



# The Effect of Creative Occupation Implementation to Reduce Stress in Unsheltered Women

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## Introduction

### **Creative Occupations:**

- The use of artistic mediums to provide an outlet for expression.

### **Background:**

- Homeless women are significantly more likely to experience mental health problems, including depressive disorders, anxiety, psychosis, personality disorders, and drug and alcohol abuse, than women who are not homeless (Duke & Searby, 2019; Austin et al., 2008). The main reason identified for using creative activities is to strengthen the client’s occupational performance, well-being, and self-esteem (Müllersdorf & Ivarsson, 2016). Currently, there is limited research regarding the role of occupational therapy and how this profession might employ creative occupations to function within the homeless population.

### **Purpose:**

- To focus on how the use of creative occupations can reduce stress levels among women who have experienced homelessness, specifically those now living in a permanent housing program.

## Methods

### **Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:**

- Women who have or are currently experiencing homelessness.
- Women who have reported mental health disorders.
- Women in the Day Center did not participate in data collection.
- Men who have/are currently experiencing homelessness did not participate.
- No exclusions based on race, age, sexual orientation, or marital status.

### **Assessments Administered:**

- Perceived Stress Scale:
  - Individual perceived stress over the month before assessment.
- Visual Analog Scale:
  - Weekly scale for participants to indicate level of stress before/after interventions.
- End of Program Evaluation:
  - Likert scale for participants to report satisfaction with the program.

### **Intervention:**

- One-hour creative occupation session, twice per week, for 5 weeks.
- After each session, the participant’s artwork was either placed in the dining room or in their immediate environment until the next session.

### **Weekly Interventions**

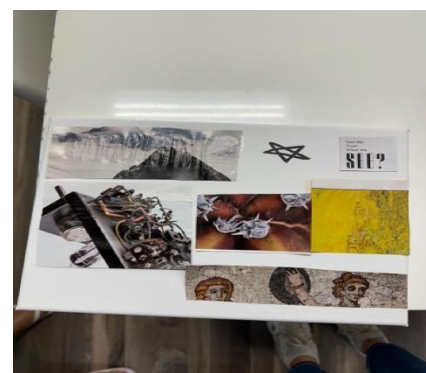
**Week 1:** Pumpkin painting

**Week 2:** Air-dry clay art

**Week 3:** Trick-or-treat bags

**Week 4:** Collage art on canvases

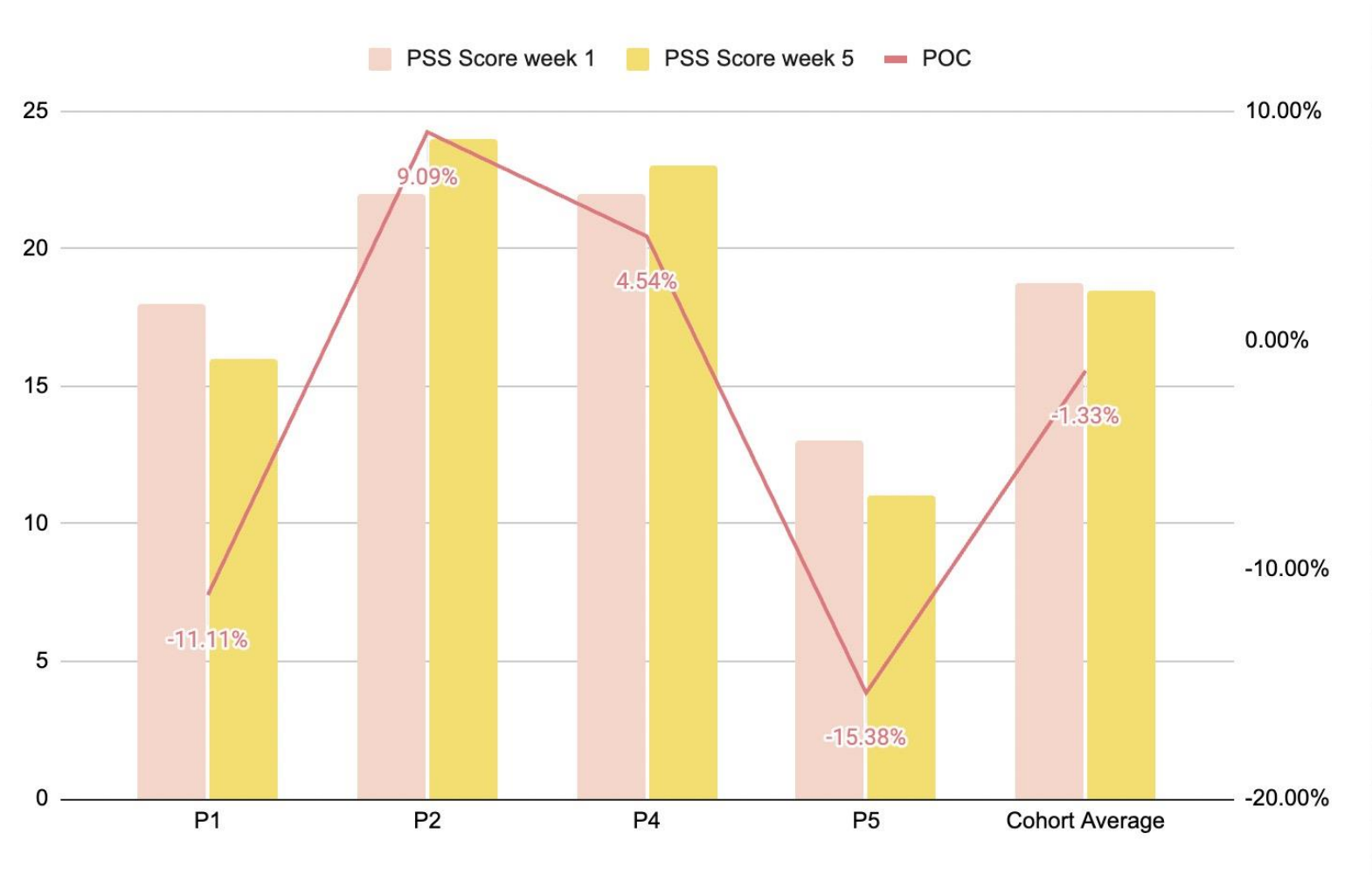
**Week 5:** Painting ornaments



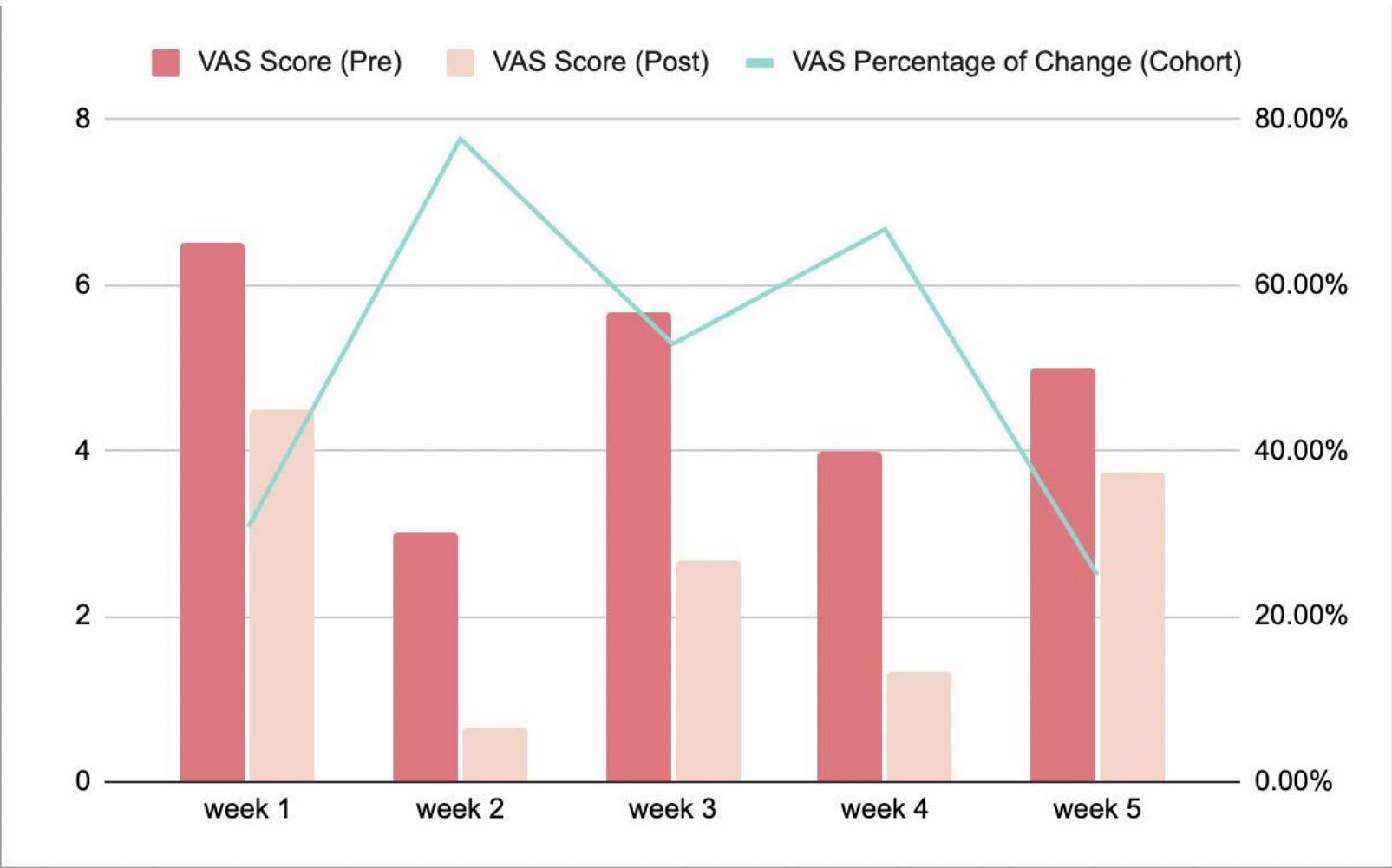
## Results

- 5 participants were enrolled, 4 participants completed the study
- Week one PSS scores were compared to week five PSS scores on individual and cohort levels
- Pre- and post-VAS scores were compared weekly for individual and cohort POC
- Lower scores on PSS = lower perceived stress
- Decreased VAS scores varied week to week
- PSS: 1.33% decrease in cohort perceived stress between weeks one and five

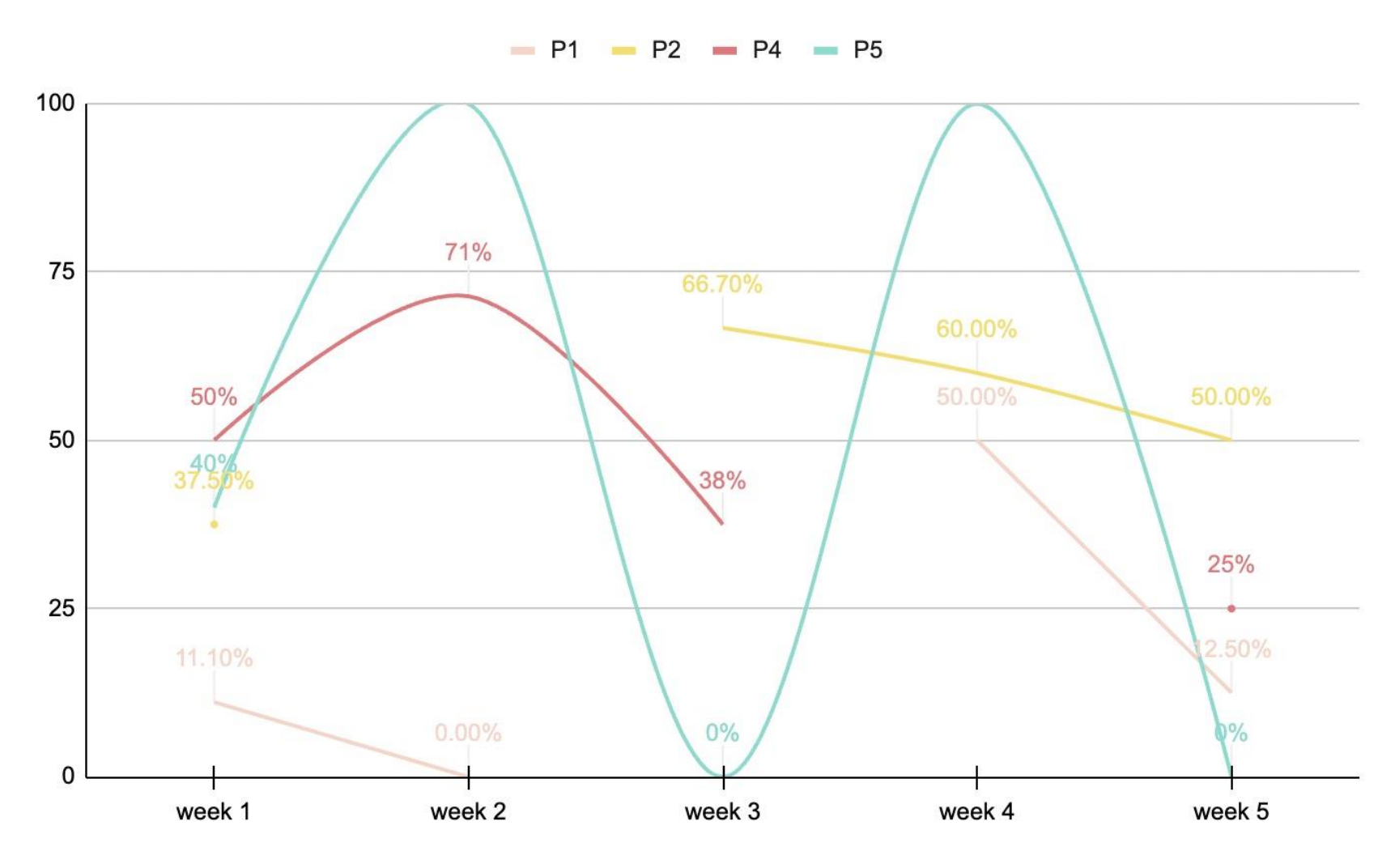
**Figure 1** Individual and cohort PSS scores from Week One and Week Five.



**Figure 2** Weekly cohort Pre and Post VAS percentages of change.



**Figure 3** Weekly individual VAS percentages of change with decreasing percentages or no change.



## Discussion

### **Findings**

- The most significant differences in individual and cohort change percentages occurred during weeks two, three, and four. Creative occupations completed these weeks include air-dry clay art, trick-or-treat bags, and collage art on canvases.
- 3 participants reported gaining/improving new skills. Regarding stress reduction, 2 participants reported the program assisted in alleviating stress, while 2 remained neutral.

## Discussion Continued

### **Findings Continued**

- 2 participants disagreed with the structure, pace, and organization of the study or that the creative occupations related to personal life.
- Consistent participation proved the main challenge, raising concerns about the likelihood of positive effects for the ladies.
- Providing a resource detailing the necessary materials and instructions for each creative occupation supports the continuity of the program and future engagement.
- Overall, there was a positive outcome regarding stress reduction by using creative occupations.

### **Limitations**

- A 5-week study was not a significant timeframe for collecting ample data to demonstrate statistically significant results. Participants may have benefited more had the study been longer.
- Consistent participation proved challenging. While the participants were not required to attend each session, participation served as an opportunity for reducing stress.
- Overall, the small sample size decreases statistical significance.
- Participant’s mental health diagnoses presented as barriers to participation at times.

## Conclusion

The findings emphasize that creative occupations can serve as an outlet for stress reduction for women who have experienced being unsheltered. While the participants subjectively benefited, further research is needed to support the use of creative occupations within homeless shelters.

## References

Duke, A. RN & Searby, A. PhD, RN (2019) Mental ill health in homeless women: a review, *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 40:7, 605-612, DOI: 10.1080/01612840.2019.1565875

Müllersdorf, M. & Ivarsson, A. B. (2016). What, why, how: creative activities in occupational therapy practice in sweden. *Occupational Therapy International*, 23(4), 369–378. <https://doi.org/10.1002/oti.1438>

## Acknowledgement & Contact Information

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