

# Application of Biomorphic Abstract Arts As A Tools for Intervention on Children with Suicidal Ideation: A Case Study

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find and evaluate evidence-based interventions for individual psychotherapy sessions that use art therapy. Participants in this study are 10-year-old and currently reside in Kuala Lumpur. Art therapy can be used to guide practitioners and psychologists in a variety of fields. Interventions that provide positive consequences for appropriate respondent behaviours, as well as antecedent strategies that can help reduce the emergence of problematic behaviours, are examples of these. According to the study's findings, incorporating art therapy into individual psychotherapy sessions benefits the sample of the study while also allowing the researcher to conduct the session in an interactive manner. Biomorphic art that has been used as an intervention has an impact on suicidal ideation and a new perspective on life.

**Keywords :** Art, Intervention, Suicidal Ideation, Biomorphic

## Introduction

The emotional development of children can be defined as a process of emotional change experienced by children. Rebert Havinghurst explained that there are three phases of emotional development in children: the infant and early childhood phases (0–6 years old), the mid-childhood phase (6–12 years old), and the adolescent phase (12–18 years old). In each developmental phase, it can be observed that children go through emotional development that shapes their personalities (Yahaya, 2019). Conducting counselling services for children requires the researcher to have specific skills and strategies, as children tend to answer questions directly rather than openly like adults do (Geldard & Geldard, 2002). Concurrently, suicide is referred to as one's conscious attempt or intention to unlive himself. Some of the leading factors are financial issues, poverty, depression, failed relationships, family problems, and many more (Jodi & Hussain, 2017). Therefore, suicide attempts can happen among adults, teenagers, and even children. Hence, researchers should hold great competence and possess knowledge of child development as well as understand how suicidal attempts take place as

part of an early prevention and intervention step that can be taken in order to ensure that she receives good emotional support.

### **Sample of Study**

The sample for the study is a 10-year-old girl who is also an only child. She has average academic achievement. At the time, the sample for the study was living with her mother. The parents were divorced five years prior. Her father is an entrepreneur and often works in other cities. While the mother is a cashier at a shopping mall. The father's basic income is >RM 2000.00, while the mother's basic income is <RM 2800.00, but the total amount is rather inconsistent. The sample of the study is a passive child who does not have many friends. She only has a few close friends. Based on the researcher's observation, it can be seen that her behaviour did not seem aggressive or disruptive during the session. Rather, her behaviour seems to be the opposite.

### **Problem Statement**

The sample for the study was brought by people who have authority over her to meet up with the researcher. They had informed the researcher that she had brought a pair of scissors to hurt herself in the toilet. When asked, the sample of the study responded that she intentionally brought the scissors to stab herself in the chest. She revealed that she is heavily depressed due to all that is happening in her life. The sample of the study also confessed to seeing a black, hairy, and terrifying entity when she was alone. The entity whispered voices into her head, telling her to jump off a building or stab herself. To which the sample of study had already attempted to jump off from the balcony on the second floor of the building once but was successfully intercepted by a person who happened to pass by the area. The number of sessions conducted in this research was five in total, and the sample of the study was referred to a psychiatrist who specialises in children and teenagers after her first session for an immediate follow-up.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The intervention used is a biomorphic model of abstract art. Abstract art refers to a type of art that is neither figurative nor objective. whereas the biomorphic model is a part of abstract art that was introduced by Alfred Barr. The biomorphic model is a conviction of art that prioritises the subconscious mind as a source of creativity. Every piece of an abstract artwork holds aesthetic values, which can be observed through the aesthetic values presented by the artist (Barr, 1936). Abstract drawing can be used in the field of psychology as a technique, and this can be seen through studies done by Frixione (2009); McClure & Siegel (2015), where abstract drawing encourages brain functions and psychological developments. The word biomorphic is derived from the Greek word 'morphe, which means organic, biology, or living organism (Tyan & Wen, 2007). Biomorph is an unstructured design that is either designed, drawn, or coloured.

Biomorph is the replication of natural forms that are not created by humans, such as a shape section through texture, lines, shapes, and colours, in which the source of inspiration is derived from plants, insects, or animals. Biomorph in the context of art has its own aesthetic value and represents a certain meaning to a person (Nordin, 2020). Biomorph is utilised in drawings or designs created through the development of ideas upon observing anything that is organically or biologically oriented. There are two types of biomorph aesthetics: the aesthetics of faunal organisms and the aesthetics of floral organisms. The

researcher determines whether it is a flora or fauna theme, and the sample of study will choose a living organism as a source of inspiration (Nordin & Bakar, 2020). The sample for study is then asked to choose an organism that is significant to the emotion she wishes to share.

The medium of this biomorphic execution is sketching. Based on the sketches and designs created, the researcher will explore her choices and aesthetic values that are significant to her emotions, issues, or problems. In the second stage, every single shape structure drawn by the sample of study represents her state of emotion at the time. This stage is known as structural aesthetic, while the third stage is known as physical aesthetic. Similarly, this stage also represents her state of emotion, which can be further explored by the researcher. If the faunal organism chosen for the study is an insect, the fourth stage is hence called the abdomen aesthetic. Whereas if the sample of study chose floral organisms, the fifth stage is therefore considered colour aesthetic. At this stage, the colours picked by the sample study play an important role in aiding an in-depth exploration of her emotions.

According to Nordin and Bakar (2020), The method of executing the session to implement the biomorphic model is divided into six components. The first component is to establish a good rapport with the study sample. The second component is to construct the goal of the session to ensure that the session is directed and achieves the target goal. The following step is to carefully evaluate and listen to the study sample. In this component, the researcher should listen to what is being delivered by the sample of study and evaluate if the information heard and understood is in line with what the sample of study intends to deliver. The fourth component is to run a psychological filter where the researcher may use appropriate assessment and measurement to identify her needs and determine if assistance from an expert is necessary. The last component is the researcher's intervention. Under this component, the researcher runs an intervention plan and evaluates whether it affects the sample of the study. The last component is to provide continuous assistance, where the researcher examines other emotional support needed by the sample of study or the need to terminate the session.

### **Evaluation and Plan of Intervention**

The processes of conducting counselling sessions for children are important to ensure that the welfare of both the sample of the study and the researcher is cared for. Therefore, the researcher decided to apply the Session Execution Framework by Nordin & Bakar (2020), which was adapted from Everly & Lating (2017). Since the process of a counselling session is structural and dynamic, the process and plans of intervention play a vital role in ensuring that the objectives of the session are achieved. **Diagram 1** illustrates the steps taken by the researcher when providing counselling sessions.

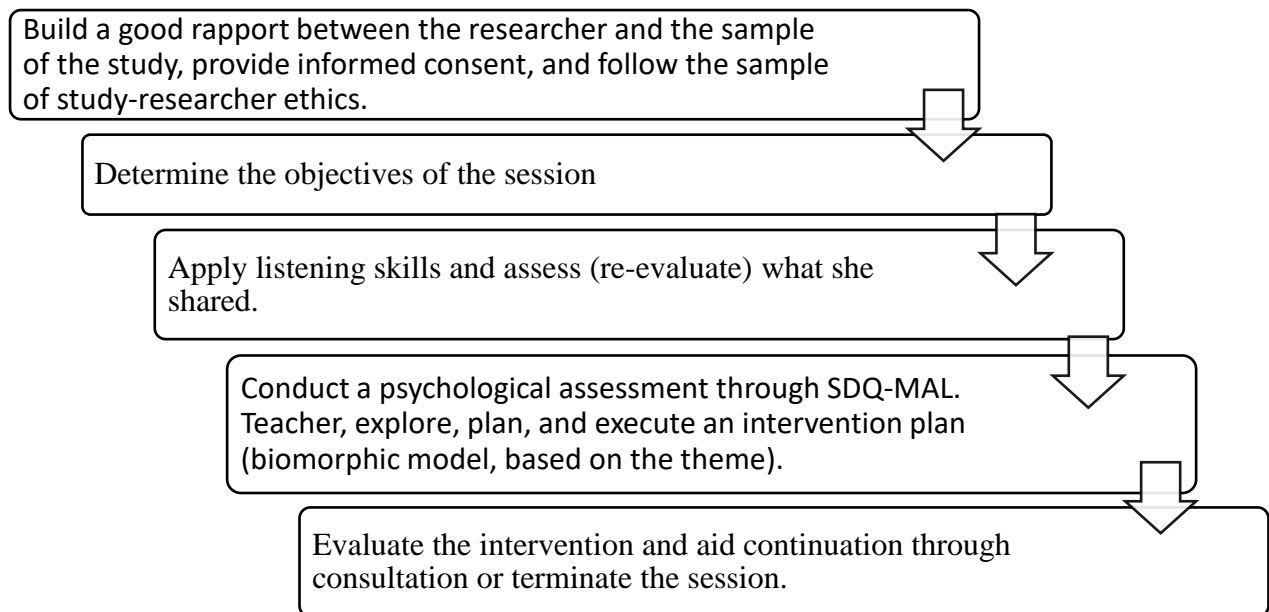


Diagram 1 : Session Execution and Intervention Steps.

A medical expert in charge of her case was referred to. The researcher asked the expert to suggest instruments and intervention plans that could be used to help the sample in the study. Based on the suggestion provided, the evaluation instrument employed was the Parents and Teachers Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ-MAL). The questionnaire was constructed by Dr. Robert N. Goodman. It was then translated by Idris et al (2019) to be used in longitudinal research on emotional and behavioural problems. The instrument (SDQ-MAL) assesses behavioural problems among children and teenagers using five subscales, such as emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviours. Each item and subscale were based on the concepts of children's psychology, psychiatry, and psychopathology that were obtained through factor analysis.

The questionnaire translated by Idris et al (2019) was administered to 495 parents and 432 teachers to test its reliability, and the Cronbach's alpha values achieved for the translated version of the questionnaire were 0.74, 0.77, and 0.78 for their respective sections. The three sections of the questionnaire are SDQ-MAL parents, SDQ-MAL teachers, and SDQ-MAL children. The questionnaire is also divided into two categories: one for children from the age of two to four years old and the other for children and teenagers whose ages range from four to 17 years old. The questionnaires for parents and teachers were administered to parents as well as teachers and were answered based on the behaviours and emotions exhibited by children in the past six months. The scoring values are 0 for untrue, 1 for slightly true, and 2 for very true. However, a reversed scoring method was administered for items 7, 21, 25, 11, and 14, where 2 is for untrue, 1 is for slightly true, and 0 is for very true. The result of the calculation of the five sub-scales indicated that children's problems can be classified into three scale categories: normal, mid, and abnormal (Goodman, 2001).

Based on the five sub-scales, one's level of anxiety and depression are signs of emotional symptoms. While fighting, stealing, and lying are indicators of conduct problems, Subsequently, the sub-scale hyperactivity-inattention refers to physical hyperactivity, sensitivity, attention, and carelessness. Peer relationship problems refer to the condition of a child's ability to socialise with other children (the higher the score obtained, the higher the

issues faced). As for the last sub-scale, prosocial behaviours assess a child's level of concern and good attitude towards the people around him or her. **Table 1** below illustrates the findings of the SDQ-MAL for the teacher that was employed by the researcher.

Table 1

*Observation findings 1*

No	Sub-Scale	Score	Scale Category
1	Emotional Symptomps Scale	10	Abnormal
2	Conduct Problems Scale	3	Mid
3	Hyperactivity-Innatention Scale	8	Abnormal
4	Peer Relationship Problem Scale	7	Abnormal
5	Prosocial Behaviors Scale	3	Abnormal

Upon successful completion of the first counselling session and once the sample of study has been referred to a child psychiatry expert within six months, an observation session was conducted. Based on the findings of the session, it can be seen that scores from four of the five sub-scales can be categorised as abnormal. The expert requested that the researcher conduct an intervention that allows the sample to express her emotions better. This enables the sample of the study to regulate her emotions better without leaving them unattended for too long. Interventions conducted during a particular counselling session are regarded as biomorphic abstract art concepts. The intervention was conducted for six months prior to the second observation session in order to observe her change of behaviour. **Table 2** below demonstrates the findings from the SDQ-MAL teacher that was employed by the researcher.

Table 2

*Observational findings 2*

No	Sub-Scale	Score	Scale Category
1	Emotional Symptomps Scale	6	Abnormal
2	Conduct Problems Scale	3	Mid
3	Hyperactivity-Innatention Scale	6	Mid
4	Peer Relationship Problem Scale	5	Abnormal
5	Prosocial Behaviors Scale	2	Abnormal

The second observation session was conducted after six months of implementing the intervention. Based on the findings of the observation, it can be seen that three out of the five sub-scales can be categorised as abnormal as compared to the findings of the first observation, which attained four abnormal categories. Interestingly, scores across all sub-scales decreased, with the hyperactive-inattentive scale category dropping from abnormal to midrange. This signified that the implemented intervention plans had a significant impact on the sample of the study, which consequently also indicated that she received good emotional support from the researcher. To ensure that the sample of the study received good emotional support and was free to express her emotions, the researcher chose to employ an abstract art approach based on a biomorphic model. The biomorphic model was deemed suitable for the sample of study as it is autonomous in nature and holds aesthetic values, which represent the emotional expressions of creators. This model is divided into four different stages. The first stage is the process of selecting the flora or fauna of a local area (known by the sample of study) as inspiration, aided by the researcher. The second is a biomorphic abstraction,

which is a process of shaping or physically illustrating the original sources. At this stage, four levels were utilised by the researcher: (1) choosing a sketch or shape based on biomorphic concepts; (2) structural aesthetics; (3) physical aesthetics; and (4) colour aesthetics.

The next stage is known as continuous biomorphic abstraction, which is a process of shaping or drawing a physical sketch that is done in greater detail. At this stage, the original shapes or forms of the work produced are detached through her freedom, where they cannot be guessed or deviated from. The last stage is automatism, or, in other words, a subconscious sketching technique that represents a certain value, meaning, or personification that leads to short-term relief for the sample of study. **Diagrams 2** and **3** explain how biomorphic models (fauna) were used during the session in greater detail.

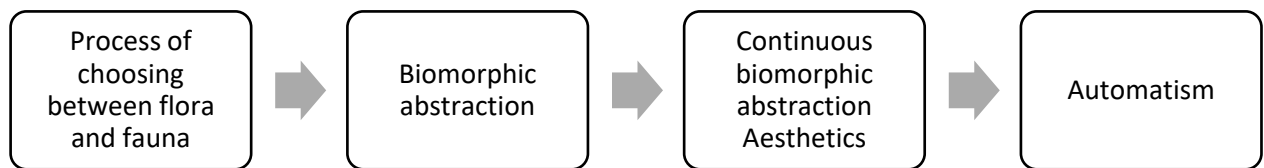
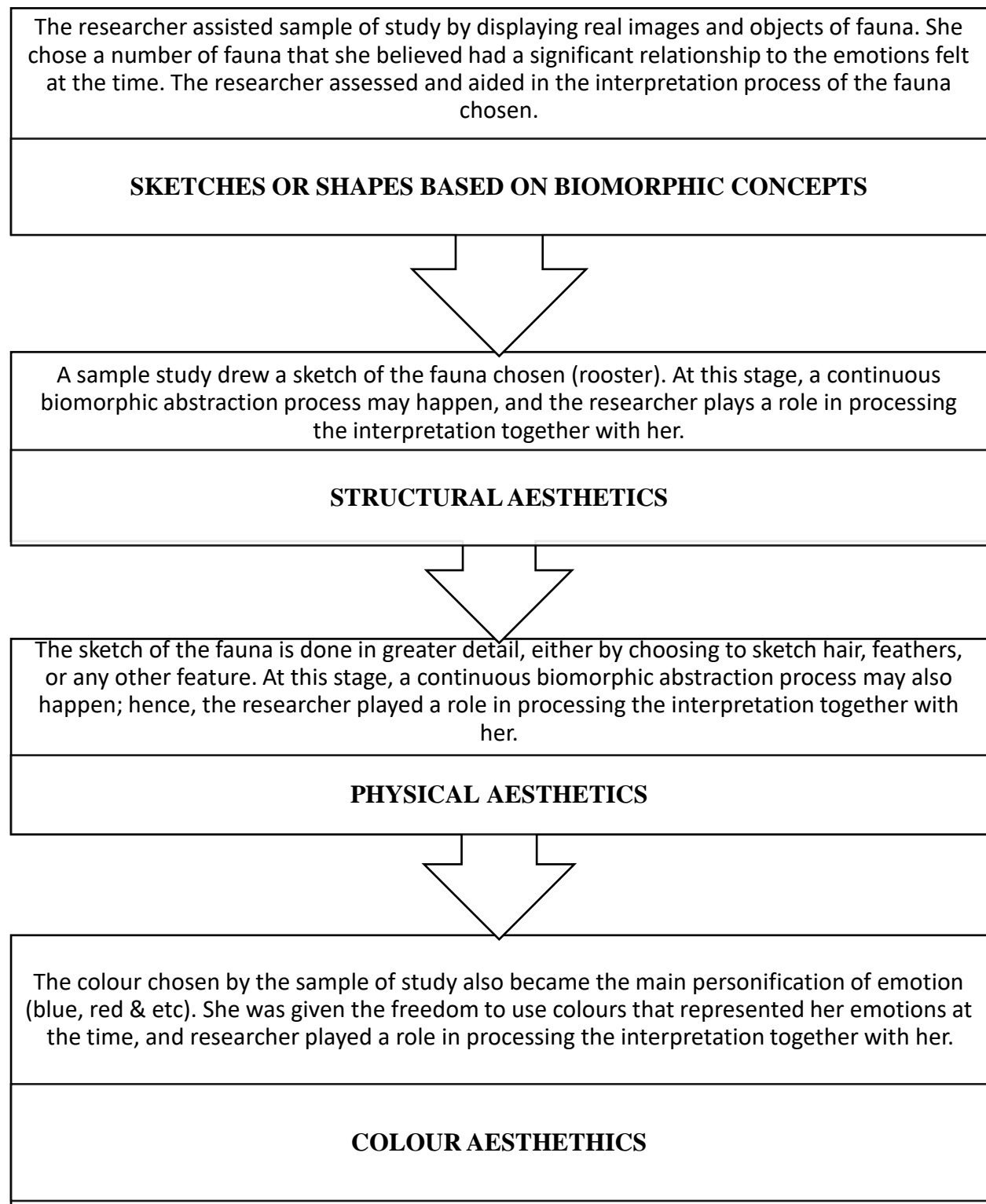


Diagram 2: Process implementation of Biomorphic Concept in the session.



**Diagram 3:** Implementation Steps of the Biomorph Model Intervention. Adaptation from Nordin, (2020)

To illustrate further, **Table 3** is a sample of the sketch drawn using the biomorphic model. For confidential purposes, the sketch below is only a sample and not the real sketch during the session. However, the sketch is drawn as an aid for other researcher to understand how the biomorphic concept application process is applied during the counselling sessions.

*Table 3*



A step by step example of the execution of biomorphic intervention model

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The process of choosing between flora and fauna available at any local site (known to the sample of study) This process requires the counsellor to aid the sample study to find sources of inspiration.



The sample of study chose rooster (fauna)

*“I choose rooster because when I see it, I saw my life, I saw how depress I’m to face all the difficulties in my life”*  
**(Sample of study,10.2)**

The second stage is biomorphic abstraction. A process of shaping or drawing a physical sketch based on the original source It is drawn in reference to the theme of life and the current state of feelings or emotions.



The image above is the process of shaping or drawing a physical sketch based on the original source

*“That’s how inside of my brain look like, I’m so stress out and what I see is death or run away”*  
**(Sample of study,12.5)**

Next, the third stage is continuous biomorphic abstraction, where the process of shaping or drawing a physical sketch is done in greater detail.





It can be seen that the process of continuous biomorphic abstraction has taken place where the sample of study shaped the wing of the rooster in a way that is different from the original source. It symbolizes 'messiness and freedom'. At this stage, researcher made an in-depth exploration.

*"Can you explain more about your drawing?"*  
(Researcher, 14.0)

*"This is how I feel fear, useless and death"*  
(Sample of study, 15.5)

*"Would you like to explain more"*  
(Sample of study, 15.20)

*"I feel angry, always remind myself to be dead is better than living, I'm useless and want to run away from all the problem I've had but then just like the rooster, a wing that can't fly"*  
(Sample of study, 16.20)

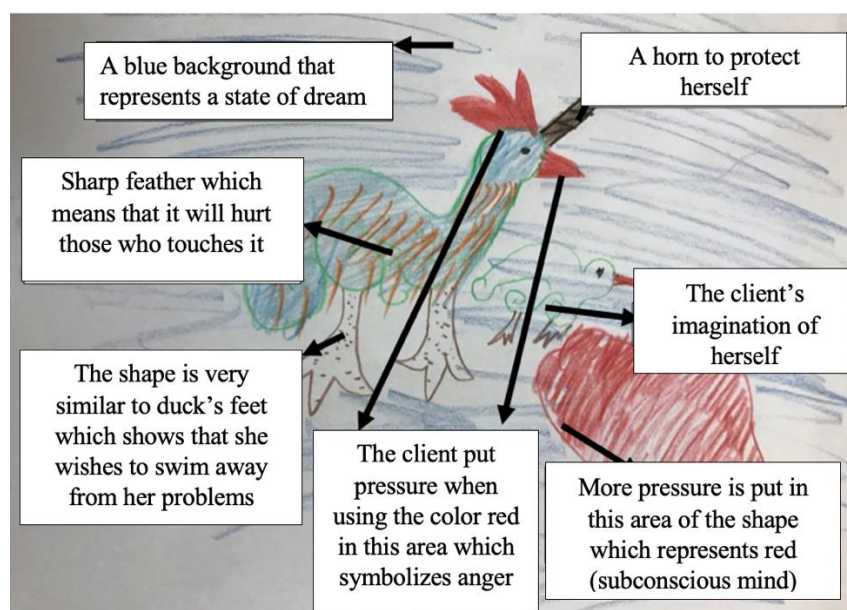


Diagram 3: The Final Sketch of the Intervention Application (Automatism).

The final stage is automatism, which is a sketching technique done subconsciously that represents a certain value, meaning, or personification that brings short-term relief to the sample of study. All of the sketches made have a certain meaning or representation of what the sample of the study is subconsciously experiencing (refer to **Diagram 3**). At this stage, to help the sample of study share her emotions and experience short-term relief from her problems, the researcher will start an in-depth exploration of the sample of study. The drawing will go through another cycle of sketching where the theme of 'life, hope, and

dreams' is applied in the upcoming session. This particular theme is used to help the sample of the study shape her development of self-worth in a more positive light. As the sample of the study explores her own strengths and uses the newfound strength as something she can hold on to in life, her belief that death can solve her problems will slowly start to dissipate.

### **Researcher's Reflection**

The researcher learned that handling cases related to suicide attempts is challenging. A researcher, therefore, should be competent, have knowledge, and remain calm in order to provide the sample of study with a decent counselling session. It is undeniable that while handling this case, the researcher may become concerned about the lack of information and resources available to handle suicide attempt cases among children. However, as a professional researcher, the right steps and actions should be taken to ensure that harmful risks for both the researcher and the sample of the study can be avoided.

To ensure the sample of study participants' safety throughout the session, the researcher asked for her consent to talk to her parents and people who have authority over her. Upon receiving her consent, the researcher held a face-to-face meeting session with her parents, people who have authority over her, and the sample of the study herself. The meeting was conducted to discuss the best steps to be taken by all parties involved to ensure that her welfare is well taken care of. Since the researcher does not have any expertise in clinical counselling, the researcher and the people who have authority over her agreed to refer the sample of study to a clinical counselling specialist, a clinical psychology specialist, and a children's and teen psychiatry specialist at the nearest hospital. The idea was accepted by her parents, who were present at the meeting.

Based on the experts' referrals and in-depth discussions, a number of intervention plans, assessments, and measurements were proposed to be used by the researcher to support her emotions throughout the counselling session. One of the proposed interventions is to provide emotional support and allow the sample of the study to express her emotions well. Apart from that, an intervention plan should also be established by the researcher to ensure that the sample of study receives emotional support appropriate to the issue brought forth by the sample of study. To build the intervention plan, the researcher referred to a number of hospital specialists as well as counselling and psychology practitioners in the field. The cooperation given by the parents, hospital specialists, and practitioners in the field facilitated the researcher's development of an intervention plan that was appropriate and effective for the sample of the study. Regardless, continuous effort is needed to help the sample in the study show positive self-development.

### **Conclusion**

Through the application of the biomorphic model, the sample of the study is able to freely express her emotions and attain emotional relief at the end of each session. The interventions carried out paved the way for the researcher to explore new and updated interventions. Consequently, through the sessions conducted, while ensuring that the goal of the session is achieved, researcher is also able to improve on some basic counselling skills.

### **Contribution**

The context, theory, and study design were developed with the collaboration of Mohammad Hazim Amir Nordin and Nurhafizah Amir Nordin, including data analysis. Nuraimi Nadirah Rahim@Rohim responsible for translation and proofreading, while Chin Yin Min drafted the

manuscript and made critical revisions to the study. Before approving the final manuscript for submission, the authors discussed the findings, implications, and literature.

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