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The Effects of Creative Arts Therapies on the Traumatic Stress Symptoms of Refugee Minors

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The Effects of Creative Arts Therapies on the Traumatic Stress Symptoms of Refugee Minors

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Introduction

The experiences of refugees are often characterized by traumatic stressors including loss and violence. Minors of these target populations are particularly sensitive to traumatic stress due to the nature of their developmental state. Currently, there is a lack of evidence-based research on the efficacy of Creative Arts Therapies (CATs) as interventions to reduce traumatic stress symptoms of refugee minors.

Purpose

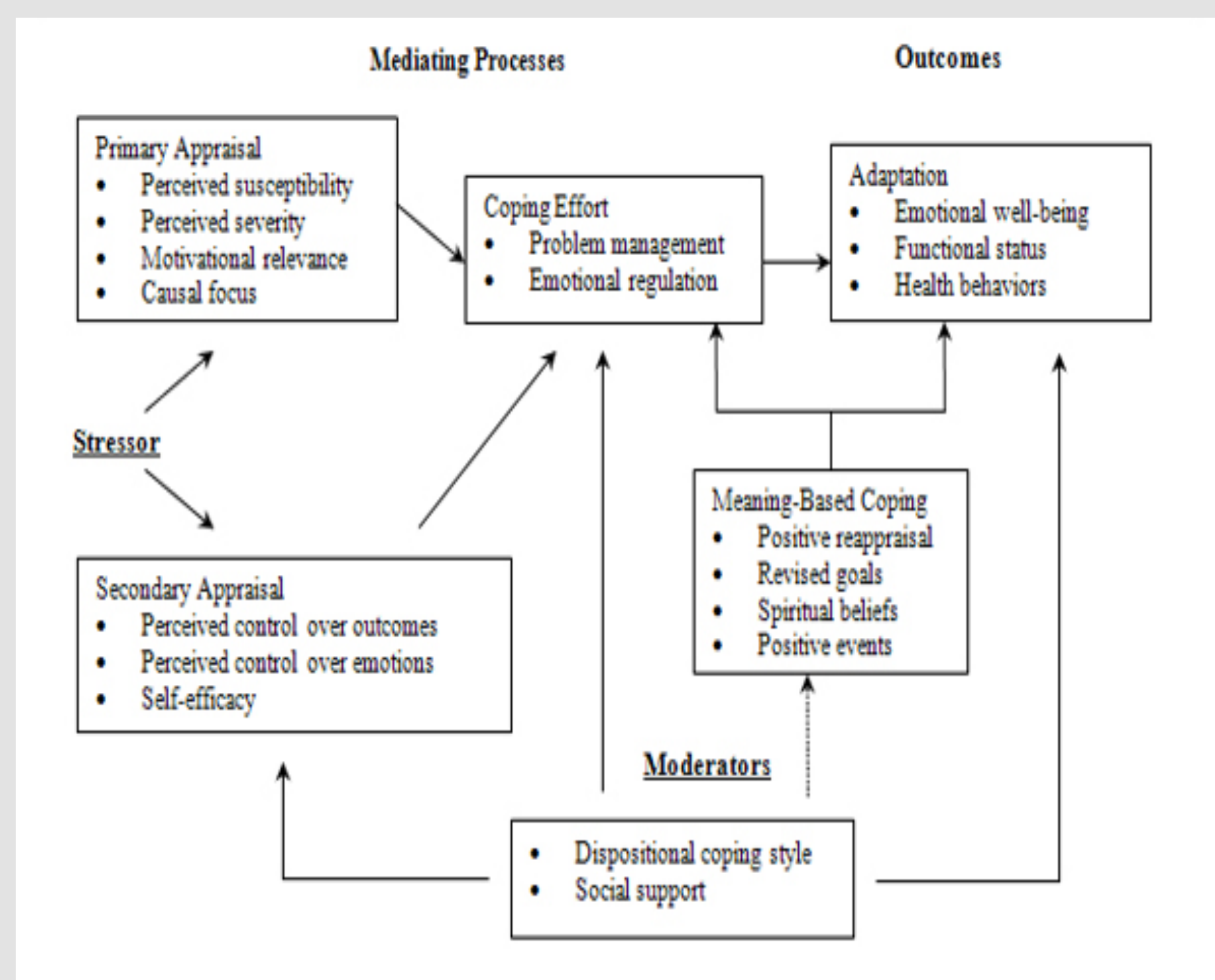
The purpose of this integrative literature review is to evaluate current research articles to determine the efficacy of CATs as therapeutic interventions for refugee minors by comparing their traumatic stress symptoms before and after participating in CATs.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the effects of creative arts therapies for refugee minors?
- 2) Can CATs decrease the traumatic stress symptoms of refugee minors?

Conceptual Model

Richard Lazarus' and Susan Folkman's theory of stress and coping focuses on the individual's psychological responses to stressful stimuli. The theory of stress and coping has the potential to guide the study of Creative Arts Therapies (CATs) as interventions for traumatic stress by unpacking the factors in stress response.



Methodology

For this literature review, an integrative literature review was utilized to answer the main research question concerning CATs' effectiveness with refugee minors. This review allowed for data from diverse studies to be synthesized in a meaningful manner. It provided a comprehensive summary of the literature and its findings.

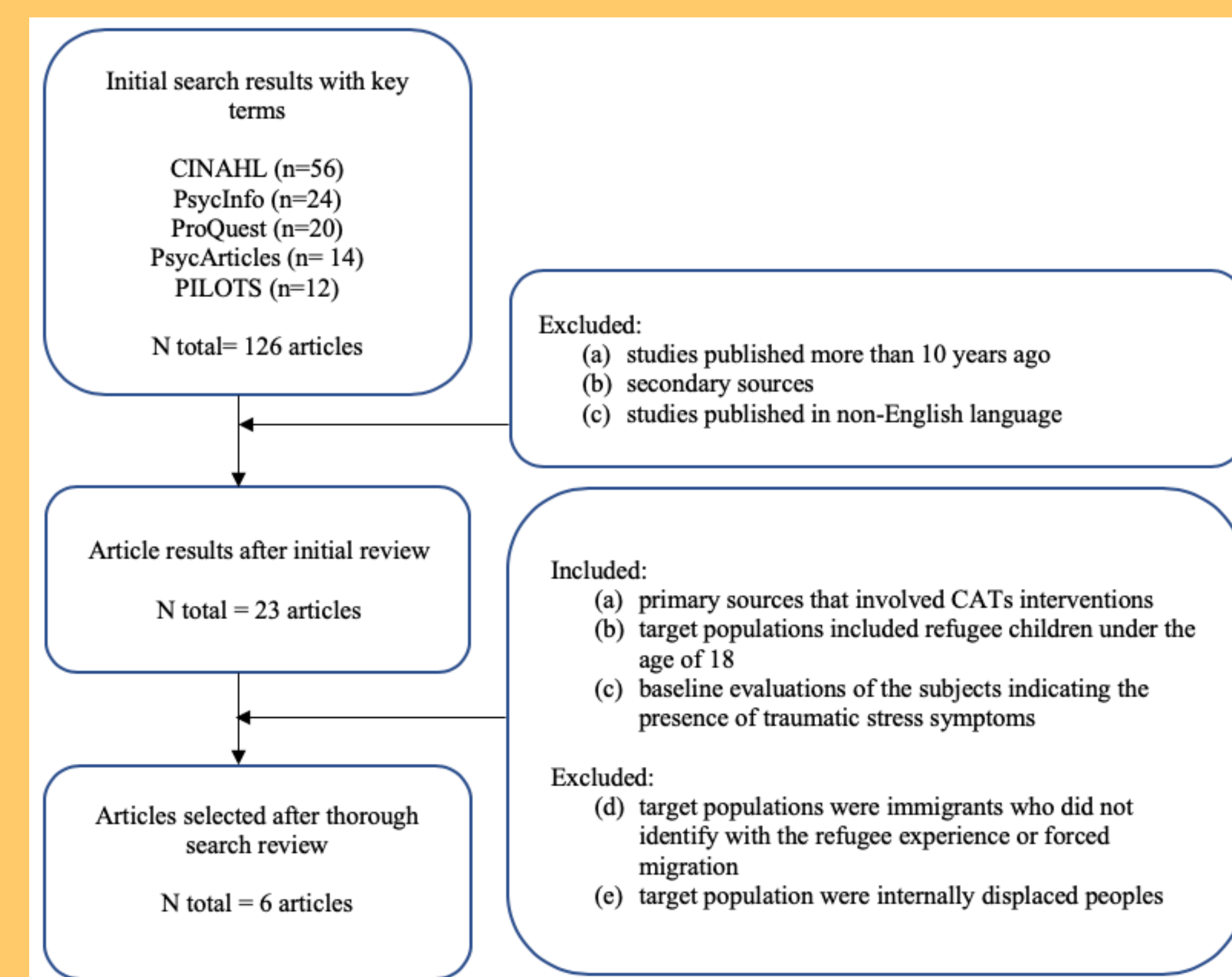


Table 1. Summary of Articles Reviewed

First Author	Study Design	Target Population	CATs Intervention
Demott (2017)	Quantitative	145 unaccompanied minor refugee boys between 15 and 18 years of age	10 sessions of manualized expressive arts intervention (EXIT) within 5 weeks
Kalantari (2012)	Quantitative	88 war bereaved Afghani refugee students between 12 and 18 years of age	6 unstructured and structured writing sessions on 3 consecutive days
Rousseau (2009)	Quantitative	105 immigrant and refugee preschoolers predominantly from Southeast Asia	School-based program consisting of sandplay workshops throughout the school year of 2004-2005
Rowe (2017)	Quantitative	30 refugee students from Burma between 11 and 20 years of age	16 sessions of Burma Art Therapy Program over the course of 6 months
Schottelkorb (2012)	Quantitative	31 refugee children between 6 and 13 years of age	Twice weekly 30-minute child-centered play therapy (CCPT) sessions in school for 12 weeks
Ugurlu (2016)	Quantitative	64 Syrian refugee children between 7 and 12 years of age	5-day workshops of art therapy directives guided by Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR)

Results

Effects of CATs on Refugee Minors

1) Social engagement and connection

All six of the studies incorporated group dynamics into their interventions and promoted the sharing of emotions in a safe-space. Students found their life-satisfaction and hope may have increased upon being able to ask for help from a social network.

2) Self-esteem and self-efficacy

Creative and expressive arts therapy provide children with the appropriate space to create and improve their self-concept. The act of art-making allowed children to create unique products they were proud of, which ultimately increased their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

3) Coping and relaxation

Coping strategies were indicated as instrumental in how the children managed their symptoms. This was described as a "toolkit" given to the children which helped them learn how to calm themselves and take contact with others. Through relaxation techniques, they learned to decrease their stress and gained a sense of control over their symptoms.

Table 2. Efficacy of CATs on Decreasing Traumatic Stress Symptoms of Refugee Minors

First Author	CATs Intervention	Intervention Outcomes
Demott (2017)	Expressive Arts in Transition (EXIT)	There was significant time by group interactions in students of the EXIT group for post-traumatic stress symptoms. EXIT group had higher life satisfaction and higher hope for future than control group.
Kalantari (2012)	Writing for Recovery	Students in the experimental group had a significant decrease in TGIC scores. Analysis of covariance indicated significant effect of program on the experimental group.
Rousseau (2009)	Sandplay Therapy	Children in experimental group benefitted moderately from the program. Children whose families experienced violence in their homelands had significant decreased SDQ global score.
Rowe (2017)	Burma Art Therapy Program (BATP)	The proportion of participants reporting symptoms of anxiety decreased by a statistically significant 0.8%. Teacher reports indicated a decrease of 5.2% among participants who had severe difficulties in school. Participants with positive self-concept increased by 11.8%.
Schottelkorb (2012)	Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT)	Results from ANOVA measures indicated CCPT group demonstrated same significant decrease in severity of PTSD rating as evidence-based-TF-CBT group.
Ugurlu (2016)	Art Therapy	The mean scores of children were significantly higher at pre-treatment in comparison to post-treatment regarding trauma, depression and trait-anxiety symptoms

Limitations

- Experiences CATs may not be comprehensively captured with standardized post-traumatic stress scales
- Limited number of empirical studies for CATs effects on refugee minors
- Populations included in studies may not be representative of diverse refugee populations
- Several studies had very short-term post-tests and follow-ups

Recommendations

- The literature suggests that different tools for analysis be used such as the Diagnostic Drawing Series, which is a more art-based assessment, to understand the positive growth of the participants during the therapeutic process.
- More empirical studies focusing on the effects of CATs on refugee minors are needed.
- Larger-scale studies with a more diverse refugee population are needed to establish accurate representation.
- There is a need for more long-term interventions and follow-ups, as mental health symptoms tend to require long period of time to demonstrate significant trends.

Conclusion

- Creative Arts Therapies (CATs) have been indicated as possible early interventions for decreasing mental health symptoms of refugee minors who undergo traumatic migratory experiences.
- This review identified three major themes that highlights the beneficial effects of CATs related to: 1) social engagement & connection; 2) self-esteem & self-efficacy; and 3) coping & relaxation.
- The empirical evidence also indicated the decrease in traumatic stress symptoms such as maladaptive grief, depression, and anxiety to be statistically significant in several CATs intervention studies.
- There is a need for more CATs intervention studies to be done and the inclusion of refugee minor population must be highlighted.
- Health professionals have a responsibility to serve the most vulnerable groups of their society. The current state of global migration demands their support through more research, advocacy, and policy-change.