

NAME: SHIRVAUGHN SIMMONS

ID#: 812006376

DEGREE: VISUAL ARTS (SPECIAL)

SUPERVISOR: DR. DANALEE JAHGOO

CREATIVE ARTS AS AN AGENCY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN
IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



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NAME: SHIRVAUGHN SIMMONS

ID: 812006376

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the link between the creative arts and mental health in Trinidad and Tobago. It serves as a foundation for further research and investigation.

Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were obtained, and qualitative and quantitative approaches applied in analysis.

Results support the view that creative arts are well engaged in Trinidad and Tobago and positively influences mental health and well-being, through participation and observation. However greater government involvement and acknowledgement is needed as there is room for improvement and more opportunities to organizations that use the creative arts for community upliftment. Furthermore, creative arts therapy is not used to its full potential as there are not many positions in the field in public health care. The average citizen is therefore often unaware of what it entails. Local research, training, supportive leadership and collaboration between stakeholders, and across ministries is key to advancement.

KEY WORDS

Creative Arts, Mental Health, Mental Wellness, Mental Illness, Well-being, Health,

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INTRODUCTION

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO 1948). The World Health Organization’s Assembly, which sets the highest health policy for the world, has, in 2021, endorsed the ‘Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030’, an extension of the previously set 2013-2020 action plan. This plan has been put in place for member states, WHO Secretariat and international, regional and national partners to fulfill its goal of improving global mental health and well-being, counteracting conditions of those susceptible, and enacting medical service coverage universally (*Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030*).

A person’s mental health and well being is greatly affected by his or her genetic, biological, environmental and socio-economic circumstances, and interactions between them can be addressed in order to change mental status, although, this is not always an option (Husain).

Nearly one billion people around the world live with some form of mental illness. Depression, in particular has been identified as a leading cause of chronic illness and disability. Mental health and wellness challenges have been on the rise in the Caribbean region, with COVID-19 further compounding this issue, as new realities of unemployment, under-employment, remote work and education, prohibited external socializing and increased pressures on front-line and essential workers. Consequently, the WHO, Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), encourages governments, faith and community based

organizations, civil society and the private sector throughout the Caribbean, to increase emphasis on mental health awareness, prevention, support, and strategies to cope with mental illness.

There are many ways people can attempt to preserve their mental health and well-being. These include self-care activities such as healthy eating, avoiding excessive smoking and alcohol use, drinking ample water, exercising and getting enough rest. Additionally, people can surround themselves with positive thinkers, volunteer time and energy to help others, practice mindfulness by consciously quieting their mind when negative thoughts arise, connecting with pets, friends or family, taking time for hobbies, and seeking help when they need it (*Make Mental Health Care A Reality*).

However, globally, there is cause for concern as a regional report from the World Health Surveys: ‘Twelve-month Mental Health Service Use in Six countries of the America’ suggests. It identified under treatment of common mental disorders as a great public health care problem and recommended more accessible services be provided (Borges et). Accessibility barriers include stigmatization, economic strain, acceptability, lack of awareness, and sociocultural and religious influences (Muhorakeye and Biracyaza). A correspondent at Health Plus, a weekly Health Segment featured by the *Trinidad Guardian* digitally points out the secrecy involved in pursuing help, and the stigmatization patients of mental care face. The article highlights the importance of providing information to combat the myths surrounding mental health issues, and of acknowledging that mental illness can affect anyone and is a treatable illness. Responsibility is placed on the community, health care professionals and the media to educate and set the record straight. Among the common misconceptions named in the article include the idea that evil spirits cause mental illnesses, mental health problems are permanent, mental health problems are a sign of weakness, and having mental illness means you are crazy (*Mental Illness*). Similarly,

Dr. Maryam Richards, at an International Mental Health Symposium in 2018, identified stigma, discrimination and neglect as factors which prevent care and treatment from reaching people with mental disorders (Loubon).

Despite these barriers, the government of Trinidad and Tobago has become involved in providing assistance for people in need of mental health care. The Ministry of Health offers free services to care for and treat the mental health and wellness of citizens through Regional Health Authorities in both Trinidad and Tobago. These services are provided through referrals by doctors, as well as walk in services. The treatment available to patients in local hospitals and clinics include; care for existing medical conditions, medication, psychological interventions, social work interventions and rehabilitative interventions such as occupational therapy, memory clinic services, speech and language therapy. Many of these services have become available virtually or by telephone due to the pandemic (*Mental Health*).

Nevertheless, it is important to understand that beyond visits to health institutions, there are other ways in which mental health and wellness can be improved. The creative arts, for example, can be considered as an agency of mental health and wellness. Creative arts involve using creative expression and imagination, and includes visual and performance arts. Some examples of visual arts include painting, drawing, design, photography, sculpturing and crafts. While performance arts include dance, drama, music and singing.

Trinidad and Tobago is rich in diversity and culture and this is evident in the creativity of the people of this country. The connection between creative arts and mental health has attracted a vast amount of interest globally, however, the topic has not been extensively explored in Trinidad and Tobago and so, this project will examine this link in its cultural context.

THESIS STATEMENT

Creative Arts is a viable agency for mental health and wellness as proven, through growing global research, exploration and analysis. Trinidad and Tobago is rich in the creative arts, which can take a number of forms, in various aspects of the society, consequently, the country holds valuable, useful tools for the effective management of mental health and wellness.

PARAMETERS

The study was limited to Trinidad and Tobago, with a specific focus on the mental health and wellness of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The creative arts are wide ranging and so for this paper only the visual arts and performing arts of music, theatre and music are considered.

OBJECTIVES

This work will outline and examine how the creative arts have been used in Trinidad and Tobago, evaluate its impact on mental health and wellness and serve as a foundation for further research, investigation and as a tool for generating further interest in using creative arts in caring for mental health and wellness.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study consists of three chapters. Chapter One serves as a Literature Review, highlighting global research and findings supporting creative arts as a form of healing and places this study

within the global conversation. Chapter Two highlights different forms of creative arts in Trinidad and Tobago as it shows up in various aspects of our society, and explores how they are used for mental health and wellness and Chapter Three explores the findings of the data analysis from the primary sources of information.

METHODOLOGY

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in researching the connection between mental health and wellness and creative arts. Traditionally, mental health has been a topic of great taboo in Trinidad and Tobago. However, recent times have seen a shift in this way of thinking. The evidence of this shift can be gained through the lenses of mental health practitioners and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. This research explores creative arts as a viable option for mental healing and wellness and involves an understanding of individual experiences, impressions, beliefs and ideas. As a result, it was necessary to apply both qualitative and quantitative approaches to this research. The primary source of data collection for this paper was through interviews and questionnaires. This data was then measured to detect patterns in behavior, feelings, and perceptions.

Interviews were conducted with professionals in the field of Creative Arts Therapy such as, Music Art Therapist and founder of Solari Centre for Music Therapy, Martina Chow, Mental Health Social Worker and Dance Movement Therapist, Kezia Barclay and Art Therapist, Sarah Soo Hon, together with Dara Healy, Performance Artist, Communications Specialist and founder of Idakeda and Indigenous Creative Arts Network (ICAN), all based in Trinidad and Tobago. Since the Covid-19 Pandemic is still on-going, interviews were conducted on Zoom Virtual Platform and What's App and recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Structured

questions were asked, allowing for open-ended answers in order to gain more insight for this research.

Questionnaires were produced virtually as a Google Form, containing mostly closed ended questions, The questionnaire was then distributed virtually via social media platforms; Facebook, What's App and Instagram. Since the geographical parameter for this study is set within Trinidad and Tobago, the title of the research paper was included on the questionnaire, in addition to including questions that specified Trinidad and Tobago as the subject of inquiry. Further to this, a mandatory question was included that asked for the nationality of the respondent.

Several secondary documentary sources were used, one of which is The NALIS Heritage Library in Port of Spain. Here articles from local Newspapers were obtained on the topic. Databases searched includes UWI Linc, EBSCOHOST, NIH National Library of Medicine, PMC US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, Proquest, Google and Google Scholar, for articles and journals using key words- 'Mental Health in the Caribbean', 'Art Therapy', 'mental health stigma', 'mental health surveys', 'mental health issues, 'festivals of Trinidad and Tobago, 'mental health and culture', 'creative arts in Trinidad and Tobago' to name a few.

Additionally, the websites of Art therapists were visited, to gain a better understanding of the goals of their profession and how accessible they were to the public, as well as several public groups on Social Media that use art for therapy. Although the majority of these groups were internationally based, they gave further insight into the actual materials used in creative arts therapy and also allowed me to observe several posts by persons testifying of how they have benefitted from creative arts therapy. Although this information will not be shared in this study, it was helpful in constructing the questions for my primary sources. None of my searches

resulted in published research papers on the use of creatives arts as an agency for mental health and wellness in Trinidad and Tobago.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

The American Psychiatric Association describes mental illness as health conditions that involve emotional, thought or behaviour changes, or a combination, and are connected to distress and issues operating in work, family or social activities (*What is Mental Illness*). Often used interchangeably, Mental Health and Mental Wellness are not the same. Mental illness consists of diagnosable mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorders, depression and anxiety disorders, and are treated using clinical or pathogenic approaches. Here, a problem is identified, diagnosed and symptoms treated, thereby ushering a patient back to 'normal' state, by trained mental health professionals such as psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists. On the other hand, mental wellness is measured on its own axis, from languishing to flourishing and includes the numerous factors that affect overall mental health and well-being, ranging with worry, stress, sadness and loneliness at one end, and happiness, life satisfaction and personal growth at the other. These are non-clinical, and so it is self-directed, personal and subjective (McGroarty). The Two Continua Model identifies mental illness and mental health as related but distinct dimensions. Mental wellness is not equivalent to a lack of mental illness as they can both co-exist. However, mental illness can be prevented or mitigated by taking care of mental wellness (Westerhof and Keyes). Mental wellness is a long-term, proactive approach to strengthen adaptability and resilience, guiding toward a more meaningful, flourishing human experience. The concept of flourishing as the ultimate peak of the human experience has been shaped by many 20th century developments in psychology. Greek Philosopher, Aristotle,

believed a good human life is one in which we fully express our human capacities. Abraham Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' presents a five-tier model in which human needs are satisfied in succession, with physiological needs at the bottom tier and self-actualization at the peak. Carl Rogers, agreed with Maslow's approach of continuous growth, however, in his view, only an environment of openness, acceptance and empathy would facilitate growth. Whereas, Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishments (PERMA) are the five factors of Martin Seligman's model of what contributes to flourishing (Seligman,2011). The Human Potential Movement of the 60s and 70s highlighted the power of individuals to grow and change in the present, and embraced self-fulfillment, through the eliminating obstacles, as the ultimate objective. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi discovered enjoyment did not come from relaxing or being stress free, but in being fully absorbed in the goal-oriented activities someone prefers to do, in his Flow theory. In contrast to flow, psychic entropy or disorder, diverts from a set goal, resulting in negative outcomes like worry or fear. He said, "peculiar to the human condition" it "involves seeing more to do than one can actually accomplish and feeling able to accomplish more than what conditions allow." (Csikszentmihalyi). The flow experience has been empirically linked to improved well-being and creativity. Pioneer in the field of psychology, Carl Jung, claimed art helped him to voice the unvoiced contents of his unconscious mind and did so through his own art work. He recognized that active imagination may also be achieved through therapeutic writing, reading and other creative activities such as dance, music, painting, sculpture, and craft, and through these activities, those suffering from trauma could creatively individuate or metaphorically, re-invent themselves in a brand new story (Gordillo).

There continues to be growing interest in the benefits to mental health and wellbeing by creative arts engagement. Sharon Vaisvaser examines the recognition and incorporation of

evidence based neuro-scientific concepts into creative arts' therapeutic knowledge and practice. She writes, that recent knowledge of how the brain operates, in addition to changes in psychotherapy, may impact creative arts therapy practice considerably, as this would broaden the possibility of more precise, thorough accounts of case conceptualization and also more accurate treatment and intervention. She views the exploratory, integrative essence of creative arts therapy, to be linked to various dynamic brain functions: empowering the sensitivity of the brain to experience-based context, widening sensory sampling, processing emotional salience and introspective awareness, promoting agency and shaping the interpersonal world to revise prior interpretations and reconsolidate memories in light of new experiences. She advises that further research evaluating the presented mechanisms will be valuable and useful to the field of creative arts therapy (Vaisvaser).

In scoping review entitled, 'Engaging the Arts for Wellbeing in the United States of America', a team of researchers, including Virginia Pesata, investigate and analyze 44 publications on the use of arts to address the well being of communities in the United States. Among the psychological, physical and social outcomes of art interventions outlined, were- improved self-esteem, formed identity and physical conditioning. From their review it was suggested that the arts, in its various forms, whether through participation and/or observation, can positively augment the well being of individuals and communities in the United States. However, they highlighted the need for studies to set core outcomes, reporting guidance and the refining of search strategies for improved integrating of evidence (Pesata et al.)

In another perspective, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellness, in partnership with the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Well-being, King's College London, the Royal Society for Public Health and Guy's and St. Thomas' Charity,

conducted an inquiry between 2015 and 2017, into the practice and research in the arts in health and social care. Sixteen meetings were held, attended by parliamentarians, interest groups and numerous people from various parts of England, in which key issues relating to arts and health research and practice were discussed, new insights gained and testimonies heard from patients and service users. This inquiry produced three messages: the arts support healthy, longer, better lives; the arts can contribute to solutions in social and health care challenges; and the arts can help ease financial burden in health and social care. It acknowledged growing exploration and assessments supporting the case for arts as an important contributor to health and wellbeing as a movement, however, this group highlighted that it has been all too little realized. It was pointed out that a change in culture is necessary at all levels, and that leadership and collaboration across health and social care and the arts is key to progress. Ten specific recommendations were made to serve as a catalyst for this change in thinking and realization of the true potential of the arts in health. Among them, integration of art and healing from the institutional level, collaborations across health, creative and educational sectors, availability of evidence based information, and agencies looking at the idea from unbiased perspectives (*Creative health: The arts for health and wellbeing*).

Hollis Liverpool explores how African rituals of music, song and dance, merged with the Carnival brought to Trinidad and Tobago by French settlers, were used as coping mechanisms before and after slavery in the eighteenth century, and forged, reshaped and adapted, in spite of, and because of oppression, segregation, racism, rebellion and conflict, into the calypso, soca, steel pan and masquerade of the twentieth century. It is the story of the African resilience through creativity. Liverpool explained how, in addition to the songs they sang while working, to ease the exertion and to comfort each other, through dance, the Africans “relieved their

emotional tensions”, doing it “with such vitality and gaiety that the masters were unaware of the satire in the dance.” He added, along with being a form of relaxation to them, its satirical nature was “a form of passive resistance, while its communal form consolidated their bonds of kinship” (148-150). He also wrote of how people dealt with emerging issues after emancipation, and the introduction of indentureship, such as: population increase, urbanization, land disputes, poverty and unemployment. He said people began looking for ways of escape, with many wandering the streets, some committing suicide; some committing themselves to asylums and some turning to alcohol, ganja or opium. According to him Carnival was the most common escape as “Thousands participated in it annually, drowning their sad spirits....in the music and dances of their traditions” (263). Liverpool credits the Bongoes, Shango and Baptiste melodies and rhythms, as well as the call-and-response pattern and picturesque metaphors of Kalenda chants, as heavy influencers of Calypso music, not only in lyrics and melody but as subjects. Some examples he gave were: Blue Boy’s (now Super Blue) ‘Soca Baptiste’, ‘Bongo Man’ by Wrangler and ‘Shango Vision’ by Chalk Dust(144-147). Calypso became the vehicles for freedom of speech on issues such as racism, corruption and segregation, often sending messages to politicians and those in authority. As Liverpool explains, Garfield Blackman (Ras Shorty-I) is accredited to being the ‘Father of soca music’, which came later. The hybrid, Soca, which according to Ras Shorty I, means the ‘Soul of Calypso’, originated from a mix of calypso music and Indian instruments. While calypso features socio-political commentary, soca mainly highlights dance and up-beat, ‘feel-good’ undertones. Furthermore, banned African drums were replaced by bamboo tubes known as tamboo-bamboo, and then, in the quest for a clearer sound, lead to the discovery of the steel pan, which was developed from beating oil drums (Liverpool).

There have been many critiques and debates in the fields of philosophy, social sciences and cultural studies, on what culture entails. In Jamaican born, London-based cultural studies scholar, Stuart Hall's view, culture is always a translation, so it moves whenever people move and settles wherever people settle. According to Hall, you should not always think of culture as "a return to ROOTS" but also as "the various ROUTES by which people travel", since, "culture moves, culture develops, culture changes, cultures migrate..." He sees the Caribbean as being a diaspora in which the people all came from somewhere else, describing it as the home of hybridity (Paul). In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago's culture is a translation of Indigenous, European, African and Asian cultures that have been preserved, adapted and developed through colonization, slavery, indentureship, immigration, independence and many other struggles. These are manifested, among other forms, through the island's visual arts and performing arts, and present themselves in various aspects of society. For this reason, the culture of Trinidad and Tobago is a quite unique one, and allows for individual creative expression of beliefs, ideas, attitudes and knowledge to be shared, embraced and adopted collectively.

This research paper will identify the aspects of Trinidad and Tobago's society at which the creative arts are at core. For its purpose, creative arts will refer to the visual and performing arts- music, dance and theatre, and will examine their contribution to Mental Health and Wellness. Since searches reveal no existing works on the use of the creative arts in Trinidad and Tobago for the purpose of coping with Mental Health and Wellness, findings of this paper will add the Trinidad and Tobago context to what exists. The writings by Vaisvaser, Pesata and AAPG Group do not provide the Trinidad and Tobago perspective as they are based on different cultures- England and the United States. However they serve as useful guides into further research on the brain function as it relates to local creative arts, local community studies and

collaborations between local organizations, ministries, leadership and stakeholders, as no documentation was discovered on these that applied to the Trinidad and Tobago context. The writings of Liverpool serves as a foundation as it provides historical context and aids in a greater understanding of the present.

CHAPTER 2

Findings in numerous research, reviews and studies worldwide, including those discussed by Vaisvaser, Pesata et al and APPG et al, support creative art engagement as positively impacting mental health and wellness. Creative arts of Trinidad and Tobago are used for mental health and wellness in many modes. Among these modes are in the festival of Carnival, in personal and/or collaborative expressions, in Creative Arts Therapy and through non-profit organizations.

In Trinidad and Tobago the past is commemorated, homage is paid to religious beliefs and cultural development is celebrated, through the many religious and cultural festivals observed throughout the year, with creative arts as the main vehicle. Festivals include carnival, Ramleela, Hosay, and the Tobago Heritage Festival to name a few. The historical context of these festivals are presented through visual arts, via the costuming design and/or sculpture and props, which can either be traditionally passed throughout generations, or contemporary adaptations tweaked to serve changing narratives. Photography and videography documents and gives context for future referencing. The drama or theatre, often re-enactments of the past played out in real time, provides a link between the two. And music and song, while preserved in many forms, have evolved in others, while maintaining function. The festival of Carnival is well-known for these attributions.

Carnival celebrations begin just after Christmas, with numerous events, and culminate in Carnival Monday and Tuesday. Events include: band launches, fetes, calypso tents, pan events, Monarch finals, Panorama, Canboulay, Dimanche Gras, Jouvert and the street masquerades on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. Aspects of Carnival: Masquerade, whether traditional or

contemporary, from design to presentation; together with Calypso, Soca and Steel Pan music, with all their variants; and their documentation, all constitute visual and performing arts and tools for release. The resilience through creativity used for survival by the African ancestors have been passed down through generations into contemporary Carnival, as it is still used as a form of escape from harsh realities.

In Carnival masquerade, costumes worn by emancipated Africans, discussed by Liverpool are still portrayed, as well as other protest characters added over time, they include are the Dame Lorraine, Jab Molassi, Burrokeet, Baby Dolls, Dragon and Moko Jumbies, each having a quite unique portrayal that tells its story. Contemporary Carnival masquerade now includes themed bands, made up of sections, in which participants wear the same or similar costumes -Pretty Mas. Mas man, Peter Minshall is known for his choreographic and story telling approach to his masquerade on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. Minshall views mas as “a vehicle for the expression of human energy.” Therefore, he combines the visual, with dance and theatre in his masquerade, always telling a story. In his description, “flesh and blood powers the mas...the energy passes from performer to spectator like an electric charge....it passes quickly, leaving the mind singed....our aesthetic is performance, the living now.” Minshall believes once a year carnival gives a chance “to be who we are in own own heads” and so he facilitates this through his designs (Laughlin et al) (*see fig.1*). Pride Columnist, Dr. Peter Sealy writes about how jumping up for carnival (movement): releases endorphins, (a natural chemical that that improves mood and decreases stress); is mentally uplifting, as it distracts from life’s problems; and improves right brain functions through colour perceptions(as the experience of carnival is one of spectacular colours)(Sealy).



Fig.1 . – Minshall, Peter. “The Merry Monarch, 1987” .*Caribbean Lab*. 5. Dec, 2016
<https://caribbeanlab.wordpress.com/2016/12/05/peter-minshall-inspiration-by-excellence-incorporated/>.

Songs the enslaved sung to ease exertion, as described by Liverpool, have been transformed into Calypso music, and by extension, Soca music. Calypsonian, David Rudder’s, ‘Calypso Music’ confirms the roots Liverpool refers to in his writings (see *fig.2*). While calypso usually

features commentary on social and political issues, soca mainly highlights freedom from worry and stress. Well-known soca artist, Machel Montano said to *NPR Music*, “The intention of the energy of soca music is to really uplift people; really make them smile; keep them happy; make them celebrate even in the toughest times.” (Dreisinger). Soca artistes Iwer George, Travis World and KMC sang of their longing for Carnival in their song ‘One Wish’, when the celebrations were cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions in 2020 (Travis World). Since its invention soca has seen many expansions, with sub-genres such as soca-chutney, ragga-soca and parang-soca.

Calypso Music

Can you hear a distant drum
Bouncing on the laughter of a melody?
And does the rhythm tell you come come come
Does your spirit to a dance to this symphony?
Does it tell you that your heart is afire?
And does it tell you that a pain is a liar?
Does it wash away all your unlovely?
Well are you ready for a brand new discovery?

Chorus:
Calypso, calypso, calypso music
Singing o yeah, o yeah, o yeah, calypso

I say the Lion is the seed of the Growling Tiger, now
I got to sing o yeah, o yeah, o yeah calypso

It is a living vibration
Rooted deep within my Caribbean belly
Lyrics to make a politician cringe
Or turn a woman's body into jelly
Shake it up, shake it up
It is a sweet soca music, calypso
You could a never refuse it, calypso
It will make you shake like a Shango now, calypso
Why it is you shaking you don't know that's calypso

Chorus

I say the Lion is the seed of Attila, now
I got to sing o yeah, o yeah, o yeah calypso

I can still hear Lion roar through Greenwich Village
While Executor kills them dead at the Ribbon Blue
Lord Invader conquers Berlin, from their heart this time
And Lord Kitchener making old London feel so new,
Beginner and Terror too
Fitzroy Coleman fingers dancing on the fret
And when you think that he through he ain't start
Nothing yet
Carnegie Hall graced by the presence of Sparrow
And when Slinger done with they tail, hear they
Shouting
Don't go, Sparrow don't go
Why?

Chorus

I say the Lion is in the seed, is the seed of the Spoiler now
Ah wanna fall.
I wanna rise, I wanna rise

From the time the first bamboo cut and we drag it down
From up the St. Ann's hills
From the day the first shantwelle lead the band
The real jamming start and today we jamming still
Creating rhythms that could be deadly like Headley

Only this time is the rhythm and the melody that
Sending your soul to the boundary
From the bongo drum to the roll of the tassa
And ever since Europe come and she make bassa-bassa

Chorus

We got to sing it in London
We got to sing it in America
We got to sing it in Africa
We got to sing it in Europe now, Calypso

David Rudder 1987

Fig. 2. – Rudder, David. “Calypso Music” 1987.

The third aspect of Carnival is the Steel pan, which is the National Instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. Forged out of resistance, innovation and the need for self expression by the dependents of African slaves, the steel pan is now internationally recognized and accepted.

During the carnival season, panyards are the ideal place for listening to steel pan music- calypso or soca music played by the instrument. This is where the pannists practice in ensemble - steel bands or steel band orchestras, for Panorama competition. Pan orchestras from all around the country practice to compete in this event. Some popular panyards are the Amoco Renegades, Desperados and All Stars. Some famous pannists are Ellie Mannette, Winstons 'Spree' Simon, Liam Teague, Ray Holman.



Fig.3 – Diaz, Abraham. “Desperados members perform at the North/East Pan Spectacular at the Arima Velodrome earlier this year.” Trinidad and Tobago Guardian. 28. Aug. 2019.

<https://www.guardian.co.tt/news/despers-youths-stranded-6.2.920660.1c70344782>

The personal works of individuals and/ or collaborative creative works of expression are often displayed in spaces throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Since art survives through generations, it gives us clarity and historical reference. The National Museum houses Indigenous artifacts, as well as over 10,000 items of cultural, historical and artistic nature, including paintings of 19th century, Trinidadian artist, Michel-Jean Cazabon and other artists, that capture the landscape and culture of the society throughout history (*National Museum and Art Gallery of Trinidad and Tobago*). Further to Cazabon, the National Trust names artists such as Carlisle Chang, Boscoe Holder, Leroy Clarke, Jackie Hinkson, Peter Minshall and Che Lovelace, among others as key artists which have contributed significantly to art history (Doyle). Art spaces such as the Rotunda Gallery, 101, and Horizons art Gallery and The Tobago Art Gallery, all provide a space for local and regional visual artists to display and sell their work, which varies in genres, subject matter and mediums. Some spaces also host workshops, seminars and other art activities. In addition organizations such as the Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago and The Women In Art Organization Of Trinidad and Tobago offer access of membership to local artists. These organizations host themed Membership Exhibitions annually, giving local artists the opportunity to express, communicate their ideas and bring awareness to the public. Artworks include, but are not limited to: Paintings, drawings, sculpture, installations, photography and design.

It is common for artists to create works to bring awareness to issues surrounding mental health in Trinidad and Tobago. For instance, visual artist, designer, art historian and curator, Steve Ouditt, concerned about the prevalence of suppressed mental illness and those going undiagnosed in Trinidad and Tobago, examined the connection between the mind, the imagination of the artist, and engagement with the public. He produced 135 collages and drawings and exhibited the artworks in 'Proceeds to Mental Health' in 2013 (*Steve Ouditt*

Proceeds to Mental Health). It was then he said, that he started exploring behaviour change interventions in health care. And subsequently through his work with the Caribbean Behaviour Change Network (CBCN) has implemented several projects. One of which, as Ouditt describes to the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, “Another great project” “ the development of the Autie graph, combining the concepts of photographs, auto graphs, autism, and biography to help autistic people to share their stories in a way that others could understand easily.” (Lindo). In like fashion, local visual artist, Kerron John compiled a body of paintings based on his experience with depression and hosted an exhibition open for public viewing, in 2020, entitled “Emotions,” in hopes that others experiencing it could connect and cope (*Expressing emotions*). Viewing art is also quite beneficial, according to *Daily Art Magazine* looking at art facilitates a “mentally transformative experience” that has “a physical impact on our well-being.” And art “takes you away from any daily worries or stress you might experience” (Relf).



Fig. 4 . – Hinkson, Jackie “Game of Words” *Trinidad Express*. 26. Feb. 2022.

https://trinidadexpress.com/features/local/wall-to-wall-carnival/article_35d29fb4-976e-11ec-9e7a-cf4c34b5585a.html

Public spaces are no exception to visual arts, as painted murals and themed outdoor displays are quite common mediums of communicating, and bringing awareness to an issue. An example of this are the street exhibits of murals done by artist, Jackie Hinkson entitled, ‘From Camboulay to Beyoncé’ and ‘Game of Words’ , during the would-be Carnival season, which was cancelled in 2021 and limited in 2022, respectively (see *fig.4*). It featured commentary on current issues in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago Newsday reported Hinkson as saying, “The gazelle in the Parliament, the vaccines, the anti-vaxxers, floods, sou sou. Petrotrin.....were added to the mural, reading like a chronological sequence of what was happening”(Quash).

Creative Art Therapy is a developing profession in Trinidad and Tobago, that involves the use of art, music, drama and dance in the therapeutic process. Jamal Glynn, the only Music Therapist in Trinidad and Tobago's public sector, has incorporated the steel pan into his practice and supports clients diagnosed with personality disorders, depression, Alzheimer's as well as schizophrenia. *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* reported him as saying, "There was some sort of solace, there was some sort of solidity, some sort of value of instrument untapped, not written about, and I was thinking that this would be a good avenue to explore." (Doughty). Martina Chow, through private practice at Solari Music Centre addresses clinical goals such as speech development, mobility and memory improvement, as well as psychological and emotional states using music therapy. She also includes the Steel pan in her therapy sessions (Chow). Mental Health Social Worker and Dance Movement Therapist, Kezia Barclay uses movement in her counseling and therapy sessions. She offers services in individual and group sessions, with a main focus on children and teenagers, as well as workshops for adults. Sarah Soo Hon is specialized in the use of visual and plastic arts as a form of therapy. Her clients are wide ranging and can vary from persons who have committed serious crimes with aggression and psychotic symptoms to adults and adolescence with mood disorders (Soo Hon). Chow, Barclay and Soo Hon were interviewed for this paper. Chapter Three will discuss the results of these interviews.

Performing artists, manifest personal or collaborated creative expression and communicate their message through dance, drama, song and music, and other forms. Trinidad and Tobago is synonymous with 'dance, rhythm and sound', which are a translation of the ancestors of the people. These include: folk dance (limbo, bele, congo), Indian folk and classical dance, along with dances from around the world. Choreographers and dance organizations show their choreographic skill in productions year round. Some well-known dance icons include Beryl Mc

Bernie, Julia Edwards, Geoffrey Holder, the Metamorphosis Dance Company, Shiv Shakti Dancers and Malick Folk Performers. Dance Choreographer and Principal of The Caribbean School of Dancing, Bridgette Wilson, offered a ‘Movement 2 Mindfulness’ Series to her demotivated students and to the public, virtually in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic (Doughty). Local singers, singing groups, choirs and bands use their voices in a variety of musical genres which Calypso Rose, Drupatie Ramgoonai, Daisy Voisin, and Pat Bishop are popular icons.

Trinidad Theatre Workshop was the first local theatre workshop and was founded by Playwright and Nobel Prize winner, Derek Walcott, Beryl Mc Bernie and others. Often dubbed the ‘Flagship of the Theatre Movement in the Caribbean’, it encourages expression of Caribbean realities through performance in its training workshops, playwright and studio productions (*Trinidad Theatre Workshop*). The National Drama Association of Trinidad and Tobago, Tobago Drama Guild and National Theatre Arts Company of Trinidad and Tobago are other homes to actors, playwrights and directors and artists who contribute to the development of theatre art locally. Tony Hall, Penelope Spencer, Raymond Choo Kong, Victor Edwards, James Lee Wah, and Pearl Entou Springer are a few of many that have been influential in promoting theatre and the arts in Trinidad and Tobago. Performances can be presented in any space, however, formal spaces and auditoriums like the Naparima Bowl, The Southern Academy for the Performing Arts (SAPA), The Lord Kitchener Auditorium- National Academy of the Performing Arts (NAPA), Queen’s Hall, The Little Carib Theatre, Shaw Park Complex, The Central Bank Auditorium, Big Black Box and the Trinidad Theatre Workshop are common venues, that provide adaptable lighting and seating or audience areas.

There are many non-profit organizations in Trinidad and Tobago that promote mental health and wellness through the creative arts. Chosen Hands is a non-profit network of artists and

professionals that facilitates an Art and Wellness Mentorship Programme that uses visual art for healing, personal development and self-expression with a goal of empowering and transforming the lives of participants (*Chosen Hands empowers through art with support from bmobile Foundation*). The 2 cents Movement is a youth-led, non-profit organization using performance art in youth outreach. Their programs include school tours, clubs and open mics (*Empowering youth to speak*). Dara Healy initially created the Idakeda group to protect and promote the artistic works of her mother, actress, poet and playwright, Eintou Pearl Springer. Since then, through the Indigenous Creative Arts Network (ICAN), the non-profit arm of Idakeda, the group has evolved into an organization that supports communities through challenging situations. Their interventions are performance-based, rooted in Arts Therapy and Theatre approaches. Their methods include: movement and dance, carnival arts, and theatre training (Healy). Chapter 3 discusses the results of interview with Healy.

Measures to contain Covid-19- social distancing, travel bans and lockdowns saw the creative arts sector gravely affected. People could no longer gather to spectate events, spaces of performances were closed and many artists were not able to earn a living. Dancers, vocalist, musicians and many others were forced to find innovative ways of re-inventing themselves. Some artists put their art careers on hold, while many began using online platforms to market themselves and/or share their works online (Sanchez-Vegas). In 2020, United Nations ESCO launched its “ResiliArt” movement, geared at shedding light into how Covid-19 affected the creative industries worldwide. The initiative attracted 1.1 million interactions, three hundred debates with 115 countries involved. It extended the invitation for those in the culture to be heard (*RESILIART Artists and Creativity beyond Crisis*).

CHAPTER 3

Findings from questionnaire, one of two primary sources of reference for this research paper, suggest that creative arts are used for mental health and wellness in Trinidad and Tobago. Results show that of the 69 respondents, 95% engage in some form of creative art, 28% by enjoying others' work, 26% participate and 41% engage by observing or by creating (*see fig.5*). Of the 69 respondents, 22% engage in visual arts, 22% through music, 1% dance and 48% engage in more than one of these forms (*see fig.6*). Respondents claim to have varying reasons for engaging in the arts. 27% engage for therapeutic or stress relieving reasons, 18% earned a living from interaction, 10% engaged for exercise or recreation, 1% in worship and 5% for self-expression, with 39% engaging in creative arts for more than one of these reasons (*see fig.7*). Furthermore, of the 69 persons responding, 91% claimed that engagement in the creative arts improves their state of mind, while 6% were unsure how engagement affected their state of mind and in 3%, engagement were said to have no effect (*see fig. 8*). Moreover, 96% of the the 69 respondents would recommend the use of any form of creative arts to someone else as relief in stressful situations (*see fig. 9*). These results supports the view that creative arts is a viable option in dealing with mental health and wellness in Trinidad and Tobago.

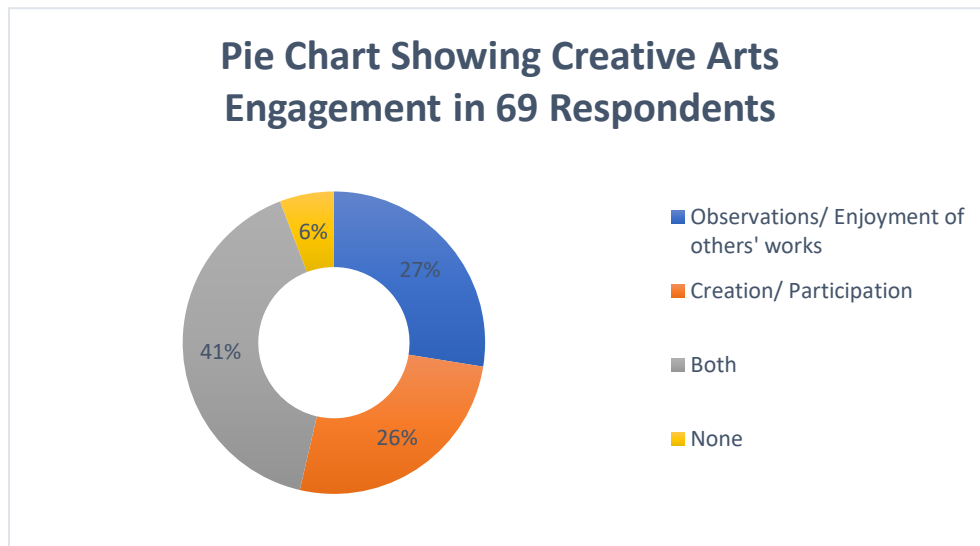


Fig. 5. – Pie Chart Showing Creative Arts Engagement in 69 Respondents

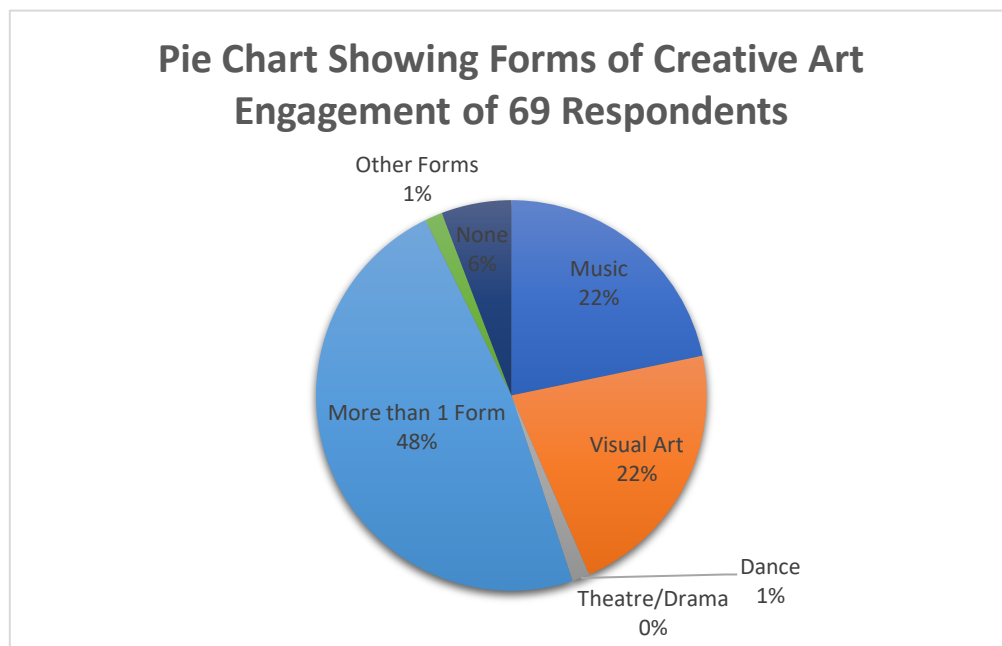


Fig. 6. Pie Chart showing forms of creative art engagement in 69 respondents

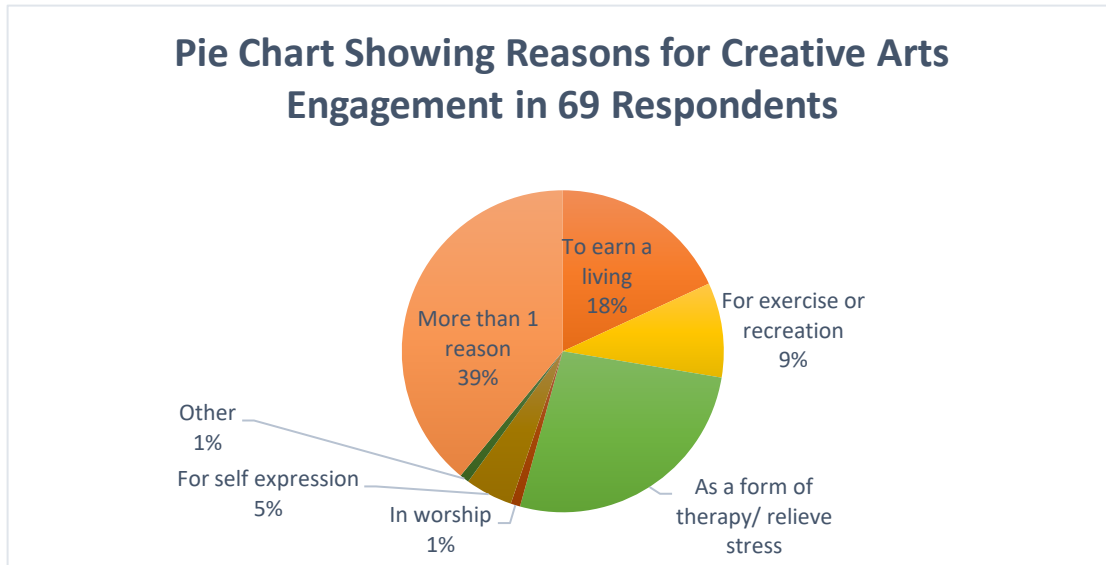


Fig.7 . – Pie Chart showing reasons for creative arts engagement in 69 respondents

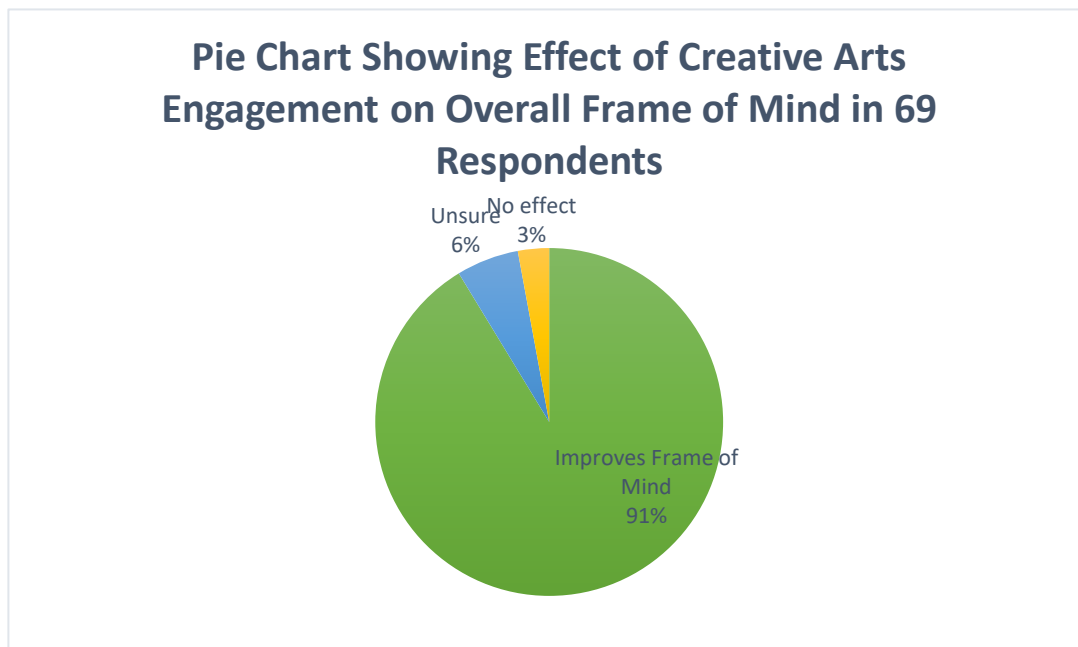


Fig. 8 . – Pie Chart showing effect of creative art engagement on overall frame of mind in 69 respondents.

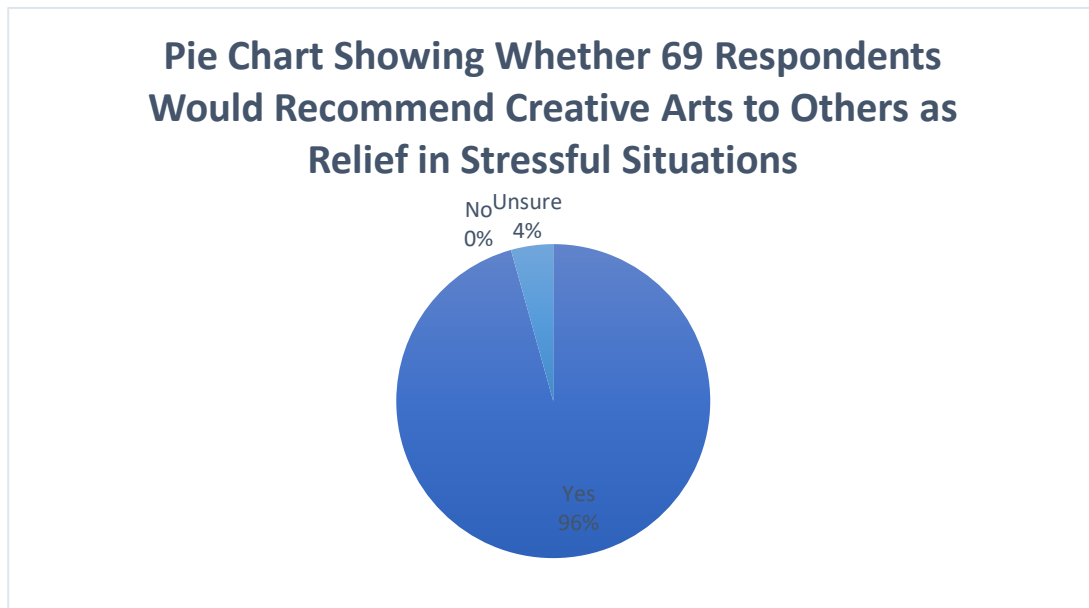


Fig. 9. – Pie Chart showing which of 69 respondents would recommend the use of creative arts to others as relief in stressful situations

The second of two primary sources of research came from persons whose line of work entails the use of creative arts to tend for mental health and wellness in Trinidad and Tobago. Interviews were conducted with: Music Therapist and founder of Solari Music Center, Martina Chow; Mental Health Social Worker and part-time Dance Movement Therapist, Kezia Barclay; Art Therapist, Sarah Soo Hon; and Communications Specialist, Performance Artist and founder of Idakeda and the Indigineous Creative Arts Network (ICAN), Dara Healy.

Interviews with Chow, Barclay and Soo Hon reveal that although the government has provided services to care for and treat the mental health and wellness through the Regional Health Authorities, as stated in the introduction, there are in fact, a limited number of positions available in the field of Creative Arts therapy in the public sector, and so it is not as easily accessible as other forms. Moreover, all three professionals attained training in their field abroad. This is reiterated in interview with Performance Artist and Communications Specialist, Dara Healy, who believes that the benefits of incorporating the arts and culture in work with situations of trauma is not yet fully understood as she points out the non-existence of any real academic programmes providing training locally. Considering being trained abroad, the Creative arts Therapists describe having to adapt theories, assessment or even the Termination phase of therapy, to a Trinidad and Tobago context because of the difference in culture of the people. It can also be suggested from the interviews, that there is a lack of public awareness of creative arts therapy. Chow, Barclay and Soo Hon all identify instances where first time clients expect a music, dance or art lesson, not therapy that includes music, dance or art. While Chow acknowledges a change in people's views toward therapy, she said Trinidad and Tobago's culture is still averse to therapy. Being the first Art Therapist to be hired in the Public Sector,

Soo Hon describes the lack of familiarity of what the profession entails by members of staff and even doctors when she was initially employed. It can also be suggested that the lack of awareness may have a direct link to the lack of marketing, as Chow describes her service as marketed by word of mouth (although she would have previously done interviews, workshops, presentations and in-house), Soo Hon gains clients by doctors' referrals after measures of screening, and Barclay would typically take on a few clients after Creative Arts Therapies week. Recognized annually in the US and Canada, Creative Arts Therapies week has been introduced in Trinidad and Tobago and used as an opportunity to educate the public about the benefits, uses and availability of these therapies, as well as to promote the intentional use of the arts for mental health and wellness (Creative Arts Therapies Week 2022). This occurs once annually. Chow, Barclay and Soo Hon are all hopeful for improvement in the field of Creative Arts Therapy for the next five to ten years. Chow says her hopes for music therapy is based on the development of the field of Occupational Therapist, which she says, has seen great development in the last 30 years- accomplishing an Occupational Therapy Organization of Trinidad and Tobago, Parliament recognition, and Insurance coverage. With music therapy being only 12-15 years old in Trinidad and Tobago she is hopeful that progress is coming based on Occupational Therapy's trajectory. Barclay hopes to see Creative arts therapy be more recognized by the Ministry of Health. She believes that once that occurs, there would be a lot more awareness, since it would be provided to the public free of charge. Soo Hon is hopeful for more positions for Creative Arts Therapists in public health care, less bureaucracy in accessing services, greater access geographically, and in other settings, such as in educational institutions and community outreach, to aid in mental health prevention. Her personal perspective is that "there is already so much richness in what already exists...it is not about evolving into something, but the idea of how it could be applied in

different spaces and in different ways to support health..” and “the element of exploring culture is important because that element could possibly create a space where people feel like they could speak the language...” (Soo Hon). Healy says to receive local accreditation would open doors to funding locally and globally, and to spaces where the work could be practiced, and to legitimize them as organizations for access to volunteers, as currently organizations such as hers are highly dependent on the corporate sector for funds. This, she says is quite unpredictable, with many trying to “tap into a limited pool of resources.” She believes that on a political level, when the budget is being conceptualized and prepared, artists should be included in the discussions. Healy recommends time, effort and funding to generate local content that delves into local stories, folklore and songs. As well as the incorporation of the arts in more meaningful ways into school curriculums at all levels, because she says a disconnect still exists in how carnival and festivals are seen, and their potential for making changes in communities and in the nation as a whole (Healy).

CONCLUSION

Growing research supports the use of creative arts in treating mental health and wellness. The diverseness of Trinidad and Tobago makes for a country rich in creative arts, and consequently one that should be effective in the treatment of mental health and wellness. The many carnival, individual and collaborative expressions of awareness and organizations all contribute to wellness and mental health, however, there exists the potential to do more as active involvement is needed. This would mean public acknowledgement that the Creative Arts, in its various forms can positively augment mental health and wellness through the media and legislators. Investment in research on the effect of local arts to the brain and behaviour could make for effective, appropriate therapy. Its advertised usage in therapy could positively influence how therapy is viewed by the public. Furthermore, research would mean discovering innovative ways of using what exists to help. In addition to increasing opportunities for Creative Arts Therapist and organizations that cater to the improvement of mental health and wellness in public health care, these positions should be placed in high stress areas such in places of employment, family court rooms, homes for the aged, in communities, etc.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

CREATIVE ARTS AS AN AGENCY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO- INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. *What does a creative arts therapist do?*
2. *How long have you been practicing creative arts therapy in Trinidad and Tobago?*
3. *Where did you attain training for your profession in creative arts therapy?*
4. *Do you work with other types of therapists or do you work alone?*
5. *Do you / your organization have a mission/ vision statement?*
6. *Is your organization mainly Privately-owned, Governmental or Non-Profit (Public/Private) Organization?*
7. *What services do your organization offer in Trinidad and Tobago?(private group/individual sessions, team sessions for schools/team building workshops for employees of companies etc.)*
8. *What range of symptoms have you treated with creative arts therapy?*
9. *What are some challenges you have encountered in your therapy practice?*
10. *Does a client having a creative background affect the success or failure of creative arts therapy?*
11. *In your experience, what particular demographic usually seeks out your services?*
12. *Who do you prefer to work with?*
13. *How would you describe your approach to therapy and have you adapted what you have learnt in studies to Trinidadian culture?*
14. *Can you describe your process?*
15. *Do you/ your organization check up on past clients to note progress?*
16. *What benefits have you seen in persons who have accessed music Therapy and do these benefits extend to day to day functions?*
17. *Is medication prescribed to clients that work hand in hand with music therapy?*
18. *What measures or testing mechanism do you use to measure effectiveness of creative arts therapy? And is it recorded?*
19. *How long does it usually take to see results or improvements in clients?*
20. *How is your service marketed in Trinidad and Tobago?*
21. *How accessible are therapy sessions?*
22. *Has there been any change in the number of persons seeking help in Trinidad and Tobago since the beginning of the pandemic in 2019? (increase/decline/fluctuation)*
23. *How has Covid-19 affected your practice?*
24. *Do you think the use of creative arts therapy in Trinidad has lived up to its full potential or should more be done? If so, what do you suggest?*
25. *Where do you see creative arts therapy in Trinidad and Tobago in the next 5-10 years?*

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf-p26D1EPi0ZAytzr-AeXCUJmgkrIAKI6qWLI0dveiq-KudQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

What is your age?
69 responses

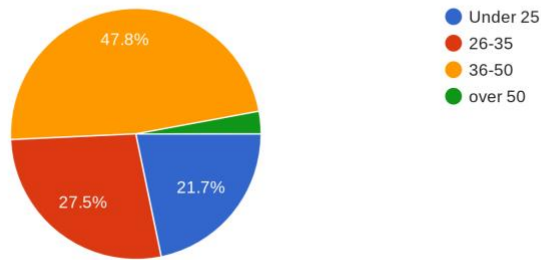


Fig. 10. -Pie Chart showing Age Groups of Respondents

How would you compare the importance of mental health and physical health?
69 responses

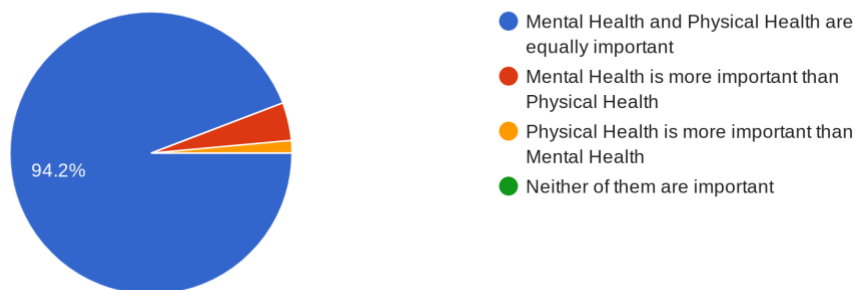


Fig. 11.- Pie Chart Showing Respondents' Comparison of the Importance of Mental Health and Physical Health

What do you know about mental health ?

69 responses



Fig. 12.- Pie Chart Showing Respondents' Mental Health Awareness

At what age did you start learning about mental health?

69 responses

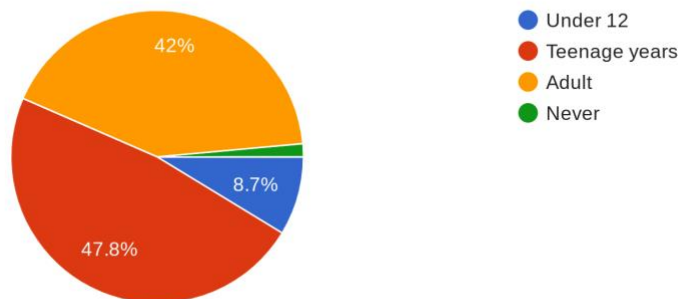


Fig. 13. - Pie Chart Showing Initial Age of Respondents' Mental Health Awareness

What do you know about mental wellness?

69 responses

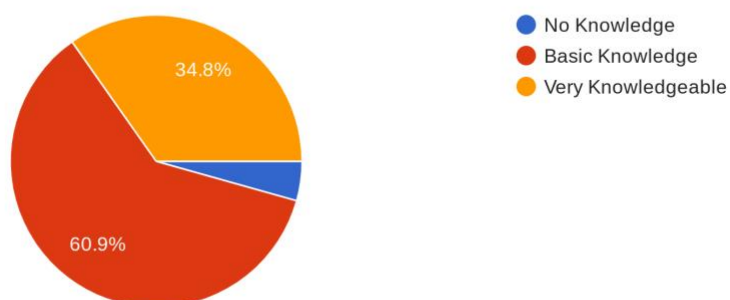


Fig. 14. – Pie Chart Showing Respondents' Mental Wellness Awareness

At what age did you start learning about mental wellness?

69 responses

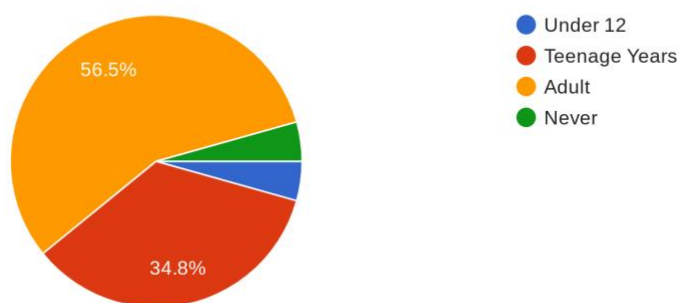


Fig. 15. - Pie Chart Showing Initial Age of Respondents' Mental Wellness Awareness

Should every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago be educated on issues surrounding Mental Health and Wellness?

69 responses

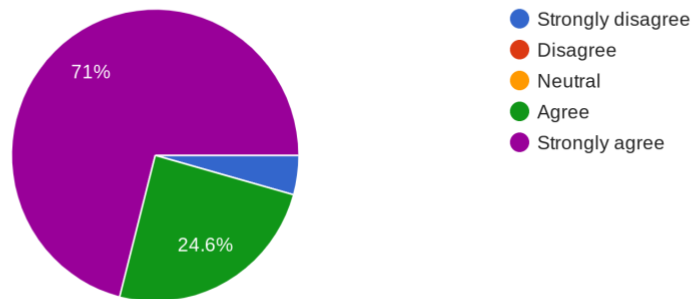


Fig. 16. - Pie Chart Showing Response to Whether All Citizens should be Educated on Mental Health and Wellness

If so, at what age should the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago be educated about issues surrounding Mental Health and Wellness?

69 responses

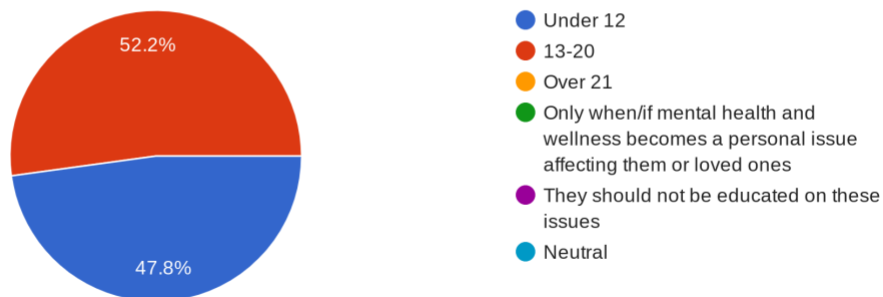


Fig. 17. - Pie Chart Showing the Age Group Respondents thought to be ideal for Initial Education on Mental Health and Wellness

Are you aware of your own mental health situation? (Able to describe your own overall mood/ stress or anxiety levels/ ability to function)

69 responses

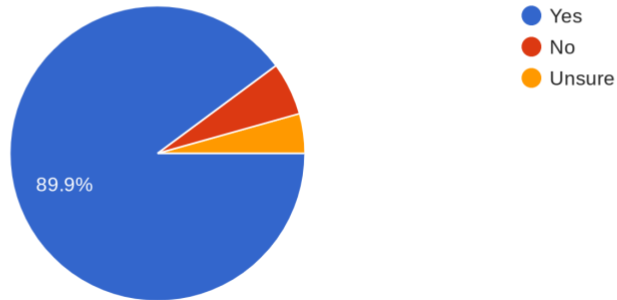


Fig. 18. - Pie Chart Showing Mental Health Self Awareness of Respondents

In what setting do you engage in Creative Arts?

69 responses

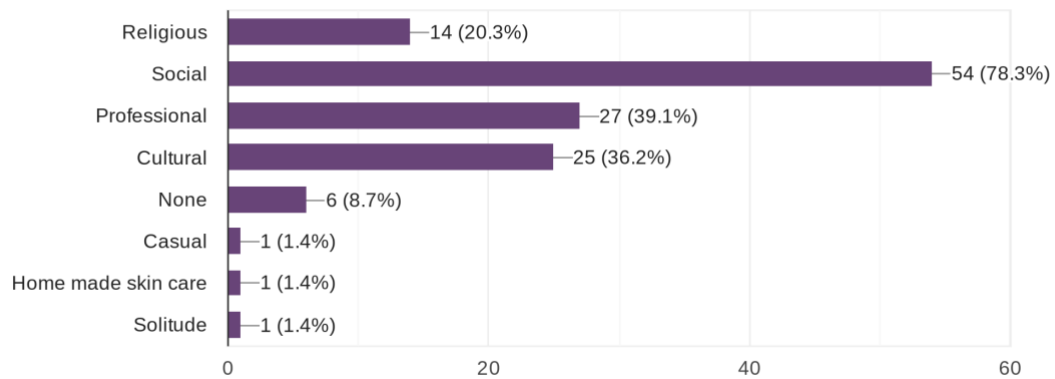


Fig.19. - Bar Graph Showing the Settings in which Respondents Engage in Creative Arts

