

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: Lingnan University

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 38 - Visual Arts, Design, Creative Media, other Creative Arts and Creative Writing

Title of case study: Art as intervention in serving child victims of family violence

(1) Summary of the impact

Professor Sophia Law's work operationalizes inter-professional collaborations among social work, art therapy and academia. These collaborations demonstrate methodological innovation in using art as an intervention strategy in serving child victims of family violence. Collaborations with the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and school social workers in Hong Kong have influenced social services for child victims. Best practices and findings are disseminated through training seminars, presentations at international conferences and publications in relevant professional journals. Impact is also evidenced by requests from Family & Child Protection Services Units (FCPSU) for continuing partnerships, significant private grants, engagement with many social workers and client feedback.

(2) Underpinning research

Law's research addresses a notable challenge in child social services: the difficulty for children with traumatic experience to articulate their thoughts and feelings. To address this issue, Law's research on art and well-being adopts an interdisciplinary approach, including anthropology, neuroscience, trauma studies, cognitive psychology, art therapy and philosophy of art. The primary research area underpinning this case study is art and trauma, which is one aspect of Law's output on art as a language for people in need, including elders with dementia, people with intellectual disabilities and students with special education needs.

Children suffering and witnessing family violence are constantly stressed by fear, pain and insecurity. Their limited and still-developing cognitive and language abilities prohibit them from comprehending reality and articulating their inner feelings. Their very confused and repressed emotions are studied and elucidated in Law's article on "Colour my growth: A study of art as a language for victims of family violence" (2017) [R1]. Without early intervention, many of the affected children will develop personality and behavioural disorders as they grow older. A fundamental focus of using art as intervention for these children is to help them recognize and liberate their inner feelings. Law's "Art as a language for children in need" (2016) [R2] explains how art, as a form of play, can act as a non-verbal platform to help traumatized children disclose their inner world in images.

Based on her research, Law has created a new methodology, called "Action Research and Art Therapy", that is the first of its kind in terms of structure and implementation. A key innovation is using art therapy not as a short-term intervention, but as a centrepiece of a long-term programme. Working closely with social workers serving child victims of family violence, Law designs and runs many series of creative workshops for child victims of family violence. The creation and implementation of these programmes to train actual medical professionals is one impact of her research. Her book, *Art as intervention in serving secondary child victims of family violence: Introduction & manual* (2016) [R3], is meant to be a manual for social workers.

(3) References to the research

- R1. Law, S. (2017). Colour my growth: A study of art as a language for victims of family violence. *Hong Kong Association of Art Therapists Newsletter* 25.
- R2. Law, S. (2016). Art as a language for children in need. *The Hong Kong Medical Diary* 21(4), 27-29.
- R3. Law, S. (2016). *Art as intervention in serving secondary child victims of family violence: Introduction & manual*. Hong Kong: The Jean C. K. Ho Family Foundation; Social Welfare Department; Department of Visual Studies, Lingnan University.
(250 English-language copies were distributed through the Social Welfare Department of the HKSAR Government. Additional 250 Chinese-language copies were requested and distributed in December 2018.)

(4) Details of the impact

Child victims of family violence are often prevented from healing due to an inability to express themselves verbally, which creates obstacles to the therapeutic process. Prof. Law's research provides a mechanism to overcome these obstacles by generating therapeutic techniques that allow these victims to express themselves through images because art, in its fundamental sense, is a language written in images. It has generated diverse impact from both individual participants and professional bodies adopting Law's methods.

Indirectly, Law's research has immense impact for the children and families accessing these services. Participants in Law's workshops confirm that these techniques have allowed these victims "to be themselves," which is "what they usually lack" (Section 5, item 1) and "express and get some sense of control over their circumstances" (item 2). The effectiveness of these workshops is reflected in social workers' responses to these "highly appreciated" workshops that "opened [their] eyes and deepened [their] understanding" (item 3), and where they "learned a lot" (item 1) about how to apply the skills and concepts to their therapeutic work with clients. A social worker as participant of FCPSU (Tuen Mun) expressed that she and her colleagues will keep up their spirit and continue to work enthusiastically (item 4). The feedback indicates that these workshops could be directly incorporated into their social work since the techniques provided "were very useful for them to render services to their clients" (item 5).

Post-workshop questionnaires report that over 90% of participants found the talks "highly useful" or "useful" (items 6, 7). Many of the social workers are now integrating creative art therapy into their work with children (items 5, 8), continuing the impact of this research and training. Additional feedback and comments include:

- "... art therapy is capable in dealing with emotions."
- "SW can learn more about kids' thoughts through artistic activities."
- "I have a better sense of using art as facilitation in my own profession."
- "I've learned art facilitation skills to provide a stress-free and joyful experience for my child service clients."
- "I've learned how to observe and interpret children's creation in a workshop."
- "I've learned new approaches to ease my clients' emotions, and expand the horizon for my profession."

Prof. Law's research impact is generated from both long-term programme series and individual training seminars. Each long-term programme series, which started in 2012 and continues today, involves 2 to 6 social workers and art therapists as participants, observers and core members of the research team, as well as groups of between 8-24 child victims. In total, these series have

enrolled 37 social workers and 99 children to date. Case social workers, if available, were invited to regular meetings held by the research team to discuss the progress of their specific cases. The breadth and depth of professional collaboration of these series is unique and pioneering in the local context.

Individual training seminars and workshops have impacted over 320 attendees from different organizations, most of whom provide mental health services to countless members of the community. This evidences a multiplier effect of incalculable impact. The positive impact of these collaborations is further indicated by the continuous support of these workshops by the Social Work Department (SWD) and private donors. The SWD has requested and distributed 500 copies of Prof. Law’s instructional materials to its employees for use in their therapeutic practices.

Recognition of the significant impact of the work is further indicated by invitations for Law to speak to medical professionals and high-level government consultation committees. Scope and significance of impact is also evidenced by the number of series attendees and seminar feedback:

Attendees	Details of seminars & examples of feedback
120 (seminar) 50 (workshop)	<p>“Art as intervention for child services” at Tuen Mun Town Hall in September 2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A questionnaire conducted by the organizer, the SWD Tuen Mun District Office, indicated that over 90% of the participants found the talk useful/highly useful (item 6)
30	<p>“Why art and art facilitation” at Yan Oi Tong (YOT) in June 2017</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the seminar talk, YOT made a commitment to begin a collaborative art facilitation service-learning programme with the Office of Service-Learning, Lingnan University.
50 (48 social workers, 2 education counsellors)	<p>“Uses of art in child services,” whole-day experiential training at Tuen Mun Town Hall in November 2017.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback stated “very interesting and meaningful course. I would try to apply the skills and concepts to my services” and “give me inspiration in running future group”.
80 (social workers, teachers, and child services professionals)	<p>「從藝術創作看家庭暴力對兒童成長的影響及康復之路」 at Wong Tai Sin (WTS) Community Centre in January 2018.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A questionnaire conducted by the organizer, the SWD WTS District Office, indicated that over 94% of the participants found the talk useful or very useful (item 7). • A social worker from Harmony House wrote an email to Law and said: “My colleagues and I found the sharing very useful in conducting art-assisted children groups.”

Recognition of the significant impact of the work is further indicated by invitations for Law to speak to medical professionals and high-level government consultation committees, including:

- 10/2015 - “Art as a language for children in need”. Department of Paediatrics & Adolescent, Tuen Mun Hospital. Attendees included 23 paediatricans, nurses and clinical psychologists.
- 10/2016 - “Image writing: The inner world of child victims of family violence”. Nurture A.R.T.: Self Adolescent Mental Health & Art Therapy International Conference.
- 02/2017 - “Art as intervention—inner needs of child victims of family violence”. The Working Group for Combating Violence organized by the Headquarter of the SWD. Attendees included 20 representatives of government departments including the SWD, Justice Department, Police Department, Education Bureau, Hospital Authority, and non-government organizations such as Caritas and The Harmony House.

The substantial and continuous support from the SWD indicates the full commitment of social workers from different FCPSUs. Each social worker who has participated and completed a long-term programme series was required to fill in a questionnaire for their feedback and comments. The series has enhanced social workers' understanding of the needs of their service clients and provided them with new tools for child services. Over 90% social workers involved agreed that art facilitates inner expression of child victims in "a joyful, self-directed and safe platform", while parents have also gained a better understanding of their children in follow-up sessions. The family relationship and the children's emotion were largely stabilized after joining the programme organized by Prof. Law (item 8).

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

1. An email from the social worker involved in FCPSUWTS on 6/10/2017:
"Thank you very much! I am glad to work with you and learned a lot in the experience. Most, I am happy to see the children enjoyed their experiences and found a place to *be* themselves. That's what they usually lack. Do send my thankfulness to Frieda [Research Assistant] and Sarah [Art Therapist] as well!"
2. Senior social worker, the ex-Unit Head of FCPSUTM: email on 18/4/2016:
"Thanks for your sharing. When I caught sight of the two head creature [an image mentioned in Law's article], I immediately recognise it was Y as I have also selected this drawing for sharing at the Committee on Family Violence in the initial stage of the project. Your article makes me recall a lot of the children and our journey of exploring way to help the children express and get some sense of control over their circumstances. It is so touching and has become a critical piece in my life. How is the art facilitation project with Lilian [Liliane] and FCPSU (Tuen Mun) which should still be going on? Hope I still have the privilege to be shared of the findings and another valuable experiences."
3. Chief of Service and Consultant of Department of Paediatrics & Adolescent (Tuen Mun Hospital), Dr. Albert Kwong: email on 14/10/2015:
"We enjoyed your talk very much, and I am sure you opened our eyes and deepened our understanding on this issue. I will contact you soon to discuss on our future collaboration. Thank you."
4. An email from Ms. Fong, social worker as participant of FCPSU (Tuen Mun) on 10/1/2018:
"Thanks for the heartwarming support from you and Liliane. We will keep up our spirit and add oil [i.e. continue working enthusiastically]."
5. Unit Head of FCPSU (Yuen Long), Ms. Kan: email on 16/10/2017:
"Thanks a lot for your kind arrangement and provision of the Programme to our unit. I have read through the reports attached and found many positive areas. Through sharing and collaboration, our caseworkers learnt much during the process and all those certainly were very useful for them to render services to their clients."
6. Questionnaire feedback for "Art as Intervention for Child's Services", SWD Tuen Mun District Staff Training on 9/9/2015.
7. Email from Ms Tang of FCPSU (WTS) on 20/1/2018.
8. Email from Ms Chan of FCPSU (Tuen Mun) on 23/8/2019.