

Advantages of Crafts Based Intervention for Mental Health

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Abstract: *Mental health is being increasingly recognized as a critical global health concern with organizations like the World Health Organization estimating that over 1 billion people worldwide live with a mental health disorder. It warns that greater investment and action are needed globally to scale up services to protect and promote people's mental health. Despite this, the median global government spending on mental health remains at just 2% of total health budgets. It could be worse in countries with severe resource crunch and hence, it becomes imperative that communities adopt less capital-intensive interventions that could help ease the burden. This paper examines the advantages of crafts-based interventions that can be adopted at the school and community level. While this is not a replacement for clinical therapy or medication, the World Health Organization and various Frontiers in Public Health studies recognize arts engagement as an effective and low-cost tool for improving mood, life satisfaction, and public mental health.*

Keywords: Mental health, disorder, anxiety, depression, crafts, cost effective intervention, social inclusivity, communication, skills, isolation

1. Research Methodology

This paper takes a literature review approach focussing on peer reviewed journal articles, conference papers, books, magazine articles and other authoritative reports on the subject.

2. Introduction

Mental health is an integral component of health and well-being. The WHO (2022) conceptualises it as 'a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community'. Mental health is often measured by levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, as these conditions are common indicators of mental well-being across all age groups [1]. Stress, anxiety, and depression are a major public health problem worldwide and are associated with increased mortality, higher health-care costs (medication, hospitalisation, and GP visits), generally a poor prognosis and human suffering which if left unattended could lead to impairment in important areas of functioning, such as family and social life, economic activity, and other occupational roles [2].

With organizations like the World Health Organization highlighting that over 1 billion people worldwide live with a mental health disorder, mental health is being increasingly recognised as a huge public health crisis [3]. In 2021, nearly one in seven people globally were living with a mental disorder [4,5], the number is increasing at an alarming rate. Mental disorders are the leading cause of global non-fatal disease burden, with rising prevalence among children, adolescents, and youth [6]. Numerous studies have revealed a particularly high prevalence among younger populations, with rates peaking around age 14 [7]. The 2023 Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD) published on Oct 12 reported a staggering increase in the burden of mental disorders globally. The leading mental health burdens are depression and anxiety, with the peak now occurring in those aged 15–19 years—an increase driven mainly by depressive and anxiety disorders. Since 2010, anxiety disorders in this age group have risen by nearly 70%,

and depression by about 30%. This trajectory should be a cause for concern [8]. Globally, mental disorders accounted for 5.1% of the disease burden and are the leading cause of years lived with disability (YLD), responsible for one in every six (15.6%) YLDs. Critically, more than 80% of individuals with mental disorders reside in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) [9, 10].

Despite these alarming numbers, the public health response is woefully inadequate. In the words of Dr Tedros, WHO Director General, "Mental health remains one of the most neglected areas of public health and health services delivery". Repeated WHO reports have highlighted persistent service gaps, and a glaring neglect of youth-specific mental health needs [11]. In 2019, MNS conditions accounted for over 10% of the global burden of disease (in disability-adjusted life years), and almost a quarter of all years lived with disability (Global Burden of Disease Collaborator Network, 2019). The lifetime prevalence of mental disorders has been estimated to be between 12.2% and 48.6% globally and over 70% of this burden lies in low- and middle-income countries. Despite this burden, mental illness has thus far not achieved commensurate visibility, policy attention, or funding, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Prior to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), studies estimated development assistance for mental health (DAMH) at less than 1% of all development assistance for health. On average, country spending on mental health amounts to 2% of national health budgets, with little investment in community-based services (UN, 2020). These estimates are the basis for the wide consensus that mental health requires larger funding. There has been a huge concern raised in this regard after the COVID 19 pandemic whose impact on mental health globally is well established [12-20].

Early in the pandemic, the United Nations released a policy brief calling for action on mental health as part of the COVID-19 response and identifying specific populations of concern which did not yield the desired results. In March 2020, the United Nations launched the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan, a \$10.3 billion appeal to protect the world's most vulnerable from COVID-19, which included the increased need for mental health and psychosocial

support. At its end in December 2020, just 40% of the appeal had been funded (International Rescue Committee & Development Initiatives, 2021) [21,22].

Mental health continues to lag in funding and policy attention due to invisible research methodologies, severe provider shortages, and structural stigma. Mental health research suffers from a chronic lack of sustained grants compared to physical health conditions like oncology or cardiology as funding agencies often favour biomedical models where physical biomarkers are easily measured, leaving mental health under-resourced. Moreover, continuing societal stigma often leads to mental health conditions being dismissed as a lack of willpower or "weakness", discouraging people from seeking help thereby worsening the situation. Lack of specific biomarkers and will due to social stigma leaves policymakers confused about funding priorities. There is additional pressure on account of acute scarcity of trained mental health professionals worldwide. For example, in India, the current ratio of psychiatrists is fewer than 1 per 100,000 people—vastly below the World Health Organization recommended minimum. Barriers include under-resourced health systems, stigma, discrimination, and violations of human rights. Risk factors such as poverty, violence, inequality, and disability increase vulnerability, while protective factors include strong emotional skills, supportive relationships, and access to education and social participation [23-26].

Given the restricted resources, it becomes even more important for communities and public institutions to make an extra effort to adopt cost-effective therapies to provide more easily accessible, non-pharmacological mental health interventions to alleviate the financial strain on public healthcare systems. These therapies provide scalable, low-cost solutions to reduce stress, counteract social isolation, and build community resilience, all of which directly and indirectly help in overcoming mental issues like anxiety, depression etc well before it can start harming the overall health of an individual. Numerous studies have shown the positive impact of these therapies on reducing and helping alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression which are the leading drivers of the global mental health burden, accounting for nearly two-thirds of all mental health disorders. These conditions represent the second-largest cause of long-term disability, inflicting an immense human and economic toll [27,28].

The belief that craftwork has a positive influence on health and well-being is said to date back to antiquity [29,30]. The essence of doing crafts, as opposed to more regulated forms of manual work, is that it demands both physical and cognitive work by the maker [31]. There have been times when crafts were purposefully used to promote health and well-being, for example, with injured soldiers following the Second World War [32]. The late 19th century was an era when crafts were recognised as having a beneficial effect on human flourishing, with influential writers and public figures, such as John Ruskin and William Morris, arguing that social as well as personal benefits come from allowing workers to have control over the processes and outcomes of their labour, rather than carrying out routine tasks. They believed that people who engaged in handicrafts did not just make objects but also created themselves in the process [33,34].

The profession of occupational therapy emerged at a time when the arts and crafts movement was flourishing in Europe and North America. An American anthropologist, Cheryl Mattingly, observed that: 'the most clearly "humanist" streak in occupational therapy has its roots in this arts and crafts heritage, with its emphasis on creativity, on the need to create objects that are both useful and beautiful, artefacts of which one can be proud'. This belief in the health benefits of crafts has been expressed many times in the occupational therapy literature, for example, by Reilly 'Man, through the use of his hands, as they are energized by mind and will, can influence the state of his own health' [35 - 37]

By the late 20th century, crafts came to be seen as less important. Shorter stays in hospital, pressure to get people home safely and quickly and a reduced interest in crafting in the wider society can all be seen as contributing factors in occupational therapists moving away from using crafts as therapeutic media [38,39].

There has been a revived interest in the potential health benefits of craft activities in the last two decades with numerous studies have concluded that Engaging in craftwork is said to enhance learning provide opportunities to experience a 'sense of freedom and control in the world' (promote self-reliance and teach people how to govern themselves. Crafts-based interventions are said to raise self-esteem, improve mood, counteract social isolation, and reduce anxiety and depression, among other benefits. These are the basic causes for mental distress in the wake of increasing use of social media which is known to negatively impact our overall wellbeing by fueling anxiety, depression, loneliness and FOMO (fear or missing out) [40 - 43].

This paper examines its significance as a therapeutic tool for mitigating mental distress and makes a case for why a revival of this tool at the community, school and institutional level may be a cost-effective way of reducing the mental health care burden which in any case is a neglected segment across the world. Craft is defined as an activity involving the creation of objects by skilful use of hands and brain resulting in a material product and crafts-based interventions involve crafts such as woodworking, pottery, embroidery, knitting and basketry employed as media for therapy (intervention) as sole or supplementary treatment [44].

3. Advantages of Crafts-Based Intervention for Mental Health

Craft was the first therapeutic occupation of occupational therapy. Since the early days of the profession, the value of craft as a therapeutic practice is a topic that has been discussed by sociologists, , psychologists, philosophers and policy makers alike. In fact, there is mounting evidence that crafts serve as an exceptionally effective therapeutic tool for anxiety and depression and other mental distress when applied intentionally. Here's why:

(i) Mindfulness and focus building

Craft courses have been prescribed to patients since the dawn of occupational therapy in the late 19th century, with basketry used to relieve anxiety and physical ailments in soldiers

during the first world war. They continue to be used today, with groups such as Combat Stress, the UK charity for veterans' mental health, offering pottery classes. Craig Mealing, an ex-soldier from Essex suffering from PTSD, turned pottery into a career after an introductory course through the charity which helped overcome alcoholism and control his PTSD driven anxiety and temper. Though seemingly different, the acts of baking, knitting, and gardening share characteristics that make them well-suited for self-care. These activities all help to improve mood and lower stress – the effort, multi-sensory engagement, repetitive actions and anticipation of satisfaction involved in making something are related to release of neurotransmitters that promote joy and well-being, while also reducing stress hormones [45].

Engaging in tactile crafts activates the brain's sensory pathways and sensorimotor cortical network. This hands-on engagement stimulates regions associated with focus, memory, and emotional regulation. When you mold clay, mix paint, or knit, your mind redirects its focus to physical sensations like feeling the texture of the material, the rhythm of movements, and the visual colors. This anchors attention in the present, effectively breaking the cycle of anxious thoughts as these activities engage fine motor skills and bilateral coordination, occupying resources within the sensorimotor network which tends to undergo a transition from specialized, localized processing to a globally integrated mode when it is anxious or distressed. In a globally integrated mode, rather than interpreting physical or internal cues as isolated information, the brain integrates them across multiple regions to heighten overall threat vigilance. This adds to anxiety and mental distress. Crafts help to break this integrated mode to focus on the present [45-47]. Additionally, handicraft activities offer immediate sensory satisfaction and a sense of achievement upon task completion, which activates reward circuits including the mesolimbic dopamine system. Prior studies have shown that the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) modulates reward-seeking behaviours and emotional reactions to reward deprivation through dopamine D2 and NMDA receptors, contributing to anxiety reduction [48,49].

Crafts build mindfulness by redirecting a racing mind to the present through rhythmic repetition, sensory engagement, and deep focus. This shifts the brain into a calm state where stress hormones drop and intrusive thoughts fade. The repetitive, mindful actions involved in things like knitting, hand lettering or making clay figures help calm the nervous system and bring you back to the present moment. It's one of the simplest, most accessible forms of self-care. Repetitive tasks in crafts like knitting and crocheting act as "active meditation" which improved mindfulness by staying in the present without getting overwhelmed or caught up in the past or the present. The rhythm of stitches and needles clicking can lead to a sensation known as flow state, a pleasurable experience psychologically, when someone is so engaged by an activity that time disappears. Knitting and crochet are useful for anxiety too, because they can provide a sense of control that reduces feelings of uncertainty and ruminations. Creative hobbies like collage art, painting, mindful crafts and even simple sketchbook journaling give your mind a break from daily worries. They improve focus, reduce intrusive thoughts

and let you channel your energy into something positive and rewarding [50, 51].

Research on the connection between arts and crafts and ADHD has shown that arts and crafts can have a calming and therapeutic effect on individuals with ADHD. These activities engage the brain in a way that promotes focus, creativity, and mindfulness, which can be particularly helpful for those who struggle with impulsivity, restlessness, and distractibility. By focusing on the process of creating something, individuals with ADHD can improve their ability to concentrate, stay organized, and manage emotions [52].

Flow experiences are marked by a sense of being fully immersed in an activity, with no distractions or worries. This heightened state of focus can improve emotional regulation, increase happiness, and reduce negative thinking. Craft therapy builds focus by engaging the brain in sustained, active mindfulness. Since crafts require hands-on attention to detail, it anchors the mind in the present moment, blocks out distracting daily stressors, and gradually helps build the mental endurance needed for long-term concentration [53 - 55]. The tangible progression and completion of a project trigger the release of dopamine, the brain's "feel-good" chemical. This natural reward system motivates the brain to sustain focus for longer periods [56,57]. Every craft project is built on sustained attention. Besides the craft work requires disciplined sequencing of steps to get the desired product. Navigating and working through the mistakes that happen during creation naturally builds a client's patience and ability to stay on task despite challenges. It is extremely useful for children to build focus and mindfulness as Children must look, choose, plan, and complete. This natural progression strengthens concentration abilities and prepares them for academic tasks such as writing, reading, and following classroom routines. With consistency, their ability to focus increases. The process also helps in blocking out distractions. As people work on an activity they enjoy, their attention becomes stronger. They learn how to finish what they started, even if the project takes longer than expected. When you're deep in a creative project, your mind naturally shifts away from stress and into the present moment. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi called this state "flow," where time seems to stand still, and you feel completely engaged. This flow state reduces anxiety and leaves you feeling refreshed, focused, and mentally clear [58, 59].

On 2 December 2024, "brain rot" was chosen as Oxford's Word of the Year. This term refers to "the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging. This could become the next epidemic as over 4 billion internet-connected young adults spend 6.5 h a day online, many of whom passively watch low-value content on social media and the internet. Entertainment used to involve participation; today, instant gratification provided by digital platforms like TikTok encourages users to seek more and more stimulating content to achieve the same level of satisfaction. The algorithm, for example, behind the "For You Page" on TikTok encourages an endless loop of consumption that can promote desensitization and shortened

attention spans. This is where craft-based intervention could be useful [60 - 62].

(ii) Cognitive restructuring and development:

Cognitive restructuring refers to the act of identifying ineffective patterns in thinking and changing them to be more effective. More effective can mean triggering less negative emotion, seeing things more clearly, or enabling more skilful behaviour. Cognitive restructuring builds on your ability to accurately recognize automatic thoughts and feelings. The result is being able to adopt a thought that triggers less negative emotion and is more effective at helping you achieve your aims [63]. Negative thought patterns can feel like a mental loop, persistent, intrusive, and hard to shake. Whether it's self-criticism, worry, or pessimism, these thoughts can lead to emotional distress and interfere with daily functioning. Engaging in creative activities like crafting can help interrupt these patterns and promote emotional well-being as it promotes mindfulness, focus, and a sense of accomplishment. These benefits can directly counteract the cognitive and emotional symptoms associated with anxiety, depression, and stress. Creative activities engage both the mind and body, offering a productive way to redirect attention away from negative thought spirals [64].

Visual arts education has been shown to influence neural plasticity, which refers to the brain's capacity to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections in response to learning and experience [65]. Neuroimaging studies have provided preliminary evidence that engagement in artistic activities can lead to structural and functional changes in the brain. For instance, visual artists have been found to display enhanced connectivity in brain networks related to inhibitory control, spatial imagination, and mental rotation. A longitudinal study further explored the impact of art training (painting) on brain structure and function, revealing that three months of painting training enhanced sketching abilities and visual divergent thinking without affecting perceptual skills.

Notably, improved sketching proficiency was associated with changes in the right anterior lobe of the cerebellum, while reduced integrity of the frontal white matter was observed [65 - 67]. Experiments also identified structural changes in the right medial frontal gyrus and left anterior cerebellum as representational drawing skills improved in art students compared to non-art students [68]. Studies have demonstrated that even in individuals who are congenitally blind, learning to draw through tactile memory can rapidly reorganize the primary visual cortex (V1), highlighting the role of training-induced plasticity in non-visual memory tasks [69]. These findings suggest that the immersive and repetitive nature of artistic practice may contribute to long-lasting neural adaptations that support creative performance, even in populations with unique neural demands.

Creativity appears to be supported by complex, interconnected brain networks rather than isolated brain regions. Engaging in creative tasks may stimulate similar integrative neural processes. In therapeutic settings, this suggests that creative arts might foster neural adaptability, potentially aiding recovery or development in clinical populations by promoting neural plasticity. Interventions that enhance synaptic plasticity might be particularly beneficial in

rehabilitation settings, where recovery of cognitive functions requires neural reorganization. This assumption is supported by one study with adult art students documenting structural changes like the modification of white matter in response to learning and practicing art, which correlates with increased creative output [70- 72].

Creativity activates the limbic "low road" regions of the brain, including the amygdala, which is the seat of primary emotions like fear and joy [73,74]. Adaptive emotional processing has been shown to engage the amygdala more than unhealthy mechanisms like chronic emotional suppression [75,76].

Given the crucial role of the prefrontal cortex in analyzing and interpreting art, both viewing and creating art can boost cognitive abilities. For example, when people create art, they exercise numerous cognitive skills while reflecting on complex intellectual themes. Viewing art further stimulates brain activity by encouraging people to form new connections and consider others' perspectives. This may explain why art programs are believed to enhance academic performance [77]. Also, the meticulous attention to detail required in visual arts, sculpting, or intricate design stimulates various cortical areas, which can improve cognitive abilities and overall mental agility. Meticulous practices like sculpting and intricate design directly stimulate the brain's **motor cortex**, prefrontal cortex (PFC), anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), and posterior parietal cortex (PPC) integrate various higher-order cognitive functions, including attention control, working memory, decision-making and problem solving [78,79].

(iii) Emotional regulation and expression:

Emotion regulation is an umbrella term used to capture a variety of strategies that individuals may use to engage with and respond to emotional experiences [32]. Emotion regulation is an important therapeutic skill to learn for individuals who have enhanced emotional responses or trouble coping with their emotions. Emotion regulation is a process by which individuals modify the duration or intensity of their emotions to best respond to and produce appropriate responses to the ever-changing demands posed by the environment. An individual who selectively attunes to fearful events, ruminates over past fearful circumstances or overprepares for potential future feared situations, is likely to have enhanced anxiety. These individuals may have poorer attentional control and interpret ambiguous stimuli in a more emotionally driven way. For example, a depressed individual may rely on negative schemas based on past events, while also having impaired information acquisition, memory retrieval and information processing due to early adverse life events. Individuals may benefit from treatment focusing on elements of emotion and control processes. An individual can then learn to reappraise the emotional stimulus, the response, and/or adopt a different perspective instead of reacting negatively. Over time, reappraisal leads to decreased negative emotions and increased psychological wellbeing. Suppression, on the other hand, is used to inhibit behaviors that are associated with emotional responding. Many people resort to suppression when experiencing strong emotions, however over time this response actually is maladaptive and leads to diminished control of emotions and reduced sense of wellbeing [80 - 85].

According to Paulus (2021), someone who has emotional dysregulation may experience extreme mood instability, irritability, aggression and anxiety and problems or delays with returning to the baseline state. Their emotional reactions are considered excessive compared to social norms, inappropriate or detrimental to a person's interests. This can be associated with comorbid conditions, such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders, cluster B personality disorders, as well as uni or bipolar affective disorders. This can happen to normal people, and a person does not have to have a clinical diagnosis to have complications with emotional dysregulation [86 - 88].

Through repetitive and rhythmic actions crafts ground the nervous system in the present moment and reduce rumination. This process allows individuals to safely externalize, process, confront and physically release complex feelings when words simply aren't enough. In an anxious and stressed state, the same worrisome thoughts form a constant loop, and they cannot release the tension. Fully concentrating on the creative process redirects your brain's energy and prevents constant overthinking which decreases anxiety and prevents harmful rumination about past or future events. The sustained focus that craft work demands activates the reward-related areas of the brain, actively slowing down your breathing and lowering stress levels. The reward center in your brain releases a neurotransmitter called dopamine when you do something pleasurable. Scientists believe dopamine was originally designed to make us repeat activities that would help the species survive, such as eating and having sex. Over time, we've evolved so that the brain can also release dopamine while we're staining glass or decorating a cake [89 - 91]. This helps in building confidence and strengthens belief in one's abilities, including the ability to tackle one's innermost fears in the long run. A study in the American Journal of Public Health (2010) found that creative tasks increase self-efficacy, helping people feel more capable of tackling challenges in other areas of life too [92]. Crafting provides a non-verbal outlet to project your feelings onto a tangible object. For example, the tactile nature of clay sculpting allows you to physically manipulate, shape, and express internal states. Working with clay provides individuals with opportunities for autonomy, patience, and perseverance as they witness the transformation of raw material into meaningful objects. This process of artistic creation is linked to the development of problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, and a sense of agency [93].

In the therapeutic domain, art and craft is recognized as a powerful non-verbal form of communication. This therapy provides individuals with a safe environment to explore emotions, process trauma, and develop coping mechanisms. For example, clay work's tactile nature fosters grounding and sensory regulation, while the act of shaping and reshaping promotes flexibility, emotional release, and self-discovery. Studies in art therapy emphasize that working with clay helps reduce anxiety, improve mood, and facilitate communication in individuals who struggle with verbal expression [94 - 97]. Arts and crafts have been shown to be effective tools in managing various mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and even schizophrenia. For example, a study published in Psychiatric Services found that art therapy was an effective treatment for people with

schizophrenia, helping manage symptoms and improve social functioning. Creative activities can help individuals process trauma, reduce intrusive thoughts, and promote self-expression in a non-threatening way. In cases of PTSD or trauma, crafting and art can help individuals externalize their feelings and experiences, making it easier to process them [98,99].

(iv) Identity rebuilding and strengthening:

A consistent identity may reduce confusion and anxiety, guide a person's choices, and nurture meaningful self-esteem. Identity certainty helps a person reject incongruent self-evaluations. For example, a person with a strong sense of identity may be better equipped to ignore or reject bullying. Identity confusion or uncertainty may lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety as one is constantly unsure of one's self worth. Mental distress is a major catalyst for identity issues, frequently triggering a classic identity crisis or exacerbating deeper conditions like Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Dissociative disorders are mental health conditions that involve experiencing a loss of connection between thoughts, memories, feelings, surroundings, behavior and identity. These conditions include escape from reality in ways that are not wanted and not healthy. This causes problems in managing everyday life [100, 101].

Craft therapy builds identity by allowing individuals to externally process emotions and reduce their stress levels. Self-identity is a core part of our individuality. It includes the beliefs, values, and experiences that shape our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Cultural heritage is key in forming this identity. Crafts work linked with cultural heritage helps reconnecting with our roots. For example, a person from a family of musicians may feel a deep connection to music, viewing it as not just a hobby but a vital aspect of their identity. This inherited passion can lead to high self-esteem, as they see themselves as part of a larger story that celebrates art and culture [102]. Understanding one's cultural identity is crucial for mental health. A strong sense of cultural identity fosters self-awareness and confidence, enabling individuals to navigate their experiences and interactions with the wider world. When individuals feel connected to their cultural heritage through art and crafts, they often find a supportive community that provides emotional and social resources essential for well-being. This support can help mitigate the risks of identity crises, empowering individuals to respond positively to societal pressures. It enhances feelings of belonging and community connection, which are vital for emotional stability [103].

The creative processes of artmaking and crafts allow the artist-client to express rejected aspects of self, to gain self-awareness and self-acceptance, and to create and recreate identity. In addition, art therapy provides a context for observing and synthesizing emotional states which is extremely important for the psychological integration necessary for having a strong identity. It is likely that through artmaking, along with the reflective aspects of art therapy, the client will be able to gain self-insight and the skills necessary to build a flexible and adaptive self-identity [104,105].

The perseverance required to master a craft and the problem solving and confrontation of setbacks that comes along in the process instils personal agency and self-confidence. A healthy self-identity allows an individual to view themselves in an objective manner. Notice we don't say positive as this can reinforce toxic positivity. Healthy self-identity has a strong sense of self, self-awareness, an understanding of strengths and weaknesses, self-confidence, emotional resilience (how easily we can bounce back from challenges) and high interdependence (lack of needing to seek external validation), all of which are honed through craft [106].

Various psychiatric disorders like depression, alcohol abuse, child abuse, sleep problems, personality disorders and Alzheimer's disease. It also leads to various physical disorders like diabetes, autoimmune disorders like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and cardiovascular diseases like coronary heart disease, hypertension (HTN), obesity, physiological aging, cancer, poor hearing and poor health. Left untended, loneliness can have serious consequences for mental and physical health of people. Therefore, it is important to intervene at the right time to prevent loneliness, so that physical and mental health of patients is maintained [107 - 109].

(v) Functions as a social catalyst:

Human beings are a social species. Satisfying social relationships are essential for their mental and physical wellbeing. Impaired social relationship can lead to loneliness which in turn has serious physical and mental consequences. Social isolation is when a person does not have relationships or contact with others and has little to no social support. Social isolation can pose a health risk to people, even if they don't feel lonely [110]. Craft involves learning from and about others, adding to create a sense of belonging to communities and social groups. Learning a craft also teaches us important social skills. Formal apprenticeships and craft guilds have traditionally been important sites of socialisation. Anthropologists Lave and Wenger (1991) have argued that craft learning involves the creation of communities of practice, that is, people who share a common interest and deepen their knowledge through frequent interaction. Through this process of sharing knowledge and established practices, they can form a common identity and sense of belonging. A project involving making replicas of a collection of artefacts by Ainu indigenous peoples of Japan held at Hokkaido University showed that, in the process of engaging with the objects through the various senses, craftspeople were able way to connect not only with lost techniques, local materials, and their own skills and cultural background, but also with the souls of their ancestors and with future generations (Yamasaki & Miller, 2019). This example shows how crafts also help in restoring relationships to one's cultural identity and heritage, which in turn helps build kinship, social identity and cohesion [111- 113].

Since crafting often involves working in small groups, it creates an environment that encourages social interaction and collaboration. By working together on projects, people specially children learn to share craft supplies, exchange ideas, and negotiate tasks. These collaborative experiences foster the development of essential social skills such as communication, teamwork, and empathy. Crafting, therefore,

becomes a social catalyst, laying the groundwork for positive interpersonal relationships [114 - 116].

(vi) As a tactile learning tool

Craft transforms passive reading into active learning by engaging a child's sense of touch. Physically making items like raised-line letters, cardboard shapes, or textured storyboards allows students to encode the information through multiple senses, which builds fine motor skills and significantly improves memory retention and helps them internalise the concepts better. When learners manipulate objects, they activate motor, visual, and somatosensory cortices, creating richer neural pathways and more robust memory traces (Barsalou, 2008). This integrated sensory input is important for developing comprehensive conceptual knowledge.

When learners manipulate objects, they activate motor, visual, and somatosensory cortices, creating richer neural pathways and more robust memory traces (Barsalou, 2008). This integrated sensory input is important for developing comprehensive conceptual knowledge. Direct interaction with learning materials makes the educational process more enjoyable and relevant, reducing passivity and encouraging active participation. This heightened engagement can lead to improved learning outcomes and a more positive attitude towards schooling [117 - 119]. Research has shown that meaningful hands-on experience with concrete manipulatives related to learning contents increased reactivation of the somatosensory association cortex during subsequent reasoning, which helped to improve the problem-solving performance. Hands-on experience also reduced students' cognitive load during the well-structured problem-solving process [120].

4. Conclusion

More than 1 billion people are living with mental health disorders, according to new data released by the World Health Organization (WHO), with conditions such as anxiety and depression inflicting immense human and economic tolls. Mental and substance use disorders are now the leading cause of disability worldwide. This documented global burden of disease associated with mental disorders is compounded by the widening "mental health treatment gap" where, worldwide, more than 70% of persons who need mental health services lack access to care. Paradoxically, this gap exists at a time when evidence-based mental health interventions have been found to be effective in limited resource environments [121 -125].

In too many countries and communities, mental health care is unavailable, unaffordable, and overly reliant on institutional models that isolate rather than integrate and include. To reduce suffering, uphold human rights, improve access and quality, and move towards universal health coverage, we must reimagine mental health systems from the ground up. This means building comprehensive, community-based networks of mental health services and supports for people of all ages. Community-based mental health care brings services closer to where people live, work, study and connect. It reduces isolation and supports recovery in everyday environments. But it is more than a compassionate alternative to institution-

based care – it is the evidence-based model for expanding access to care, advancing rights and improving health and social outcomes [126]. For many countries, a key step towards community-based care is deinstitutionalization – shifting resources from psychiatric hospitals towards community-based services. This is not simply about closing institutions; it is about replacing outdated, often harmful, models with person-centred, recovery-oriented care.

This is where crafts base intervention could be very useful. It is cost effective and can be made accessible at the community level in schools, community meeting places etc. The WHO has recognised that involving non-specialist providers, such as general physicians, nurses, community workers, and peer supporters, to deliver the highly effective evidence-based mental health interventions that are available for these conditions. This again supports the inclusion of crafts intervention. Health organizations and researchers, agree that promoting community crafts or introducing "art prescriptions" provides an inexpensive, preventive approach to wellbeing that can reduce the strain on overburdened clinical healthcare systems [127]. Encouraging craft therapy in communities offers countries a low-cost, preventative strategy to tackle rising mental health burdens. The accessibility and affordability of many arts and crafts activities make them particularly attractive as potential public health interventions. Unlike some wellness strategies that may be cost-prohibitive or require specialised equipment, creative pursuits often have low barriers to entry. This allows nations to scale care across diverse demographics [128]. Creative activities complement traditional medical interventions by reducing stress, alleviating loneliness, and empowering residents through accessible, culturally grounded practices that build long-term psychosocial resilience [129,130].

The previous paragraphs elaborated how crafts-based intervention is useful for stress reduction and mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, and combating social isolation, all of which contribute to a large proportion of the mental health burden globally. Importantly, traditional arts, crafts and events are living cultural practices that contribute to mental and social well-being. Incorporating these into culturally responsive health strategies could help promote overall well-being, particularly in communities where conventional mental-health services are less accessible or culturally misaligned [131]. Because it does not require advanced artistic talent, craft-based therapy transcends language, literacy, and cultural barriers. It can be easily adapted to serve diverse populations, from children to older adults from various demographics.

In recent years, we have seen a greater awareness of the harms of loneliness and social isolation, especially following lockdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase in remote working has also opened up discussions around the loss of social connectedness and the impact of isolation on mental health. In fact, social isolation and loneliness are increasingly being recognised as a priority public health problem and policy issue across all age groups, including by the WHO Commission on Social Connection. During the course of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), the Demographic Change and Healthy Ageing

Unit will be addressing social isolation and loneliness as one of the themes that cuts across the four main action areas of the Decade. The WHO report from the WHO Commission on Social Connection highlights that social isolation and loneliness are widespread, with serious but under-recognized impacts on health, well-being, and society and makes a compelling case for urgent action [132].

As more and more data are pouring in on the effects of loneliness on various health conditions and life expectancy, public health experts are getting behind projects to establish causes and work on solutions. Social prescribing, which "connects people to activities, groups, and services in their community" has been implemented by the UK National Health Service and has also been taken up in Ireland and the Netherlands. During the course of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–30), activities will be addressing social isolation and loneliness as a theme that cuts across four main action areas. This makes craft intervention, which is known to foster social connections, comes handy. When facilitated in groups, craft therapies combat the modern epidemic of loneliness by encouraging shared experiences, the exchange of ideas, and peer support. Shared making practices involved in the process right from sourcing, helps build social networks and trust among residents. This revitalizes communal bonds, particularly in areas facing economic hardship, population decline, or the breakdown of social ties.

Not only this, but Crafts is also considered an important tool for local economic development and job creation. Furthermore, crafts have traditionally stood out in the rural world as a source of job creation. In this sense, there are also European projects, such as the European Network of Rural Artisans, which defines crafts as "part of the economy, due to their capacity to generate employment, as an element of social cohesion in the territories and as a potential tourist resource and distinctive culture resource of the counties". Thus, for community institutions focused on economic development, teaching traditional or modern crafts provides individuals with marketable vocational skills. This can foster entrepreneurship and economic self-reliance, directly benefiting local economies besides letting them benefit from its therapeutic impact on the mental and physical health of their residents [133 - 136].

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