

Music Therapy in Individuals with Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Abstract

Music tends to have a firm association with the psychological well-being of individuals, specifically those who have witnessed trauma. Thus, owing to this repute, music therapies have long been familiarized in the psychological domain to help alleviate stress and trauma through guided music therapy sessions. The current study intends to dive deeper into the notion of music therapy and its alliance with coping post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The study has been built upon a qualitative research design, and the paper will proceed by meticulously exploring the existing body of literature in this regard to offer analysis on the given issue.

Keywords: Music Therapy, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Healing Therapies, PTSD, Music and PTSD.

Introduction

Individuals who have witnessed atrocious life events are the survivors of trauma (Blake and Bishop 1994). The trauma can be a consequence of coming across any accidental or natural disasters (Ursano, Fullerton, and McCaughey 1994), wars (Ai, Peterson, and Ubelhor 2002), any sort of violence (Carlson 2005), or a sequence of abusive encounters such as childhood, marital, or any other prolonged abuse (Kent and Waller 1998; Follette et al. 1996). Besides, there could be copious causal aspects that can induce trauma and stress in people, leading to depression and sometimes even severe adverse outcomes (Maercker and Hecker 2016). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is also among the most perilous and serious reactions to trauma.

To date, numerous therapies have been incepted to reconcile trauma survivors by means of distinct healing techniques (Herman 1998). Music therapies are also among the foremost and evidence-based treatments that momentarily assist in curing trauma. The therapy is administered by proficient and trained music therapists (Craig 2019; MacRae 2021). In accordance with American Music Therapy Association's description:

Music Therapy is the clinical & evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. (AMTA 2022)

Music therapy is determined as a cathartic process that integrates musical interaction as a medium to communicate and express (Gold et al. 2005). In his book,

Dr. Michael Thaut (2013), the Director of Colorado State University's Center for Biomedical Research in Music, enlightened that:

The record of the complex role and function of music in human history is full of examples of how certain pieces of music express certain emotions, concepts, or events for specific cultures and societies.

It is broadly acknowledged that individuals often use music to communicate feelings and express emotions without requiring to add verbal context (Davis 2010). Thus, in this sense, music therapy is irrefutably an optimistic intervention for PTSD patients since such people often perceive it distressing and intrusive to talk with therapists about their past experiences (Baker et al. 2018). Therefore, music therapists believe that such interventions offer them a means to use music to evoke traumatic memories of the victim to provide access to discussion and processing of the past (Bittman et al. 2001; Sutton 2002). Besides, there are multiple other facets of music therapy and PTSD treatment that we later intend to discuss in the current study. The prime incentive of this research is to encapsulate the imperative notion of music therapy and how it is attributable to coping with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Research Methodology

The current study entails a qualitative research design. With the intention of getting an up-to-date insight into the study problem and offering rigorous outcomes, a review approach deemed optimal to conduct the research. To accomplish the research aim, various online databases have been utilized to amass data on the current topic.

Multiple databases, websites, search engines, and some authentic journals were sorted to extract the required data. Initially, a few of the renowned and widely used platforms such as Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, and Web of Science were considered to gather the relevant studies. Moreover, other materials concerning the topic were searched among the free access literature. The selected researches for this study were all composed of relevant findings concerning the topic. Lastly, after finalizing the assembled content for review, an additional step was re-examining the given material and excluding the unfitting and redundant studies.

Results and Discussion

Connection between Music, Emotions, and Mental Wellbeing

It is indubitable that music stimulates distinct emotions and feelings among individuals (Schaefer 2017; Robinson 2008; Koelsch 2014). For instance, listening to cheerful and lively music prompts a sense of positivity among individuals (Sena Moore 2017). In the same way, sad music often reminds of the gloomy memories, and sometimes the lyrics and rhyme seem to influence in a way that one might find the explanation of their stories floating within them (Mihalcea and Strapparava 2012; Cochrane 2010).

Music has been defined as an aesthetic experience that is a basic necessity for development and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, music has no boundaries; one can alter it, improvise it, or either adopt it from all contexts. Even if you cannot understand a specific language, you can still feel the emotion, the connection, and the beauty of rhythm within its music. Music can be used to transcend the material

aspects of one's life or to integrate individuals into groups and generate group feelings (de Witte et al. 2020; 2022). Individuals can engender positive feelings with music since it is nonverbal communication. Moreover, how certain melodies can trigger our memories in just a matter of seconds and how music can re-connect us with our past are all evidence of the strong impact of music on our minds. Thus, music has the effectiveness of gratifying the need for psychological relief.

Perspective of Everett Thayer Gaston on Music Therapy

Everett Thayer Gaston is widely regarded as the “Father of music therapy” (Riddle-Crilly 2019). He was a trained clinical psychologist who extensively contributed to the advancement and expansion of the music therapy profession (Gracida 2019). In the 1940s, he attempted to create music therapy positions in psychiatric hospitals in Topeka. Gaston even developed a program at the University of Kansas School of Music to help professionalize music therapy. He designed a master's degree that was dedicated to studying the impacts of music on human behavior.

Gaston always perceived music as a structured reality that can benefit everyone. He had a belief that the entire mankind necessitates aesthetic expressions and experiences, and music is a bridge that can link towards that side. Gaston further asserted that musical expressions have inherent qualities that could be therapeutic. As per his beliefs, the shared musical experience could be a sort of structured reality that assist in maintaining a confident relationship between therapist and patients.

Since music is nonverbal communication, it has the potential to draw multiple meanings from its mimed context. Gaston had a view that music diminishes the feelings of loneliness, elicits certain emotions, and dissolves fears through intimacy. He demystified that music could be used in character training as it directly influences emotions. At one point, he cited that “behavior can be controlled by the type of music used”. Gaston further construed that the brain responds reflexively to music. He underpinned that “the rhythm determines the amount of energy invested in the physical response to music”. Gaston proceeds to explain that music is not mystical but mysterious. He further added that we do not wholly understand the reasons behind the beauty of music as they have not yet been proven and probably never will be. The causal factor is that every person has distinct definitions of music, and the rhythms disseminate different stories and meanings for varying minds.

To sum up, Gaston explored music not only psychologically but sociologically and neurobiologically as well. Apart from this, trailing upon his ideas, understanding music necessitates the acquaintance with human nature and behavior from the social and scientific outlook. Thus, Gaston is a prominent figure who suggested and explained the usage of music as an adjunctive therapy for those calling for psychological assistance and intervention.

Music Therapies and PTSD

Music therapies are long-established techniques to shrug off distress, depression, and other psychological sufferings. Research has endorsed the positive consequences of music on trauma survivors. Similarly, numerous research scholars have conducted studies to explore the vital role of music therapies in coping with

PTSD. For instance, Bensimon, Amir, and Wolf (2008) designed a study to investigate the influence of music therapy in coping with soldiers with PTSD. The researchers employed the drumming approach to combat trauma. Data was gathered through consistent monitoring through a camera, self-report of the therapist, and open-ended, in-depth interviews. The outcomes indicated that a decline was perceived in PTSD symptoms following the drumming session. Moreover, an improved sense of openness, belonging, connectedness, closeness, sharing, togetherness, intimacy, and achieving non-threatening access to traumatic recalls enabled a passage for anger and retrieving self-control. Thus, it was observed that music therapy proved to be fruitful in this case. Likewise, Hunter (2019) also investigated the impact of art and music therapies on reducing PTSD symptoms among soldiers.

Another study was conducted by Carr et al. (2012) to analyze the results of group music therapy for patients with a history of consistent PTSD. The investigators used a mixed method approach embracing an exploratory randomized controlled trial and interviews with patients. The findings of their research also showed a significant decrease in PTSD symptoms, as well as reduced depression and stress. The Group music therapy turned out to be effective and viable for PTSD patients who previously did not adequately respond to cognitive behavioral therapies (CBTs).

In addition, Green (2011) also researched to explore the considerable and beneficial role of arts and music therapies in combating trauma. The study offered a brief portrayal of arts and music therapies, defined the changing mechanisms with these modalities, and inspected the literature on using these therapies with children, families, and adults. Similarly, Felsenstein (2013) prepared a case study of three

preschool children diagnosed with PTSD. The children were given group music therapy, and the usage of visual arts and drama was part of the sessions. The results indicated the necessity of employing this technique for clinical interventions for children tackling trauma and stress.

Besides, Lightstone, Bailey, and Voros (2015) presented an exclusive case of remote music therapy based on videoconference technology. The researchers addressed the possibility of remote-based music therapy to deal with PTSD. The findings emphasized that remotely-delivered music therapy can be effective in treating complex cases of PTSD. Moreover, the inter-professional collaboration positively impacted the treatment procedure, and the remote treatment modality was not unfavorable to treatment efficacy.

Furthermore, there is a welter of research (Beck et al. 2018; Bensimon, Amir, and Wolf 2012; Garrido et al. 2015; Gulbay 2021; Pezzin et al. 2018; Ahonen and Mongillo Desideri 2014; Blake and Bishop 1994; Gooding and Langston 2019; Beck et al. 2021) that addresses the appositeness and adaptability of music therapy sessions for treating PTSD. Owing to the plentiful advantages and cognitive impacts of music, the interventions can offer the most optimum outcomes in alleviating the symptoms. It is evident how some music can inspire nostalgic feelings. Hence, it can be synthesized that music has the potency to develop an impact on the mind which could prompt copious optimistic outcomes if guided by professionals.

Conclusion

In drawing things to a close, it can be asserted that music has profound and immaculate association with psychological interventions for individuals suffering from PTSD. Individuals can harness mental comfort and fortify their rehabilitation through guided music therapy sessions, musical improvisation, sharing stories, songwriting, singing, and relaxing with music. Besides, the soothing and healing effect of music also help evacuate negative memories, which, in turn, contributes to swift recovery from trauma.

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