



## Art Therapy in The Arab World

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### ABSTRACT

Art therapy helps individuals explore their inner world, conflicts, strength, and experiences. It promotes human growth, development, and healing. While art therapy utilizes nonverbal expression as a means of communication, which benefits individuals from traditional and collectivistic societies, it is still novel in the Arab world. This paper aims to review art therapy and its implementation in the Arab world. A scoping review explored the implementation of visual art therapy, specifically in Arab countries. We identified relevant studies from different databases and general Internet searches. The data ( $n = 27$  papers) were summarized and reported following data charting and extraction. Art therapy in the Arab world is present in various disciplines in general psychological support, mainly for trauma-informed interventions. In the 27 studies reviewed, participants reported feeling safe in the sessions, and art was described as a productive way to unmask emotions without violating their socio-cultural needs. Art therapy was well accepted and may provide an alternative means of emotion processing. In conducting art therapy interventions with individuals from Arab societies, art therapists may encounter complex cultural, religious, and political issues. Cultural sensitivity and humility should be used to take this into consideration. Art therapists can learn from the above findings to adapt their interventions to the Arab culture and possible with other traditional and collectivistic individuals.

### Introduction

Creative art therapies utilize the creative process and humans' inherent ability to express individual and collective experiences through the arts as a means of psychotherapy, which promotes human growth, development, and healing (Malchiodi, 1999, 2005). Visual art therapy uses visual artmaking (drawing, painting, sculpture, etc) to help participants visually and sensually explore their inner world, conflicts, strengths, and experiences. Research over the past decades has demonstrated that art therapy effectively works with and freely expresses uncomfortable experiences through images (Kemp et al., 2022). It may be a more acceptable form of therapy among Arabs, allowing expression without violating cultural norms and protecting the collective before the individual (Behbehani, 2015). However, because art therapy developed in the West, the Arab world is still new territory for this form of expressive therapy.

The Arab world includes 22 member countries of the Arab League and their diaspora of over 400 million people (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Besides linking Asia and Africa, the Arab

world historically served as the gateway to Europe. As a collection of independent states, each country has different norms, traditions, dialects, and religions (e.g., Christians, Druze, and Jews but mostly Muslims). Arabic as a native language allows sharing cultures, values, and traditions despite diverse dialects (Barakat, 1993; Dawisha, 2016; Okasha, Karam, & Okasha, 2012) and affects how individuals lead their public and community lives (Parolin, 2009). Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, emerging Arab societies have been in flux, constantly pulled between opposite poles: past versus future, East versus West, tradition versus modernity.

Art is a basic human behavior that all cultures share and experience. It evolved to make certain situations—conditionally crucial for survival or social attachment—more prominent, pleasurable, and memorable (Dissanayake, 2015). It values local cultures and allows and holds different perspectives. Art is a medium that is used for expressing emotions and healing, at times non-verbally.

Art therapy is considered a modern therapeutic field influenced, shaped, and developed from primarily psychological concepts used in the West (Alduqail, 2020; Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005). However, the

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Arab world addresses medicine and psychotherapy differently, especially innovative practices such as art and therapy. In a collectivist society, such services must address the individual's local traditions and sociocultural perspectives and those of their family, extended family, community, and tribe (Behbehani, 2015).

In the Arabian Gulf region mental illness is stigmatized and there are cultural barriers to seeking psychological support (Al-Darmaki, 2004). Fortunately, with the rise of the nuclear family and individuality in modern Arab urban life, psychotherapy and alternative treatments, including art therapy, have increased, especially for children with disabilities. The increased recognition of mental illness led foundations and specialized programs to use art as means of expression (Behbehani, 2015). Because access to art therapy remains limited (Alduqail, 2020; El-Islam, 2006), Arab therapists tend to obtain the necessary qualifications and credentials in other parts of the world, such as Europe and the United States. Moreover, non-Arab art therapists have joined various local and international programs in the region (Behbehani, 2015; Carlier, Powell, El-Halawani, Dixon, & Weber, 2020).

Art therapists are encouraged to consider what art means to the specific cultures in which they work. It is crucial to understand local metaphors, past meanings, and societal values (Huss, 2016; Huss et al., 2012; Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005). Art practices differ between individualistic and collective societies. For example, Western societies accept the concept of private space, which is undesirable in communities where collaborative art is the norm (Betts, 2013; Potash et al., 2017). Furthermore, art therapy is a tool of self-expression, perhaps leading to difficulties regarding art pieces that represent harsh realities and how families and the community perceive them.

Arab societies have many forms of family structure and social processes and are culturally diverse through a variety of tribal affiliations, varying levels of modernization, and generational differences (Powell, 2019). Much of the Arab world is Muslim, a religion with deep-rooted, traditional connections to the arts, as shown in architecture, calligraphy, geometric, and abstract arts (Behbehani, 2015; Weber, 2012). In some parts of Arab culture (particularly conservative Islam, such as Wahhabism) art is considered a contradiction to religious ideology in which the visual representations of humans or animals may constitute *shirk* (idol or image worship). However, researchers of the Arab world's culture, claim that through the arts, a more open form of expression is achieved (Barakat, 1993), particularly in literature, poetry, and a general reliance on symbolism, imagery, and metaphor (Barakat, 1993; Dawisha, 2016). A recent quasi-experimental study found that Islamic patterns in art therapy with university students effectively reduced depression, anxiety, and stress and increased psychological well-being (Hajra & Saleem, 2021).

This study encompasses a systematic scoping review of literature and research about the implications of art therapy in the Arab world. The objectives are to (1) identify and categorize information presented in the literature about the use of visual art therapy among the Arab community; (2) describe outcomes of the body of work that examines visual art therapy activities in various places; and (3) better understand facilitators and barriers to informing future programs and interventions.

## Methods

### Study Design

To facilitate and understand this field and its implementation, we conducted a scoping review to explore and map the literature. Broad research questions about the implementation of visual art therapy, specifically in Arab countries, were addressed. We followed Arksey and O'Malley (2005) five-stage framework: (a) identify the purpose; (b) identify potential studies; (c) screen and select relevant studies; (d) chart/extract data; and (e) collate/summarize results.

### Identify the Purpose

This study's purpose was to describe the nature and extent of studies concerning visual art therapy in the Arab world. It encompasses various visual arts forms, including drawing, painting, sculpture, collage, and other media such as textiles and fiber arts.

### Identify Potential Studies

Relevant sources included in the literature review consisted of academic journals, books, and websites from several research databases on the University of Haifa (EBSCOHost, JSTOR, PUBMED, SAGE), Google Scholar, Google, and social media platforms. Research terms (*art therapy*, *Arab*, *Middle East*, and specific Arab country names) in English and Arabic were selected based on their relevance to the study purpose.

### Screen and Select Relevant Studies

We applied explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to titles, abstracts, and full-text articles to select studies. Inclusion criteria were (a) peer-reviewed articles (b) published in English or Arabic. Exclusion criteria were (a) studies that used other approaches rather than visual art therapy (b) conducted outside the Arab World. We did not include a time frame because we wanted to explore the implication of art therapy in this region over time. We searched grey literature—available literature through standard bibliographic services on Web such as Dissertations, Abstracts, International and National Technical reports, and not controlled by commercial publishing organizations.

The initial English and Arabic literature searches resulted in 219 articles and documents. After applying the inclusion criteria and removing duplicates, 207 peer-reviewed articles remained. We read the titles and abstracts to select only articles relevant to the study and excluded 51 articles. The remaining articles were assessed using their full text. By applying the exclusion criteria, we excluded 129 in addition to those that lacked enough information. In the end, 27 articles remained in this scoping review (Fig. 1).

### Chart/Extract Data

Data extracted included the study's country, purpose, art modality used in the intervention, sample characteristics, data collection, and analytic approach. Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the included peer-reviewed articles.

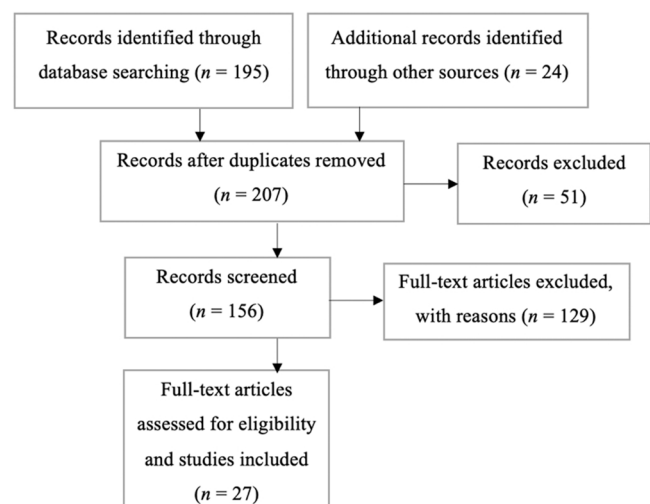


Fig. 1. Flow Diagram of Paper Selection Process.

**Table 1**  
Published Art Therapy Studies Conducted in the Arab World.

Author (year)	Language	Country	Study purpose	Sample information	Methodology
Khedr (1986)	Arabic	Egypt	Evaluate children's drawings as assessment of social/personal adjustment	<i>N</i> = 52 (10–11 yr) <i>n</i> = 28 with high social and personal adjustment; <i>n</i> = 24 with low social and personal adjustment	Quantitative; Questionnaires; Drawing assessment
Khedr (1989)	Arabic	Egypt	Evaluate juvenile delinquents' drawings as assessment of social/personal adjustment	<i>N</i> = 80 (14–17 yr) <i>n</i> = 40 delinquent teenagers; <i>n</i> = 40 nondelinquent teenagers	Quantitative; Questionnaires; Drawing assessment
Khedr (1990)	Arabic	Egypt	Examine relationship between children's drawings and mental/emotional states	<i>N</i> = 250 (9–10 yr)	Quantitative; Questionnaires; Drawing assessment
Khedr (1996)	Arabic	Egypt	Examine clinical implications of male and female drawings	<i>N</i> = 2819 (7–18 yr) 1217 male; 1602 female	Experimental study
Khedr (2003)	Arabic	Egypt	Drawing assessment as diagnostic tool for schizophrenia	<i>N</i> = 70 (17–48 yr) <i>n</i> = 35 schizophrenic; <i>n</i> = 35 healthy participants	Drawing assessment
Al-wakeel and Khedr (2009)	Arabic	Egypt/UAE	Examine role of cultural background and kinesthetic family drawing	<i>N</i> = 60 <i>n</i> = 30 Egyptian (27–44 yr); <i>n</i> = 30 UAE (25–47 yr)	Drawing assessment; Questionnaires
Abdul-Naby (2008)	Arabic	Egypt	Effectiveness of art therapy (drawing) in reducing loneliness	<i>N</i> = 9 university students 5 male/4 female	Clinical-therapeutic study; pre-/post-art therapy intervention
Al-Dala'an (2012)	Arabic	Egypt	Significant role of art therapy in emotional rehabilitation of people with hearing impairment	<i>N</i> = 3 people with hearing impairment	3 case studies
Al-Bajoury, Hassouna, and Al-Dsuki (2017)	Arabic	Egypt	Effectiveness of art therapy program in reducing negative emotional aspects	<i>N</i> = 5 pediatric patients with diabetes mellitus	Quasi-experimental
Jumu'a (2012)	Arabic	Egypt	Significance of art activities to improve social interaction skills	<i>N</i> = 14 (8–14 yr) autistic	Experimental
Mahmud (2019)	Arabic	Egypt	Effectiveness of art therapy program to empower self-strength and reduce emotional disorders	<i>N</i> = 30 (12–16 yr) girls in juvenile care	Experimental
Alyami (2015)	English	Saudi	Art therapy use in counterterrorism; help former terrorists shift ideology toward the real Jihad message	<i>N</i> = 2918 (18–40 yr)	Exploratory research
Alfaheed and Alyami (2007)	Arabic	Saudi	Role of expressive art therapy strategies in rehabilitation	<i>N</i> = 3 with spine diseases	3 case studies
Alda'elej (2019)	Arabic	Saudi	Role of art therapy to overcome the trauma of disease	<i>N</i> = 4 AIDS patients	4 case studies; Questionnaires; Drawing assessments
Alkhenaini (2013)	English	Saudi	Contribution of art therapy processes to elementary students developing creative expression	Saudi elementary students	Qualitative methodology research
Abd-Elmuhsin and Amer (2019)	Arabic	Saudi	Effects of art therapy on students' behavioral disorders	<i>N</i> = 25 elementary students	Experimental
Carlier et al. (2020)	English	UAE/Qatar	COVID-19 impact and art therapy development in region	Patients at Psychological and Counselling Center, Dubai and hospital setting, Qatar	Qualitative
Nabarro (2005)	English	Sudan	Provide positive, creative experience; develop psychosocial program; build children's self-confidence and esteem	Displaced people who moved to Khartoum to escape war/food scarcity; former street girls at a government institution	12-session (3-month) art expression modalities
Abu Sway, Nashashibi, Salah, and Shweiki (2005)	English	Palestine: Ramallah, Jenin, Nablus	How art therapy offers deep self-expression and transformation; strengthen arts as practical method; integrate body-mind approach to build appropriate programs; culturally relevant to political violence effects	<i>N</i> = 8 women who lost loved ones during the military attack <i>N</i> = 18 doctors and ambulance drivers; displaced families	Multimodality arts expression; Case studies
Nagamey, Goldner, and Lev-Wiesel (2018)	English	Palestine-Israel	Show perspectives of social suffering in interviews and drawings	<i>N</i> = 20 Palestinian adults crossing Israeli checkpoint	Qualitative phenomenological
Staples, Abdel Atti, and Gordon (2011)	English	Palestine (Gaza)	Understand mind-body interactions; increase self-care and awareness; use art to decrease PTSD depression, hopelessness	<i>N</i> = 129 in 45 groups	10-session drawing-based intervention; Case studies
Yaish (2019)	English	Palestine (Gaza)	Focus on here and now, resilience, empowerment, self-soothing; reflect and find self in mandala-making group	Mental health professionals working with traumatized people	Case study
Lev-Wiesel and Al-Krenawi (2000)	English	Israel	Examine perceptions of family among Bedouin-Arab children	<i>N</i> = 20 (12 girls/8 boys) Bedouin-Arab children of polygamous families	Drawing assessment
Al-Krenawi and Slater (2007)	English	Israel	Visual art response to destruction of in under resourced, underrecognized villages	<i>N</i> = 19 (11–14 yr) Bedouin-Arab children	Art-based activities, storytelling, descriptive analysis
Huss (2007)	English	Israel	Creativity to improve support system, share experiences and coping strategies; emphasize symbolic over direct expression	<i>N</i> = 15 widowed or divorced Bedouin women living on their own	Arts-based research; Case study

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Table 1 (continued)

Author (year)	Language	Country	Study purpose	Sample information	Methodology
Logrono (2022)	English	Qatar	Engaging art therapy as a mean of expression for patients in isolation rooms during the pandemic.	N = 166 patients at Hamad general Hospital	Qualitative method, semi-structured interviews
Abdel Latif (2021)	English	Lebanon	How participatory art can empower the families of the missing that they have to deal with disappearance in daily life, improving their mental health.	N = 4 relatives of missing persons after the war in Lebanon	Arts-based research; Case study, semi-structured, open-ended, and in-depth interviews

### Collate/Summarize Results

We analyzed and categorized the relevant studies and documents based on the study's purpose and document type. Categories were: evaluating artwork as a measure of personal and social aspects, art therapy as a tool to overcome psychological or emotional problems, art therapy as a communication tool to promote better social adjustment, or art therapy to respond to difficult experiences.

### Results

The 27 reviewed studies explored the relationship between art engagement in a therapeutic setting with various concepts related to the populations. Most (14) were written in Arabic; 11 were conducted in Egypt, seven with the Palestinian population in Palestine and Israel, five in Saudi Arabia, two in the United Arab Emirates (UAE; one of them also included Qatar).

#### Art Therapy in a War Zone

Worldwide, hundreds of projects dealing with art as an expression of internal emotions were conducted after World War II. These projects led to the acceptance of art therapy as a tool of internal emotional expression among those returning from the war and their families (Alduqail, 2020). Similarly, the Arab world is an active war zone and region of intense conflicts. Thus, the population is vulnerable, having frequent exposure to traumatic events and their aftermath. Distinctly, children who experience such conflict suffer from physical and psychological consequences, such as PTSD, depressive symptoms, and anxiety (Behbehani, 2015). A safe space can be provided by art therapy for traumatized individuals who are unable to express their conscious and unconscious problems because of their trauma history (Kemp et al., 2022).

Correspondingly, some nonprofit organizations that protect the rights of Arab children in the Middle East (Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine), such as the U.S.-based Middle East Children's Alliance, they started their projects in 1988. One project from the Art therapy programs is art by Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip (Veronese, Castiglioni, & Said, 2010). This is an ongoing project that succeeds in promoting cross-cultural collaboration between East and West by displaying the artworks of children (Behbehani, 2015). In 2005, the Queen Rania Family and Child Center (QR FCC) established an art-for-healing-violence project to protect women and children in Jordan (Behbehani, 2015). They use art therapy to help the population express their emotions concerning traumatic experiences. Recently, since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and children has intensified, which has driven the QR FCC to expand its activities, offering a series of programs in partnership with local communities and institutions focusing on several activities, including art therapy programs. These programs follow sociocultural sensitivities while respecting international psychotherapy standards (Jordan River Foundation, 2022).

Art therapists from high-income countries frequently travel to low- or middle-income countries to achieve program goals, work with people in need, and widen their knowledge—often facing composited cross-cultural ethical obstacles (Potash et al., 2017).

### Pioneer Arab Art Therapists

Art therapy began in the Arab world in Egypt with Malika (Alduqail, 2020), who researched the field of psychiatric diagnosis by drawing in the 1950 s, followed by other researchers like Amer and Abdel-Hamid (Alyami, 2001). In the early 1990 s, Alyami's (Saudi Arabia) pioneering work led authorities to recognize and include art therapy in professional practices (Behbehani, 2015; Leeds, 2015). Another pioneer in the Arab region is the art psychotherapist Yaish (Yaish, 2019). After graduating from her studies in the United Kingdom, she founded the *Kaynouna* Center in Jordan in 2012 (Freij, 2016). The Center, the first of its kind, aims to provide art psychotherapy to those in need and be part of a journey to spread insight, awareness, and compassion in their lives (Yaish, 2019).

Behbehani, another female Arab leader, is an art therapist, senior psychologist, and certified creative psychotherapist at a mental health clinic in Kuwait. Behbehani (2015) wrote a chapter about culturally sensitive art therapy in the Arab world, the controversial perspectives of art as an expression, and its different aspects that take sociocultural considerations into account. Further, Alduqail, a Saudi artist, art therapist, and researcher, works with people with disabilities (Alduqail, 2020) and highlights the importance of plastic arts and its applied practices for the past 70 years in the the Arab world.

### Art Therapy by Region/Country

#### Egypt

Egypt is the most populous country in the Arab world (106 million). There is a significant need to implement and provide mental health care services within the network of primary health care, improving access to medication, psychosocial interventions, and social support programs (Elnemais Fawzy, 2017). In Egypt, art therapy is practiced mainly in mental health services. For example, in the new Nozha hospital, there is an art therapy department. A new program in the Faculty of Art Education at Helwan University offers a diploma in art therapy without fieldwork training. In addition, the Afro-Asian Art Therapists Association, in Cairo, offers training courses for those interested in working in art therapy.

In 2019, Alexandria University conducted a scientific conference of art therapy, "Art Therapy Between Theory and Practice for Achieving Sustainable Development." Egyptian researchers, such as Malika, have the earliest experiences with art therapy in the Arab world (Alyami, 2001). Amer and Abdel-Hamid followed Malika and worked on diagnosing psychiatric patients through their drawings, the relationship between drawings and social behavior, and the effects of culture on drawings. In 1980, Al-Bassiouni wrote about art therapy and the role of art in mental health, discussing many fundamental elements in psychoanalysis and the use of drawing as analytical material that reflects emotions (Al-Bassiouni, 1999, 2000). Further, Khedr wrote several articles regarding the implications of art therapy in clinical settings (Khedr 1993, 1998).

Khedr began researching children's drawings to assess social and personal adjustment. Later, he used the same art assessment with adolescent boys. He conducted another study regarding the relationship between children's drawings and mental and emotional states. A large comparative study of the clinical implications of drawings of males and



females, found that most participants preferred to draw their own gender (Khedr, 1996). Khedr also studied cultural backgrounds and their roles in kinesthetic family drawings (Al-wakeel & Khedr, 2009) in Egypt and the UAE.

Abdul-Naby (2008) conducted a clinical-therapeutic study on the effectiveness of art therapy (drawing) in reducing loneliness among university students. The results showed significant differences in the feeling-of-loneliness scores before and after an art therapy intervention (Abdul-Naby, 2008). In 2012, Al-Dala'an wrote about the significant role of art therapy in emotional rehabilitation for people with hearing impairments (Al-Dala'an, 2008). In 2013, Muhammad discussed art therapist characteristics and specifications needed for working with individuals with special needs (Muhammad, 2013). Al-Bajoury et al.'s (2017) quasi-experimental study with pediatric patients with diabetes mellitus examined art therapy programs tailored to reduce negative emotion (Al-Bajoury et al., 2017).

One of the Egyptian Autism Society's projects with children used art as a tool to increase quality of life and self-esteem. They chose art modalities that are familiar in the region (e.g., weaving) so that they would be culturally acceptable and readily integrated in daily activities (Behbehani, 2015). Another study (Jumu'a, 2012) described the significance of art activities for communication to improve social interaction skills among autistic children. An experimental study with teenage girls (12–16 years old) in a juvenile-care setting found art therapy programs to be effective in increasing inner strength and daily living skills and reducing symptoms of emotional disorders (Mahmud, 2019).

#### Arabian Gulf

The Arabian Gulf consists of six countries: the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. A diverse mix of locals and expatriates have traveled to the Gulf to take part in its economic development (Powell, Gómez-Carlier, & El-Halawani, 2021). Arab Gulf countries share cultural, historical, and economic similarities. In recent decades, the area has undergone substantial changes. Rapid modernization is sometimes in stark contrast with cultural norms. Expatriate culture has undoubtedly influenced these aspects (Powell et al., 2021).

Art therapy is in its infancy within the Arabian Gulf alongside the broader social sector, and it is relatively new; most art therapists completed their training in the West. As such, there is a lack of art therapy research in the region. Considering the Arabian Gulf's Muslim culture, religion is a critical cultural issue alongside social and family structures. These components may have a tangible impact on art therapy practice within the population (Carlier et al., 2020).

**Saudi Arabia.** Saudi Arabia is one of the most politically and religiously conservative countries in the Arabian Gulf (Behbehani, 2015).

Nevertheless, it is a pioneer of creative innovation and art therapy program development (Behbehani, 2015). Starting in 1995, Alyami, one of the first Arab art therapists in the region and creator of the first art therapy program in Saudi Arabia (Behbehani, 2015; Leeds, 2015), established art therapy in schools and this led to the inclusion of art therapy within recognized professional practices. In 2000, the Saudi Ministry of Health added *expressive art therapist* to the list of health professions. Saudi Arabia became the first Arab country to grant a license to practice this profession in 2005, and Alyami obtained the first Saudi license. He founded a medical-based art therapy program in a clinical rehabilitation program in Riyadh, the first official practice in the Arab world.

One of Alyami (2015) notable projects was an exploratory study coined, "From Jihad to Rehab," using art therapy and religious reeducation in counterterrorism. This project aimed to help former Saudi terrorists shift their ideology toward the real message of Jihad—defending honor, family, land, and country through nonviolence. Art became a significant component designed to uncover inner thoughts and feelings regarding individual ideologies (Alyami, 2009; Behbehani, 2015).

Regarding the concept of art therapy in Saudi hospitals, current

approaches focus on a mind-body approach to help patients with psychological and physical difficulties. Studies looked into the role of art therapy in rehabilitation and revealed the emotional problems people with spinal and traumatic brain injuries experience (Alfaheed & Alyami, 2007 & Alyami, 2009). In another study, art therapy was found to help AIDS patients overcome the trauma of the disease and reduced their fear and anxiety, demonstrated in diagnostic drawings (Alda'elej, 2019).

Several experimental studies examined using art therapy to improve the social skills of children with autism, and were depicted as a promising non-verbal intervention, using art to relate to the children's world. The therapeutic intervention combined with artistic activities could reduce symptoms of behavioral disorders in autistic children with mild cognitive disabilities and improve their communication skills (Jamal Al-dein, 2009; Mustafa, 2015). Another project helped improve visual communication and social skills among autistic children using weaving arts (Alduqail, 2017).

Art therapy is used in physical rehabilitation and general psychological support in Saudi Arabia and is described in the literature as a broad and diverse discipline. These approaches to art therapy were adapted according to the local culture and religion, and art therapists recognized the healing potential of artistic expression (Alyami, 2009; Alyami, 1995). The studies reported that patients in art therapy sessions felt safe and comfortable, experienced the different art modalities and materials, and were exposed to art's healing power which obtained a new role in their life, and was experienced as an effective tool to improve mental health. At one medical center an annual art exhibition of art created in the studio model, invites patients participate in a social event with the staff and community. Besides the opportunity for individual exhibition of their art, this event especially benefits disabled patients; it increases participant's self-esteem and self-confidence and encourages them to continue to be active in their rehabilitation process. Further, it supports the art therapy unit's pioneering work by gaining recognition throughout the hospital and the community at large (Behbehani, 2015).

Recently, the number of art education classes in Saudi Arabia increased. Alkhenaini (2013) conducted a qualitative study examining the contribution of art therapy processes and techniques with Saudi elementary students. The study examined three art therapy techniques (expressive painting, expressive collage, and visual journal) used to develop creative expression in public and private Saudi elementary art classrooms. Another experimental study (Abd-Almuhsin, 2019) examined the effects of art therapy on students' behavior and showed reductions in negative behaviors in the classroom.

**UAE.** The Art Therapy International Centre (ATIC) is the first and only licensed art therapy center in Dubai, UAE (Powell, 2019). Founded by Sara Powell, a British art therapist. Additionally, in 2016, the University of Sharjah, medical college, UAE, hosted the first art therapy conference in the Middle East.

A recent article discussed COVID-19's impact on society and the development of regional art therapy (Carlier et al., 2020) at the ATIC Dubai Psychological and Counselling Center, which specializes in art therapy services in Dubai. It identified how the global pandemic increased awareness of cultural competence and led to safety restrictions and online art therapy services. A group of three art therapists practicing in the UAE met: One with U.K. nationality lived in the Gulf since childhood; the second, from Egypt, was born and raised in Dubai; the third was from Colombia and trained in the United States.

The pandemic provided an opportunity to expand services and accessibility by moving to a virtual environment. Online art therapy granted privacy; clients could complete their sessions from their own homes. An overall increase in service access and reduced stigma was perceived; the number of female clients using the services increased. The services followed the relational cultural theory model, especially relevant in the Arabian Gulf cultural context. Art therapists encountered technical, cultural, social, and religious issues during online sessions. Muslim clients seemed to share Hadith and Quranic scripture more than usual with their therapist and reflected their spirituality in their

artwork. Their use of calligraphy and references to spiritual themes increased compared to pre-pandemic sessions (Carlier et al., 2020).

The Red Pencil is an organization that was founded in Singapore in 2011 by Laurence Vandenborre, a registered and certified art therapist. Over the years, the organization has expanded its scope of activities, developing and offering creative arts therapy programs worldwide, combining it with humanitarian missions. Currently, The Red Pencil has Institutions of Public Character in Singapore and Geneva, a Foundation of Public Utility in Belgium, and is a registered Non-Profit Organization in UAE (The Red Pencil, 2022).

A recent paper described the clinical perspectives of three art therapists (2 foreigners and 1 Arab) practicing in ATIC (Powell et al., 2021). They developed a model that attempts to address the particular multicultural needs of the community. The model captures 5 main areas of clinical importance (attachment, trust, boundaries, spirituality, and awareness).

**Qatar.** Qatar is witnessing a significant economic growth and modernization. The Qatar's health care system's new protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic raised cultural issues. Besides online collaborative sessions, art therapy services continued face-to-face meetings in the hospital environment with social distancing and safety considerations. The frontline art therapy sessions were in oncology and hematology. The only art therapist in the child life team had graduated from an Australian university. She adopted the Arabic and Muslim collectivist culture and shared the lockdown experience.

The lockdown experience underlined how various cultures deal with multifaceted stressors. For example, many parents and guardians in the region hid their children's cancer diagnosis from the children, leaving the children uninformed and unaware of the complex medical treatment. This dynamic initially created personal and professional ethical dilemmas for the art therapist working with the children (Carlier et al., 2020).

At Hamad General Hospital, the *Emery* project aimed to engage patients in isolation rooms during the pandemic in art therapy as a mean of expression. A qualitative method was implemented using individual, semi-structured interviews. Most of the 166 patients reported an increase in positive emotion following participation in an art therapy session (Logrono et al., 2022).

**Kuwait.** In Kuwait, citizens enjoy more civil and political rights, compared to other countries in the region. The country is one of the most wealthy Arab nations. However, Kuwait is a conservative country, similar to other Arab Gulf countries, and Kuwaiti women can only vote in municipal and parliamentary elections since 2005 (Al-Kandari & Hasanen, 2012).

It is challenging to establish therapeutic programs in a conservative culture that fears the stigma of therapy—especially for women and families hesitate to let women receive mental health treatment (El-Islam, 2006). The concept of honor in Arab society is a critical barrier to engaging in therapy. Thus, women suffer from considerable psychological or physical harm. To avoid social stigma for themselves and their families, some women choose to suffer silently rather than reveal their physical or sexual abuse. Group art therapy also embodies gender inequality—male clients may participate and exchange experiences, but women cannot be completely open in the group. Due to social restrictions and harsh consequences for discussing issues such as abuse or rape, women rarely have opportunities to express emotional distress.

Art therapy may provide an alternative means for these women: Artmaking experiences could allow them to slowly unmask their emotions without violating their sociocultural need for privacy within groups (Kinoti, 2008). One example of removing therapy's stigma is the Soor Center for cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy. *Soor* in Arabic means *gate* or *protective wall*, representing a creative gate to alternative therapeutic paths. The Soor Center began practicing art therapy in 2013 and encourages female clients to explore multiple ways of therapy, recognizing these women as gateways to Kuwaiti families' health (Behbehani, 2015).

Another example of pioneering is the Kuwaiti Society for Handicapped, established in 1971. Several local families fund the society, which provides inpatient services for children under 18 who suffer from mental and physical disabilities (Behbehani, 2015). It offers creative art therapy for clients in this region to increase well-being and empower individuals.

**Bahrain.** The island of Bahrain is the smallest Arab nation in the Arabian Gulf. Dalal Al-Sindi established the first and only art therapy center in Bahrain in 2012. Dalal is a qualified professional who graduated from a graduate program in the UK. When Dalal returned to the Middle East, she worked in Saudi Arabia at The Rehabilitation Hospital and was supervised by Dr. Awad Al Yami. Dalal is back in Bahrain with a mission to make art therapy more accessible, with a local understanding and appreciation of Bahrain's culture and people. The center's services offer open art therapy studio, art therapy groups, and individual sessions. Art therapy is approached by different professionals in the medical, educational, and corporate fields who want to know more about art therapy and its benefits (Time Out Bahrain, 2015).

#### Jordan

Jordan, with a total population of 9.5 million, is home to an estimated 1.2 million registered and unregistered refugees from the Syrian conflict (Kemp et al., 2022).

The *Kaynouna* Arab Art Therapy Center in Amman, founded in 2012 as the first art psychotherapy center in the Arab world (Freij, 2016), runs projects in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, UAE, and other Arab countries. They travel to refugee camps, providing art psychotherapy workshops and training (psychosocial teams, teachers, and nurses) to those in need. They have trained and worked with more than 20 nongovernmental organizations and community centers across the Arab world, partnering and collaborating with international foundations and organizations (Yaish, 2019).

Among *Kaynouna*'s significant initiatives, "SELFIKUNA" emphasizes empowering Arab women through art in trauma-informed groups, presenting them safe spaces to express, process, and contain their feelings. It focuses on women's resilience, self-confidence, and self-compassion. This initiative has reached thousands of women from underprivileged and refugee communities in Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Kurdistan, Yemen, and Lebanon (Yaish, 2019).

The ongoing "Arting Out" initiative, started in 2015, is a trauma-informed art psychotherapy session with thousands of refugees and underprivileged children in the Arab world. The "Davinci's Children" initiative founded in 2016 provides psychotherapy groups for orphans and their alternative mothers (Yaish, 2019).

#### Sudan

Sudan has no professional art therapy association or educational program. Due to the ongoing political conflict in Sudan, millions of internally displaced people moved to Khartoum to escape the war and food scarcity the conflict induced. War Child Netherlands funded a program to provide a positive, creative experience to children who have lost their childhoods and live unstable and broken lives. This program, organized by the British artist Nabarro, emphasizes politically and socially engaged art creation among children from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Nabarro, 2005) in creative and artistic sessions with several art modalities (art, music, and drama).

Nabarro presented the project as part of a book called *Art Therapy and Political Violence with Art*; she provided examples of artists who are able to use art making to access healing potential in places where conventional art therapists are not available. Emphasizing artmaking as a safe opportunity in a nurturing environment, enabling children to enrich their inner selves and give meaning to their lives. When verbal expression is difficult, the children can create art, building their confidence and self-esteem. Observations revealed that the children felt more comfortable physically; their bodies relaxed. This safe environment allowed authentic experiences and dared them to imagine and create their

fantasies. Workshops are usually 12 weekly sessions. Nabbaro's project was supervised by an art therapist.

Art therapy played a positive role in the lives of former street girls staying in a government institution. Most had lived through harsh experiences, such as abuse and addiction. They met weekly for 3 months at the center for 1.5-hour sessions in an "open studio" setting where the patient's choice is a crucial component of the process. The girls reported feeling stronger, having less aggressive behaviors, and better social skills. Because the girls came from several areas, they had to express themselves and communicate in several languages. Art was reported to ease communication in group therapy. Nabarro (2020) presented a case study about working with these girls and described the art exhibit, named, "Feast of Color," where they showed their artwork and themselves to the world in a positive manner.

### *Palestine*

Palestinian people living in the Palestinian authority suffer from Israeli military occupation. This form of political violence consists of physical force and psychological trauma; the sociopolitical context of the lives of this nation create a need for sensitive trauma-informed interventions. Palestinians have been suffering from prolonged oppression with continuous threat and fear for their lives for several generations (Abu Sway et al., 2005). According to the Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC), the psychological effects of the political violence has a long-term psychological affect on 35% of Palestinians. The lack of basic needs being met is manifested as a lack of control over their environment, food insecurity, and a general lack of safety, obstructing Palestinians' natural development towards self-actualization and growth.

The PCC, established in Jerusalem in 1983, combines various mental health approaches, among them expressive art therapy, with a goal to meet the community's needs and improve mental health. In 1998, the PCC collaborated with the International School for Interdisciplinary Studies in Israel (ISIS-Israel), an institute in Tel Aviv that teaches professionals like psychologists and teachers to use psychodrama (directed by Yaacov Naor) to offer PCC staff a diploma program in art therapy. The PCC emphasizes actualizing art therapy as a healing tool among this traumatized population. In one of the programs, a multidisciplinary supportive crisis team works with first responders who are inherently at-risk due to the nature of their work (Abu Sway et al., 2005; Leeds, 2015). Nevertheless, there is no professional association or art therapy education program in Palestine.

A qualitative phenomenological study regarding Palestinian adults crossing Israeli checkpoints described various aspects of social suffering as depicted in interviews and drawings (Nagamey et al., 2018). The themes that emerged included deep distress, using a variety of coping strategies, and the experience of social fragmentation. Several visual phenomena in the participants' drawings supported their verbal expressions.

Another study provides case studies from the cities of Ramallah, Jenin, and Nablus in Palestine, where interventions were offered concurrently with the complex 2002 political situation (Abu Sway et al., 2005). The need for Palestinians to build their potential for emotional, creative expression to deal with living under constant trauma is clear. Art therapy provides a safe transitional space to attain a sense of integrity and control, contributing to the healing process (Abu Sway et al., 2005). The various participants in this study reacted positively to art therapy and stated that they could connect with the healing process through it.

Most participants reported accepting the creative process despite the collective society's cultural view that they should deal with personal pain solemnly. This success of art therapy interventions may indicate that cultural adaption is significant, and art therapists greatly benefit when they understand how to adjust appropriately. They can discover art therapy's unique ability to formulate modalities according to the situation and answer the specific communities' needs (Leeds, 2015).

**Ramallah.** In March 2002, Ramallah was under a prolonged (28-

day) curfew. Once trained crisis therapists could enter the city, they began working with the victims of the curfew and political violence. The interventions followed the expressive arts therapy approach using various modalities. One group worked with women who had lost direct relatives during the military attacks. Palestinian women often control themselves in the contexts of nationality and resistance when they lose someone; they tend not to show grief and suffer silently. The intervention assisted the women to complete the grief cycle and express their feelings. Another supportive intervention was with doctors and ambulance drivers who witnessed intense traumatic events. Participants found some consolation in the group, relieved stress, and expressed their frustration and anger using clay (Abu Sway et al., 2005).

**Jenin.** In 2002, 52 individuals were killed, and 400 homes were demolished in Jenin (Abu Sway et al., 2005). An art therapy intervention used guided visualization techniques to help displaced families connect with their lost homes. The intervention aimed at helping survivors overcome the tragedy, recover their mental capacities, restore a mental picture of their lost physical homes, and imagine their dream homes using multiple art modalities (Abu Sway et al., 2005).

**Nablus.** Nablus remained under curfew for 78 consecutive days in 2002. Thousands of families suffered loss and many were forced from their homes. After this prolonged curfew, the PCC worked with groups, especially traumatized teenagers. The aim was to empower participants' sense of control over their lives by processing their overwhelming experiences. Using multimodal art expression (clay, painting, psychodrama, and poetry), participants were encouraged to engage in daily life and connect with the present.

**Gaza.** Gaza presents a continuing collective trauma due to the effects of Israel's blockade (Staples et al., 2011). People in Gaza struggle with severe psychological problems, such as fear and anxiety; and most children suffer from panic attacks and depression (Yaish, 2019). Thus, Washington's Mind-Body Medicine Center started a program in Gaza. They worked with groups using drawing-based interventions for 10 sessions which were tailored to emphasize how interactions between mind and body work and aimed at increasing self-care and awareness of traumatized individuals (Staples et al., 2011).

**Yaish (2019),** a Jordanian (of Palestinian origin) pioneer art psychotherapist, recently established another art therapy program. She had traveled for several years in the Arab world to train professionals and provide art therapy groups for populations who witnessed challenging experiences due to their political background. Yaish shared that, despite her vast knowledge, the Gaza incident was the hardest.

**Yaish (2019)** Gaza project lasted only 3 weeks, training a team of mental health professionals working with traumatized people to increase resilience, self-empowerment, and teach self-soothing skills. She encouraged them to engage in reflection and find themselves in a mandala-making group. Each session consisted of making art in complete silence for two hours. The participants reported feeling relief, which they had missed for so long. Yaish invited them to use this technique as a form of self-care, allowing the light of their art therapy experience into their "siege."

**Palestinian-Arab Citizens of Israel (PACI).** By 1949, the previous-majority Arab population became a minority since the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948, which is coined the Nakba (disaster) in Arabic. At this time, around 750,000 Palestinians became refugees in neighboring Arab countries (Al-Haj, 1991); around 13 000 were killed; 156,000 remained in Israel, around 46,000 of them were displaced from their lands and became "internal refugees," forced to move to new Israeli communities after their villages were destroyed during and right after the Israeli occupation (Al-Haj, 1986; Molavi, 2013). Many had family ties to Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and refugees in Arab countries. The PACI face an inherent conflict between their national Palestinian and civic Israeli identities (Beshara, 1999). As Palestinian-Arab citizens of a Jewish state, they live in a paradoxical situation defined by their stateless citizenship (Molavi, 2013). They consider themselves Palestinian (Smootha, 1990) but are Israeli citizens,

and currently comprise 21% of Israeli population.

In Israel, the field of creative/expressive therapies is formal and widespread. According to YAHAT (י.א.ח.), the Israeli Association for Creative Arts Therapy founded in 1971, around 7,000 Arab and Jewish professional art therapists practice in various settings. Although the profession currently has no legal status, the Israeli Ministry of Education and Health and diverse other settings employ art therapists.

The Bedouin are a formal Arab nomadic culture now primarily settled in the Middle East, including Israel (Leeds, 2015). They comprise around 200 000 PACI (Molavi, 2013). Two experimental studies examined Bedouin children's artworks as reflecting their lives. The first study was about the perception of family" among Bedouin-Arab children from polygamous families as reflected in their drawings (Lev-Wiesel & Al-Krenawi, 2000). The drawings divided the biological and subfamilies through lines, colors, and spaces. Biological mothers were larger and placed higher on the page than were the other wives' figures.

The second study used visual art to respond to the government policy of destroying homes in underresourced and underrecognized Negev villages. The descriptive analysis showed that the children could express their adverse emotional and psychological distress (Al-Krenawi & Slater, 2007).

Another arts-based research was conducted with impoverished, widowed, or divorced Bedouin women living on their own. These women faced a challenging life without a husband, unpopular in their culture. The group provided a support system to share experiences and coping strategies, and the art therapist presented a counseling approach based on creativity, emphasizing artwork as a "trigger for words" (Huss, 2007).

A recent qualitative meta-analysis described art therapy's status and situation in the Israeli educational system (Snir et al., 2018). The research contained nine studies involving 131 Arab and Jewish interviewees (art therapists, supervisors, counselors, teachers, and school principals). Studies related to the Arab sector reported lower art therapy awareness and higher fear of stigma. These results may be associated with cultural sensitivity towards therapy and inadequate therapy settings and resources. Despite significant improvements in this field, many therapists indicated the need for additional therapy hours in the school system.

A Jewish-American art therapist raised in Israel established "Arts-bridge," an art therapy program related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Nathan, Trimble, & Fuxman, 2014). Both Israeli and Palestinian youth traveled to the United States to participate in a 3-week workshop. The program aimed to develop open communication between the two groups. Art therapy's role was to address the prolonged conflict and trauma they experienced and create a new dialogue, assisting participants to build a better post-conflict society.

The projects described above were held in various locations in Palestine and Israel (with PACI), which is a collective and ongoing traumatic society in a region whose people are suffering from the effects of occupation and displacement (hence, the need for more supportive programs like art therapy). Art therapy is a relatively well developed profession in this area, possibly due to Israeli's proximity and occupation, thus the emphasis on art therapy with Palestinians is deemed appropriate.

### Lebanon

Lebanon is the smallest country in continental Asia (around 10 452 square kilometers), located in the Mediterranean. A total of 17 religious communities are officially recognized by the government. Christians and Muslims make up the majority of them. Lebanese society recognizes diversity in terms of religious affiliation officially and commonly. (Al Ariss, 2010). In terms of wars and collective trauma, Lebanon has a difficult history: in 1975, Lebanon had a civil war that lasted for 15 years, resulting in thousands of casualties, victims, and missing people (Abdel Latif, 2021); the war with Israel in 2006; and more recently, the devastating explosion at Beirut's port. Art therapy is now being

practiced in several settings in Lebanon. In particular, it was led by pioneering Lebanese art therapists with western training. Mona Chebaro is a registered art therapist who graduated from the US with more than 20 years of experience in the field; nowadays, she works at the American University of Beirut medical center. Chebaro wrote about inquiry in art and therapy in a crosscultural context (Chebaro, 1998). She mentioned that art therapists need to keep in mind that the interpretation of artworks may differ with foreign clients due to the influence of their ethnic background. By attempting to keep the interpretations consistent with their specific academic training, they may hinder the growth of the therapeutic process by stereotyping the meanings of their art symbols.

In 2017 *Artichoke Studio* was established in Beirut by a team of creative arts therapists, all graduates of internationally recognized universities with graduate degrees in the field. As part of its services, the center offers workshops and projects collaborating with various local and international organizations targeting specific populations like war trauma survivors, addicts, domestic abuse victims, and gender equality (Artichoke Studio, n.d.).

In a case study involving the families of missing Lebanese, whose members disappeared during the war (Abdel Latif, 2021) personal interviews were conducted with 4 relatives of missing people. This paper explores how participatory art supported the families of missing Lebanese at personal, collective, and transitional justice levels. The study explored how participatory art can empower families dealing with these disappearances on a daily basis. Family's paintings and drawings were displayed on chairs symbolizing the void left by the disappeared. They reported that art-making can help these families find meaning in their experience and find new hope (Abdel Latif, 2021).

One paper for which we found only the abstract (Geha, 2019), was an art therapy workshop with older adults. They transformed traditional spices into vibrant paints, a unique expressive art therapy tool connecting their tradition and society using multisensory stimulation.

At the beginning of the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, Red Pencil offered an online program of art therapy led by Lebanese art therapists supervised by American art therapists. In this project, they worked with 90 families and children who suffered from long-term illnesses such as cancer. Furthermore, Red Pencil continues to provide art therapy services to the community in the wake of the Beirut port explosion in 2021 (The Red Pencil, 2022).

Importantly, as shown in Table 1, our review found no studies or published projects regarding art therapies (specifically, visual art therapies) in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Oman, Bahrain, Yemen Iraq or Syria. Projects with Syrian refugees in other countries were not included in this study.

### Discussion

This study proposed to fill the gap in literature regarding art therapy in the Arab World. As art therapy is in its early stages in the Arab World, this scoping review's findings indicate the growth of art therapy programs in these regions, and our findings support their importance. Programs were constructed with various aims and worked with individuals from diverse ages, populations, and backgrounds. Most reviewed studies were published after 2000 and conducted in Egypt and the Arabian Gulf, where this field is considered an official profession.

There is evidence of increasing interest in the contribution of art therapy to mental health and education systems in general. Much of the literature is exploratory, distributed across disciplines, and serving various purposes: evaluation and assessment tools; helping individuals transform personal ideologies; and suggesting expressive tools and strategies to overcome psychological, physical, behavioral, and social difficulties. By applying a scoping-review methodology, we identified several standard features of this body of literature that have implications for future research. We argue that there is a need for sustained study and research programs that draw upon multiple perspectives to support conceptual and theoretical development of culturally sensitive and



adapted art therapy interventions in the Arab world.

The included literature featured art therapy projects in several Arab countries where art therapy is a leading or adjunctive therapeutic tool. In all the reviewed studies, participants reported feeling safe during the sessions, art was found to be an efficacious and gradual way to unmask emotions without violating their sociocultural needs. Arabs of all ages succeeded in connecting with art making, and there is increasing interest for its application among populations who suffered from violence and traumatic experiences. In conjunction with other forms of treatment, the use of art in group therapy interventions may complement all phases of group and individual development (Kemp et al., 2022).

Recognition that engaging in the arts is necessary for societal, community, and personal enrichment is growing. However, working in the Arab world requires enculturation, anthropological investigation, religious examination, psychosocial understanding, and appreciation of each country's visual expression and identity, and it's important to maintain flexible (Behbehani, 2015; Powell et al., 2021). As a result of the economic growth in some regions, such as the Arabian Gulf, there is multiculturalism (Powell et al., 2021). While foreign art therapists have been helpful in many settings, we present the need for more Arab art therapists in the Arab world, especially among communities that have experienced traumatic experiences. This is because of the consistent political conflicts, language barriers, and beliefs, local art therapist may be able to provide easier understanding and trust-building, and possibly more circumstances and mutual experiences can be shared.

Art making should be approached gradually to allow repressed cultural, ethical, religious, and personal connotations to emerge. Art therapists need to consider the risks associated with misdiagnosing the existing relationship between their clients' art and culture. There may be a lack of education in the region for Westerners. Neither all Arabs nor all Arabic countries are the same. The generalization of the meaning of these client's visual vocabulary can lead to misdiagnosis due to misconceptions of cultural heritage. For art therapists interested in treating foreign clients, a democratic approach and multicultural education are essential. It will be easier for them to overcome cultural barriers with foreign clients if they accept alternative perspectives, so they can feel safe and project their personal symbols (Chebaro, 1998).

This scoping review is the first within this body of knowledge to map and shed light on new directions to move forward this area of research. Continued development in this field has growth potential, especially in examining how the arts and their various aspects can enhance mental health. Moreover, advancing such a strategy may elevate the Arab population, giving them tools to support their journey towards hope and healing.

## Limitations

The critical limitation of this scoping review was the geographic frame for including articles—Arab countries in a specific regional society. Several projects have been conducted with Arab populations in different parts of the world, such as with Arab refugees in Europe and the United States, and we may have missed some studies.

Arab art therapists, who have been working in their communities for many years, are promoting the therapeutic benefits of this tool, but they are not publishing enough in academic journals.

## Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

A culturally appropriate implementation of art therapy is required to examine this Western-based profession, in non-western societies. It is essential to understand universal elements of the therapeutic process along with culturally specific art therapy practices (Al-Krenawi et al., 2000; McNiff & Barlow, 2009). Being culturally sensitive and humble is necessary for art therapists working in foreign cultures and their home countries, while being trained in Western countries (Betts, 2013; Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005; Talwar, 2018). A deeper understanding of the

traditions, ideological shifts, and taboos can help art therapists identify contextual issues regarding their practices and stigma in applying therapy in specific cultures (Behbehani, 2015). Because the field is relatively new in the Arab region, there is limited research; cultural awareness needs to increase and be adapted into practice (Carlier et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

This scoping review examines the practice of art therapy in the Arab world. It explores the conceptual understanding of art therapy and its practice, which varies geographically (Karkou, Martinsone, Nazarova, & Vaverniece, 2011). While the studies reviewed demonstrated similar benefits of using art therapy in a variety of settings, most were not examined using rigorous research design. Thus more well designed studies of art therapy are needed in the Arab world. Art therapy's crosscultural dimensions must be delineated to encourage further intercultural research and cooperation. Future outcomes may increase attention to crosscultural art therapy practice, training, and research and the arts' involvement in crosscultural studies (McNiff & Barlow, 2009). When using art therapy assessments in another culture, their validity should be examined in the specific cultural setting in which they are being implemented. Determining which assessment aspects are universal or culturally specific is an essential objective in future research (Betts, 2013). In addition, further research regarding Arab refugees, which we did not cover in this paper, may provide a more holistic picture of art therapy with Arab communities throughout the world.

The Arab world hosts a limited number of Arab art therapists, but there is a need to expand innovative art therapy services in this region (Behbehani, 2015). Art therapy should be integrated within the broader health, education, and social care sectors to build a healthier communities. The impact of art therapy on the Arab communities in various countries was significant. Most data point to the need for recognition of art therapy in multiple settings, especially oppressed communities and people in need.

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## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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## Declaration of Interest

none.

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