

A Feasibility Study on The Effect of a Music Therapy Community Choir on Quality of Life of Patients Diagnosed with a Chronic Mental Illness.

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Literature Review

Mental illness has become more common since 2018, leading to social isolation, stigma, and reduced quality of life, which complicate recovery (CDC, 2023). People with chronic mental illnesses face higher risks of abuse, stigma, substance abuse, and difficulty accessing care, increasing the risk of suicide. Communities like Tallahassee are seeing rising mental health needs, including higher suicide rates and a shortage of mental health professionals (Cann, 2022).

Music therapy, part of a broader healthcare approach, helps individuals achieve non-musical goals like socialization, self-expression, and better engagement in treatment (Beer & Birnbaum, 2022; Gooding, 2014; Hernandez, 2022; Silverman, 2022).

Choir and Music Therapy

Research shows singing can lower cortisol levels and boost immune system function (Kreutz et al., 2004). Being part of a choir, in particular, enhances a person's sense of belonging, promotes social interaction, and offers a safe space for individuals to process their emotions (Dingle et al., 2012; Eyre, 2022; Hendry et al., 2022). Choir singing gives people the chance to socialize and connect with others.

Music therapy has been shown to improve the quality of life for those diagnosed with mental illness (Silverman, 2022). Music therapy research shows it helps participants process their thoughts, express emotions, and find validation and support (Beer & Birnbaum, 2022; Gooding, 2014; Hernandez, 2022; Silverman, 2022).

References



Purpose

This research aimed to explore the feasibility and acceptability of a music therapy-based choir designed to facilitate a sense of safety, community, and belonging in persons with mental illness.

Method

Single-group, quasi-experimental post-test design.

The intervention was an 8-week choir experience that met once a week.

Each choir rehearsal lasted one hour and followed a structured routine, including introductory activities, singing experiences, and group discussions.

Participants

Six female participants from their early 20s to 70s were recruited through flyers posted in local mental health clinics and the local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) chapter.

Music Therapy Choir Process

Choir Warm-ups

Autonomy & Choice: Participants chose songs based on their preferences.

Self-expression & Agency: Participants discussed the music and lyrics.

Community & Respect: Participants connected and shared common experiences.

Participation: Participants suggested new songs and shared their interpretations.

Coping Strategies: Music therapists encouraged practicing healthy coping strategies.

Results

Sense of Belonging, Connection, and Self-Esteem:

- Participants reported a strong sense of community within the choir, expressing that the group setting fostered a feeling of belonging.
- Many noted that the choir provided a supportive environment to connect with others who shared similar experiences and interests.
- Engaging in the choir project led to noticeable improvements in participants' self-esteem.
- Participants felt proud of their contributions to the choir.

Improvement in Self-Expression:

- Through the choir sessions, participants experienced enhanced self-expression.
- Several participants noted that feeling accepted in the group increased their ability to express themselves more freely and confidently.

Increased Motivation:

- Participants reported that being part of the choir gave them something to look forward to each week, increasing their motivation and enthusiasm in other areas of their lives.
- The structure and regularity of the sessions helped participants establish a routine, which was particularly beneficial for those struggling with low motivation.

Discussion

The research generated significant interest, and the researcher received numerous inquiries via email. However, many potential participants were unable to join due to prior summer commitments or scheduling conflicts with their work.

The smaller group size fostered more meaningful discussion and connection. Although participants varied in age and life stages, the small number allowed them to bond and engage with each other effectively.

Contact Information

