

Silent Symbols, Spoken Stories: Thematic Insights from an Art Therapy Program with Migrant Construction Workers

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ABSTRACT

Migrant workers often endure complex psychological stressors stemming from relocation, cultural disruption, limited legal protections, and exploitative working conditions. This qualitative case study explores the inner emotional landscapes of 25 migrant construction workers through a short-term art therapy program. Participants engaged in structured and open studio sessions, producing a wide range of artworks. Primary data sources included the visual content of the artworks and participants' accompanying verbal reflections. Thematic analysis revealed recurring themes of vulnerability, loss of home, identity and culture, fragile sense of self, family, faith and others. These emerging themes offer insight into the psychological realities of migrant workers and underscore the importance of accessible, culturally sensitive mental health interventions. Art therapy served as a non-verbal, symbolic means through which participants could externalize internal conflicts, establish emotional distance, and reflect on personal meaning. The findings highlight the need for broader psychosocial support systems for migrant populations, particularly those living in restrictive or high-stress environments.