, all the differences are brought away, and we play what is common between us." This way she described "brought away", in reference to the borders that limit communication and integration in a new culture proves that music gave her an essential tool to break through a barrier that plagues refugees in Jordan and across the world.

A particularly meaningful example of purpose found through the arts was with Maj, the Syrian dancer, comedian, and actor mentioned previously. When asked what was driving his performing in the arts, he began to tell his personal story. Maj and his family came from Syria after losing "everything" due to war. Maj's father also suffered from lung cancer. He described the immense hardships of coming as a refugee, ranging from difficulties obtaining a driver's license to being unable to continue his studies. Because his father did not receive the right care and treatment, he died. At the time, as he mentioned, they "were not able to do anything". So, when the opportunity came for him to be involved on stage, he said, "I want to tell my father's story." Explaining the causes of his father's death and the difficulties of being a refugee in Jordan has been the basis of many of the television shows he has written, and he has told this story to audiences across the country. Speaking to the sense of purpose that theatre brings, Maj said simply, "this is the only thing that keeps me doing what I'm doing: delivering this message to other people." And through theatre, his valuable message is given voice and has been heard by many, a testament to what the theater can do to provide agency and empower refugees and all people.

Nisreen is a volunteer with international organization and she is a photographer by talent. She also does film making but mainly she does more photography. She covers all the activities done by the organization especially with kids. She

mentioned that she finds herself through this work, even her camera is provided by this organization. In her free time, she tries to get some money by taking photos for graduation parties but this is "Seasonal" According to her she capture very nice photos during her work and she hopes to be famous one day and have her own business. Nisreen expressed that she gets lots of positive comments when she publish her work of Facebook but she believe its special because it is mainly about refugees who are her family and Community. She enjoys it and never tires of covering events and activities. Nisreen is engaged to a Syrian man who she will marry this year, but she is concerned who will be the person who will give her best wedding photos. She considers her profession as essential part of her life and wants to continue after she get married because this bring comfort and happiness to her days.

Amal (20) years old who work as a volunteer in international NGO, because of her talent she gives drawing lessons for kids, expressed how she feels when the Syrian kids draw something belong to their country, their home, town, or relatives. She assured that art is not separated from daily life aspects and its very helpful way of expression especially for kids. She also added that the social worker in the same organization in many cases ask for help from her to assist with what she described as "difficult cases" where the social worker cannot take any word from some children but when she use creative ways like asking them to draw or paint she can understand many things about the daily life of those kids and any other issues they cannot express in a direct way, like being prone to abuse, violence or any kind of maltreatment. So, she is happy to be part of this process because she feels happiness when those kids can be treated and this treatment use art as way of expression and healing.

Stigma and encouragement

Eight of the thirteen refugees mentioned resistance to their involvement of the arts. This was for several reasons. Musicians such as Mohammed and another Tableh player interviewed mentioned how many viewed their playing as religiously forbidden in Islam. Mawadda, the guitarist, talked of how she has often been criticized for playing music as a veiled Muslim woman. Artists such as Khalid mentioned how his family discouraged his pursuit of becoming a professional artist out of a need to have a more secure future, perhaps as an architect. Abdullah, the actor who performed the scene on behalf of a bullied Syrian child, mentioned how some he performed in front of became furious that certain themes were raised, such as when his troop did not want to listen to themes of dispute between Christians and Muslims. And Maj, the actor who played for the sake of his father, mentioned how just the lack of funds for his involvement in the arts affected his ability to perform. He also mentioned the outright racism that he fights against him, when individuals say, "You should go back to your own country! What are you doing here?"

Underlying this is a stigma attached the arts that is little documented yet was hinted at by many of the refugee participants. Often the arts might be considered a hobby at best, and often deemed as a skill that should be secondary towards more "practical" pursuits. The story of K's family discouraging him from pursuing the arts is indicative of this. Meanwhile, four of the six of those who mentioned they faced stigma or resistance towards their performances mentioned that someone else had encouraged them to keep pursuing their mission. Mawadda mentioned her parents encouraged her to continue performing and pursuing her passion, while a performing arts agency consistently provided Abdullah opportunities to perform. Ahmad and Jamal say their friends always encourage them and praise their work, and they don't have any issues of stigma or discouragement from their surroundings. Yet K received none of this outside encouragement, which seems to be the only main variable in terms of being different from the artist participants who are more successful pursuing their passions. The stigma exists and is very apparent, and outside encouragement seems to be the main way for these artists to stay involved. Encouragement, therefore, is the main way in which the performing arts can open a door for social change, and a lack of support can be a barrier to this change.

Discussion

Data collected from the interviews, in further analysis, indicate that the connection to one's culture that the arts bring to refugees is of immense importance to refugees' wellbeing in their new environment. Whether drawing helps connect Syrian artists to specific scenes or playing music for weddings provides a connection to their Syrian heritage, many of

these artists spoke extensively about this connection as a way to cope in their new environment, while still holding on to where they came from and what is closest to them. Though not all the interviewees mentioned this connection, especially considering the importance storytelling and expression has in Syria, it is clear that this form of artistic communication is a key for many refugees. Wellbeing defined by psychosocial indicators, such as happiness and confidence, was supported in various ways by all those interviewed. Playing a guitar for one helped change her mood, a comedian mentioned his involvement made his “personality stronger” and more aware of his own abilities. The benefits of the arts may be temporary for some in terms of increased happiness. But since confidence building was a common theme among the refugees’ responses, it indicates an incredible potential for the arts to heal loss of self-worth from displacement. In relation to empowerment, nearly all refugee participants affirmed that the arts gave them a voice and a purpose in their new environments. Examples given including performing a show addressing bullying issues of Syrians, or the drive of sending a message to communicate discrimination against Syrians in health care through theatre, show the potential of the arts, particularly the performing arts, in giving refugees a valuable platform of expression and empowerment over a given situation. Furthermore, evidence was shown that the refugees who were encouraged by others to overcome the common stigmas regarding religion or money associated with the arts tended to express more happiness and confidence compared to refugees who do not receive encouragement. Encouragement proved to be the defining variable regarding if and how the arts impacted the refugees.

Conclusion

The importance of the arts in benefiting refugees has often been overlooked by other factors. When the world thinks of the refugee crisis, so often it does not see real human beings as the ones affected, just numbers broadcast on television. Individuals think more often of the immediate survival needs of refugees: food, water, and medical aid. Humanitarian policy’s focus on this immediate need is important, but too often it overlooks the essential benefits to human dignity, psychosocial traits, and the added sense of purpose the arts give not only to Syrian refugees in Jordan, but to humanity. The arts provide healing to refugees; the evidence shows this clearly. If more attention was focused on this, humanitarian efforts might not only meet basic living needs, but also might restore a sense of humanity and dignity in the lives of refugees through involvement in the arts. As one individual interviewed emphasized, “We have life in art.”

Recommendations

Analyzing the impact on the arts included a focus on wellbeing and empowerment in this study, but there is more that can be addressed. Some of these ideas include:

- A very interesting avenue of research could be in providing a more in-depth analysis of the stigma towards the arts among refugees from sociocultural aspect, which has proven to be the greatest barrier towards the arts’ success in Jordan.
- More research can be completed particularly for advising policymakers on the best ways to approach using the arts for refugees to maximize the approach given.
- More in-depth analysis on the psychological benefits of the arts for refugees, quantitative and qualitative, including expanding on not just what refugees perceive as the benefits of the arts, but perhaps measuring health indicators before and after involvement in the arts.
- More research can be done in refugee camps involving the arts.
- More research analyzing the perspectives of government, school, international organization, and not-for-profit workers including social workers on the benefits of the arts, and what they are doing (or not doing) to support art initiatives is needed. In her study Omoush (2016) focused on the negative challenges which accompanied the Syrian refugee crisis, and its impact on the different sectors in Jordan through increased pressure on infrastructures, economic, social, and security resources, in addition to the effect political instability in the middle east on Jordan.
- More research on how refugees can use art for their political empowerment, to deliver messages to the world. Examples of this are the numerous ways refugee groups such as Palestinians have used the arts to gain support for their independence cause worldwide.

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الاستشفاء من خلال التعبير: كيف تحول الفنون تجربة اللاجئين السوريين في الأردن

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ملخص

تسلط الدراسة الضوء على وجهات نظر الشباب السوري اللاجئ في الأردن ممن يمارسون الفن، و تركز الدراسة على الفنانين التشكيليين، و الموسيقيين، والممثلين من خلال مقابلات أجريت معهم. وقد عبّر المشاركون في الدراسة عن أفكارهم وآرائهم و قصصهم المتعلقة بالمجال الفني هذه الدراسة منهج البحث النوعي الظاهري. النتائج: تؤكد نتائج الدراسة أن للفن أثرًا إيجابيًا على الصحة الاجتماعية للاجئين فيما يتعلق بارتباطهم الوجودي مع ثقافتهم وأفكارهم، إضافةً إلى تمكينهم من خلال إضافة حس بالهدف لتجربة وجودهم في الأردن. كما تشير الأدلة إلى أن الفنون قد أسهمت في ترك آثار إيجابية على الصعيد النفسي بالنسبة للاجئين : كالسعادة، والثقة بالنفس، وتقدير الذات، و الصحة العقلية. وعلاوةً على ذلك، تشير الدراسة إلى الوصمة المرتبطة بالفن -في المجتمع- التي تحد من ممارسة اللاجئين السوريين له.

الكلمات الدالة: لاجئ، العمل الاجتماعي، الفنون الجميلة، الفلكلور، الصحة العقلية

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