



Coping Mechanisms and Self-Care in the Art of Mentality: Movement Therapy as Emotional Mediation

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Abstract

This research applies the Practice as Research (PaR) method in the exploration of the author's coping strategies, as well as the impact on parents who experience child loss, especially as stillbirth survivors. Using the Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) approach as a theoretical foundation, this research conducted an in-depth investigation into the author's coping mechanisms and self-care awareness. Through practice experiments in PaR, the author explores and records her creative process in interpreting and reflecting personal experiences in her artistic works. The results of this research not only enrich the understanding of mental health, but also have the potential to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues through the exposure of powerful personal narratives in artworks. Furthermore, this research resulted in the choreographic work "Dive to Blue," which not only depicts a survivor's journey in dealing with grief, but also serves as a visual documentation of the author's personal healing and growth process.

Keywords: *Stillbirth Survivor; Coping Mechanism; Emotional Mediation; Movement Therapy*

Introduction

The perception of pain varies across different cultures and individuals. Cultural factors have a relevant influence on how individuals experience and manage pain (Gingras et al., 2023). Studies have shown that pain experienced by Black individuals is systematically underestimated, and cultural factors may explain this phenomenon (Reis et al., 2022). Different cultural backgrounds can lead to different representations and management of chronic pain (André, 2023). Cultural frameworks strongly influence the perception, manifestation, and management of pain (Rogger et al., 2023). Communication of pain is also influenced by culture, with individuals adapting their communication based on expectations, experiences, and specific circumstances (Sachs, 2022). A holistic and culturally sensitive approach is important for improving pain management outcomes and reducing health disparities. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of culturally-adapted interventions in different pain conditions and cultural backgrounds.

The long-term physical and psychological effects of stillbirth on survivors can be devastating. Parents who experience stillbirth may suffer from negative psychological symptoms such as grief, anxiety, and depression (Salenius, 2019). These effects can persist in subsequent pregnancies, leading to

increased stress and emotional burden (Burden et al., 2016). The grief experienced by parents following stillbirth can also have an impact on their interpersonal relationships and their ability to care for subsequently born children (Cacciatore, 2013). Mothers may struggle with altered body image and a decreased quality of life (Huberty, 2015). Fathers may experience grief suppression, employment difficulties, and increased substance use (Loredana et al., 2021). Additionally, stillbirth can have physical effects such as weight retention or gain, increased risk of chronic disease, and poor overall health. It is important for healthcare providers to offer support and interventions to help parents cope with the long-term physical and psychological effects of stillbirth.

Support systems and resources for stillbirth survivors are available to help them cope with their loss. A systematic global search identified 621 support providers from 75 countries, although there were no providers identified in 123 countries (Ponce Hardy et al., 2023). Internet-based programs, such as the "Living with Loss" program, have been developed to provide self-guided perinatal bereavement support (Loughnan et al., 2022). Online support groups have also been tested and found to be feasible and potentially beneficial for women of color who have experienced stillbirth or early infant loss (Gold et al., 2022). The implementation of international guidelines on bereavement care after stillbirth, as summarized by the CiaoLapo Stillbirth Support (CLASS) checklist, has been associated with greater satisfaction, respectful care, and improved psychological outcomes for women (Ravaldi et al., 2023).

Coping mechanisms that have been found to be effective for stillbirth survivors include the use of belief systems for sense-making and benefit-finding (Popoola et al., 2022). For ultraorthodox Israeli women, their faith in God provided relief, calm, and confidence, enabling them to move on (Hamama-Raz et al., 2014). Social support from relatives, friends, and peer groups, as well as access to trauma counseling centers, were also identified as important sources of support for mothers after stillbirth (Allahdadian et al., 2015). Additionally, a coping program that focused on individual sessions was found to be effective in reducing grief reactions among mothers who experienced perinatal deaths (Nourrouzi et al., 2022). These coping mechanisms and support systems can help stillbirth survivors navigate the intense grief and trauma associated with their loss.

Self-care plays a crucial role in supporting the healing process for stillbirth survivors. It allows individuals to engage in activities that promote physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. By taking care of themselves, survivors can address their grief, manage stress, and find ways to cope with their loss. Self-care practices such as seeking support from loved ones, participating in therapy or support groups, engaging in self-reflection and self-expression, and practicing self-compassion can all contribute to the healing journey. Additionally, self-care can help survivors regain a sense of control and empowerment, as they actively take steps towards healing and finding meaning in their experience (Aditya A. Auradkar *Inventions, Patents and Patent Applications - Justia Patents Search*, n.d.; Susannah, 2022).

Dance can be used as a form of therapy for stress and anxiety. Recent research has shown that dancing directly improves mental health by reducing rates of depression, anxiety, and enhancing mood aspects in people of any age (Sivasubramanian et al., 2023). Dance interventions have been found to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in adults compared to groups that did not participate in any type of intervention (Moratelli et al., 2023). Online group dance classes have also been found to support holistic wellbeing and lower anxiety, depression, and loneliness in young people (Finn et al., 2023).

Dance contributes to self-care and mental health by enhancing communication, social cohesion, emotional expression, and emotional regulation (Bostic et al., 2023). It bonds people together, facilitates human expression through movement, and intensifies social experiences (Humphries et al., 2023). Dance has been shown to have positive effects on mental and social health, including improvements in affective state, self-esteem, and social connection (Lavrentiev et al., 2022). It provides emotional relief, helps to concentrate, and can be used as a form of psychological relief (Collard-Stokes & Yoon, 2022). Dance also improves physical and mental health and wellbeing through creative expression, movement, and social

connections (Zīsberga, 2022). It promotes self-realization, self-efficacy, positivity, and self-awareness, contributing to overall well-being and healthy aging. Dance classes offer an accessible platform for individuals to experience a connection between the body, mind, and community, especially during times of social isolation.

Dance therapy can be used as a coping mechanism for grief and loss (Law et al., 2023; Serlin & Zhou, 2022). It is a nonverbal, symbolic way of helping individuals express and cope with trauma and loss through creativity, rhythm, and attunement (Thompson & Berger, 2011). Dance movement therapy has been used during the COVID-19 pandemic to help individuals recover resilience and express grief (Law et al., 2023). Expressive arts therapy, which includes dance therapy, provides opportunities for individuals to use artistic mediums to shape their experiences of grief and loss (Lusk, 2022). It allows images of grief and loss to take form in a way that is meaningful and relevant to the individual or community. Through dance and movement, individuals can find solace, healing, and a sense of community in the face of crisis, disaster, and loss.

Dance therapy has been shown to have a positive effect on reducing stress and anxiety (Andrejeva et al., 2022; Auliya & Yudiarto, 2022; Kurz, 2020). While there is limited research specifically on individuals who have experienced stillbirth, dance therapy has been found to be effective in managing stress and improving emotional well-being in various populations, including women with a history of miscarriage or stillbirth (Sivasubramanian et al., 2023). Dance and movement therapy interventions have been found to enhance psycho-emotional state, flexibility, and physical capacity in individuals under constant stress (Grosu et al., 2020). Additionally, dance therapy has been shown to effectively reduce stress levels among geriatrics. Therefore, it is plausible that dance therapy can be an effective tool in managing stress and anxiety for individuals who have experienced stillbirth, although further research specifically targeting this population is needed.

Therapeutic movement, such as dance therapy, differs from traditional forms of exercise in terms of its impact on emotional well-being. Dance movement psychotherapy has been shown to support children in coping with daily worries and stress, expressing and understanding emotions, and developing self-awareness and self-esteem (Moula et al., 2022). Movement therapy for older adults has been found to reduce depression and improve self-esteem, providing a positive experience (Salmons et al., 2022). Somatic dance practices allow participants to explore and regulate their emotions, providing a space for emotional release and self-expression (Saumaa, 2022).

Therapeutic approaches with different forms of dance both traditional and free dance also have a strong effect on emotional wellbeing, with different dance movements improvised according to individual needs and comfort. Overall, therapeutic movement offers a unique avenue to connect with and express emotions, promoting emotional well-being in a holistic way. So with this, the author will spread a work of dance creation based on the experience as a stillbirth survivor with therapeutic movement as a mediation of the emotions felt.

Method

In this research, the author uses the Practice as Research (PaR) method to explore the experience of child loss, especially as a stillbirth survivor, and the healing process through dance and movement therapy. The author began by practicing dance as a form of exploration of self-expression and a deeper understanding of her feelings and thoughts related to the loss. The process of dance practice was well recorded and documented, including in-depth reflections after each practice session. This documentation became the basis for analysis and interpretation, where the author tried to interpret the movements, expressions, and narratives created in the context of the child's loss and healing process. During the dance practice, the author also collaborated with a movement therapist to gain a professional view of the impact of body movement on the emotional healing process. This collaboration provided additional insights and valuable perspectives for the author.

The result of this research is a dance artwork titled "Dive to Blue," which depicts a survivor's journey in dealing with grief and seeking release from emotional burdens. This work is not only a visual documentation of the author's healing process, but also a means to share experiences and expand understanding about child loss and mental health. Through the PaR approach, the author was able to combine art practice with an in-depth research process, creating a powerful and moving narrative and contributing to a better understanding of how dance and movement therapy can be effective healing tools for those experiencing child loss.

Result and Discussion

The results of this study show that dance movement therapy practices can be an effective tool in coping with the trauma of child loss, especially for stillbirth survivors. The authors found that through these art practices, they were able to express more deeply the feelings and thoughts associated with the loss. The body movements and expressions in dance become a means to express feelings that are difficult to express in words. In addition, collaboration with a movement therapist also proved invaluable. The movement therapist provided insights and guidance that assisted the authors in interpreting and understanding their body movements in the context of healing. This suggests that movement therapy can be an effective approach in helping people overcome trauma and grief.

Discussion of the results of this study suggests that dance and movement therapy have an important role in supporting the healing process for survivors of child loss. Through these arts practices, survivors are able to express their feelings and thoughts in ways that words cannot. This opens up space for a deeper understanding of child loss and helps survivors to cope better. In addition, collaboration with a movement therapist also highlights the importance of a holistic approach to trauma healing. A movement therapist can provide a different perspective and help in unlocking emotional blockades that may have occurred due to trauma. This suggests that movement therapy can be a complementary and effective approach in addressing the trauma of child loss. In the context of the artwork "Dive to Blue," the results of this study show that artwork can be a powerful tool in communicating the complex experiences and feelings associated with child loss. The artwork is not only a visual documentation of the author's healing process, but also a means to share the experience and reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues. Overall, this research shows that dance and movement therapy can be an integral part of the healing process for survivors of child loss. Through the PaR approach, the author was able to combine art practice with in-depth research, creating a powerful narrative and making a meaningful contribution to the understanding of how art can be an effective healing tool.

a) Participant and Collaboration

In this work, the author's participation as a stillbirth survivor is very significant, both as a dancer and choreographer. Her personal experience gives depth and authenticity to every movement and expression displayed in "Dive to Blue". However, apart from being an artist directly involved in the work, the author also conducted a desk review of relevant literature before creating this work. This step shows a holistic approach in dealing with a complex theme such as child loss. The importance of literature in influencing artworks cannot be ignored. By referring to previous knowledge and research, the author can integrate various concepts and theories into his work, giving it greater depth of meaning. For example, the previous work entitled "Still Life" shows the author's interest in the theme of healing after loss. However, "Dive to Blue" highlights another aspect of the survivor's experience, namely the mediation of emotions and coping mechanisms. As such, "Dive to Blue" is not only a visually beautiful work of art, but also a powerful representation of the emotional journey of a stillbirth survivor. Through this work, the author not only conveys her personal experience, but also contributes to a broader understanding of the experience of child loss and the efforts to heal it.

b) Movement Analysis

Movement Analysis In dance practice, the author's body movements flow with a slow and graceful rhythm, reflecting a calm yet poignant state of mind. These movements depict the expression of deep emotions, such as a sense of loss and the need to express the pain felt. Gestures involving touch or a lost presence show the author's desire to feel the departed presence again, creating a moment of deep re-enactment. In addition to slow movements, the author also explores fast movements, perhaps as an expression of the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty that arise from losing a child. These movements may reflect the emotional turmoil that occurs within the writer and the attempt to cope with these feelings. During dance practice, the author also used breathing techniques, such as psychological sigh, to unravel the stress and anxiety associated with losing a child. This technique helped the writer to calm her mind and body, allowing for a more controlled and focused expression of emotions.



Figure 1: The moment of using EFT Movement as a stress relieving tool in coping as a survivor
(Photo: Adith 2023)

In addition, the author also performed Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), which is a therapeutic technique used to reduce the intensity of negative emotions associated with traumatic experiences. By using purposeful eye movements, the author was able to distract from painful feelings and assist in the processing of emotions associated with the loss of a child. Overall, the author's dance practice reflects a strong attempt to address the trauma of child loss and the healing process. These movements are not only an expression of the feelings felt, but also a means to relieve stress, cope with anxiety, and deal with difficult feelings in a creative and therapeutic way.

c) Artistic Component

By providing a representation of the complex and varied human experience of loss, mentality art can help reinforce the idea of "*it's okay to not be okay*". People can feel recognised and feel that they are being used in their emotional experiences through the artwork. Mentality can also aid in transforming the stigma associated with mental health issues and encouraging individuals to open their minds to these matters. The author uses the title as a metaphor in *Dive to Blue* to describe the emotions she experiences. In the context of psychological language, the word "Blue" literally means sadness. This work presents a picture of a person who perseveres despite being associated with complicated emotional coping mechanisms. Despite experiencing painful experiences, we still need to survive in daily life and seek forms of diversion through activities.

A solo dancer who plays the lead role presents this work. It creates a lighting of parlet and elliptical lights within an installation of foil curtains of water-like imagery, the dimensions of ordinary reflections providing a profound and introspective atmosphere. As a symbolisation of the emotion of sadness that wants to be released, the property of helium balloons is used and also as a reflection of responding to emotions that face the burden and pressure felt. In "Dive to Blue," the author urges us to immerse ourselves in the depths of our emotions, confront our sadness, and find ways to cope with these emotions. Because of this, survivors must have the strength to continue to endure while seeking escape and release from the emotional burden at hand.



Figure 2: Uses artistic materials with helium balloons and foil curtain installations in this work (Photo: Adith 2023)

Reflection

Self-criticism and reflection are crucial in directing the art practice and research process in this research journal. The author's analysis of the art practice prompted them to contemplate factors such as the genuineness of the expression, its alignment with the theme, and its efficacy in conveying the message to the audience. This procedure also include assessing the utilisation of the selected artistic techniques and the degree to which they effectively communicate the intended significance and sentiment. Furthermore, the research process itself is subject to criticism. The author assesses the employed methodologies, examining their capacity to provide data that is both valid and reliable, as well as its alignment with the study aims. Evaluating the research also entails examining the possibility of bias, both in the gathering of data and in the analysis of the findings. Self-reflection is a crucial component of this research journal, alongside criticism. The author consistently contemplates the transformations and development that transpired throughout the study procedure. This entails engaging in introspection over alterations in self-perception associated with the encounter with child loss, alongside the development of artistic and research proficiencies. This reflection facilitated the writers' ongoing learning and development, enabling them to enhance their artistic practice and research methodology in subsequent endeavours.

In summary, the process of self-criticism and reflection had a crucial role in directing this research towards more significant and profound results. Through the ongoing refinement of critical attitudes and introspection, the authors can generate artworks of greater artistic strength and research that is more scientifically sound.

Conclusions

Survivors of child loss can use art practices, especially dance and movement therapy, to express and cope with their emotions. They can find a safe space to express feelings that are difficult to put into words and manage intense and complex emotions through these art practices. When art not only creates aesthetically pleasing work, but also addresses trauma and supports the healing process, the importance of emotional mediation through therapeutic movement in artistic expression. Art can be a powerful tool for dealing with adversity and celebrating human strength and resilience, according to survivors and audiences.

Therefore, arts practices such as dance and movement therapy not only provide benefits to survivors of child loss, but can also provide inspiration and learning to the audience. They can understand that everyone has different ways of coping with adversity and expressing themselves, and they can better appreciate artistic expression as a means of sharing deep and complex human experience.

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Discography

“Dive to Blue” by Marshalina Anugraheni - <https://youtu.be/-uZAvE0fQ5g>.

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