

Exploring the Application of Music Therapy as an Adjunct in University Psychological Counseling

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Abstract: This paper explores the application of music therapy as an auxiliary modality in university counseling, addressing the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among college students. Despite the availability of traditional counseling services, many students face barriers such as long waiting lists and resistance to talk therapies. Music therapy, with its robust theoretical foundations in psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, and humanistic perspectives, offers a versatile and engaging approach to addressing anxiety, depression, and stress. Case studies from institutions like the University of Miami and the University of Edinburgh demonstrate significant improvements in student mental health through music therapy interventions. However, challenges such as the scarcity of qualified therapists and difficulties in evaluating outcomes necessitate strategies like professional development and standardized assessment protocols. By integrating music therapy, university counseling services can provide a more holistic and accessible support system, enhancing overall student well-being.

1. Introduction

The increasing prevalence of mental health issues among university students underscores the critical role of counseling services in higher education. Research indicates that a significant proportion of college students grapple with anxiety, depression, stress, and other psychological challenges, often exacerbated by academic pressures and social transitions. Despite the availability of various counseling options, such as individual therapy and group sessions, university counseling centers frequently face resource constraints, leading to long waiting lists and limited accessibility. Moreover, traditional counseling methods may not resonate with all students, resulting in underutilization of these services.

In this context, the integration of music therapy into university counseling emerges as a promising adjunctive approach. Music therapy, defined as the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions within a therapeutic relationship, has demonstrated efficacy in addressing diverse psychological issues. Its theoretical foundations, encompassing psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, and humanistic perspectives, provide a robust framework for understanding its therapeutic potential. Neuroscientific research further validates music's impact on physiological, emotional, and cognitive processes, making it a versatile tool for mental health interventions.[1]

The application of music therapy in university settings has shown positive outcomes. For

instance, programs at institutions like the University of Miami and the University of Edinburgh have reported significant improvements in students' mental health, including reduced anxiety and enhanced well-being. These interventions involve various activities, such as listening to music, composing original pieces, and engaging in guided imagery, tailored to address specific psychological needs.

Despite its advantages, the practical implementation of music therapy faces challenges, including the scarcity of qualified therapists and difficulties in evaluating therapeutic outcomes. However, strategies such as professional development programs, standardized assessment protocols, and collaborative partnerships can mitigate these limitations.

This paper aims to explore the application of music therapy as an auxiliary modality in university counseling, examining its theoretical underpinnings, practical implementations, and potential benefits. By leveraging music therapy's unique capabilities, university counseling services can offer a more holistic and accessible approach to supporting student mental health, addressing the gaps in traditional counseling methods and enhancing overall well-being.

2. Theoretical Foundation of Music Therapy

Music therapy, defined as the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship, has evolved significantly over the years. Its roots can be traced back to ancient civilizations where music was used for healing purposes. The formalization of music therapy as a profession began in the 20th century, particularly after World War II, when musicians visited hospitals to play for veterans, highlighting the therapeutic potential of music.

The theoretical foundations of music therapy are diverse, encompassing various psychological frameworks. One prominent theory is the psychodynamic approach, which posits that music can access unconscious processes and emotions, allowing individuals to explore and resolve underlying psychological conflicts. This theory emphasizes the role of the therapist in facilitating the expression of repressed emotions through musical experiences.

Another key theoretical perspective is cognitive behavioral theory, which focuses on the interplay between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. In this context, music therapy aims to modify dysfunctional thought patterns and behaviors by using music to reinforce positive cognitive processes. For instance, a therapist might use music to help clients identify and challenge negative thought patterns, thereby promoting emotional regulation and adaptive behaviors.

Additionally, humanistic theories, such as those proposed by Carl Rogers, emphasize the importance of the therapeutic relationship and the client's self-actualization. Music therapy within this framework is seen as a means to foster self-expression, enhance self-awareness, and promote personal growth. The therapist creates a supportive environment where clients can explore their emotions and experiences through music, facilitating a deeper understanding of themselves.

The application of music therapy in mental health is grounded in its ability to influence physiological, emotional, and cognitive processes. Neuroscientific research has demonstrated that music can activate multiple brain regions, including those involved in emotion regulation, memory, and reward processing. This multifaceted impact makes music a powerful tool for addressing various mental health issues.

In the context of university counseling, music therapy can serve as an effective adjunct to traditional therapeutic approaches. College students often face stressors such as academic pressure, social challenges, and identity development, which can impact their mental well-being. Music therapy offers a non-threatening and engaging way to address these issues. For example, it can help reduce anxiety through relaxation techniques, improve mood through positive musical experiences,

and enhance social skills through group music activities.

Moreover, music therapy can be particularly beneficial for students who may be resistant to traditional talk therapies. The non-verbal nature of music allows for emotional expression and communication in a way that words alone may not achieve. This can be especially valuable for individuals struggling with trauma, depression, or anxiety, where verbal articulation of feelings can be challenging.[2]

In conclusion, the integration of music therapy into university counseling services holds significant promise. By leveraging its theoretical underpinnings and understanding its application principles, counselors can enhance the effectiveness of their interventions, providing a holistic approach to student mental health. The evolving body of research in this field continues to validate the role of music therapy as a valuable adjunct in promoting psychological well-being.

3. The Current Situation and Challenges of College Psychological Counseling

The prevalence and diversity of mental health issues among university students have become increasingly apparent in recent years. Research indicates that a significant portion of college students experience various psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, stress, and eating disorders. These issues are often compounded by academic pressures, social interactions, and the transition to adulthood. A survey conducted by the American Psychological Association revealed that approximately 60% of college students reported feeling overwhelming anxiety, while 40% felt so depressed that it was difficult to function.[3]

University counseling services play a crucial role in addressing these mental health concerns. However, the current state of these services reveals several gaps and limitations. Most universities offer a range of counseling options, including individual therapy, group sessions, and crisis intervention. Despite these efforts, the resources available are often insufficient to meet the high demand. Many counseling centers are understaffed, leading to long waiting lists and limited accessibility for students in need. Additionally, the traditional models of counseling may not resonate with all students, resulting in low utilization rates. A study by the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors found that only about 10-15% of college students seek help from counseling services, indicating a significant gap in service utilization.[4]

The challenges faced by university counseling services are multifaceted. Resource constraints are a primary concern, as budgetary limitations restrict the hiring of additional counselors and the expansion of services. This inadequacy is further exacerbated by the increasing number of students seeking help. Another significant challenge is the low acceptance rate among students. Factors contributing to this include stigma associated with mental health issues, lack of awareness about available services, and apprehension about the effectiveness of traditional counseling methods.

The integration of music therapy into university counseling services offers a promising solution to some of these challenges. Music therapy, as discussed in the previous section, has a robust theoretical foundation and has been shown to effectively address various psychological issues. Its non-verbal nature and engaging approach can appeal to students who may be hesitant to engage in traditional talk therapies. By incorporating music therapy, university counseling centers can expand their service offerings, making mental health support more accessible and appealing to a broader range of students.

In summary, the current landscape of mental health issues among college students and the limitations of existing counseling services highlight the need for innovative approaches. Music therapy, with its proven efficacy and broad appeal, presents a valuable adjunct to traditional counseling methods, potentially enhancing the overall effectiveness of university mental health services.[5-8]

4. The application and practice of music therapy in college psychological counseling

The integration of music therapy into university counseling services has attracted growing attention worldwide, providing a novel way to support students' mental health. In the United States, for example, the University of Miami and the University of Arizona have shown that music therapy—through listening, composing, or guided imagery—can effectively reduce anxiety, depression, and stress levels among students. Similarly, the University of Edinburgh in the UK uses improvisational music-making and relaxation techniques to help students manage stress and emotions, with positive feedback from participants.[9]

In China, Beijing Normal University has piloted a program combining traditional Chinese music with Western therapeutic approaches to address student depression, showing promising results in symptom reduction. Research worldwide confirms that music therapy helps lower stress hormones, improves mood, and enhances coping strategies. Studies in Australia and Canada further demonstrate its value in managing anxiety, depression, and stress in student populations.

Moreover, combining music therapy with other methods like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) can amplify its effects. For example, pilot programs at the University of Southern California and the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that students receiving music therapy alongside CBT or mindfulness training experienced greater improvements in anxiety, stress management, and emotional resilience than with single approaches alone.[10]

In summary, music therapy is an effective and flexible complement to traditional university counseling. Its ability to address various psychological challenges and integrate with other methods highlights its practical value for enhancing college students' mental health and well-being.

5. Advantages and limitations of music therapy in college psychological counseling

The integration of music therapy into university counseling services presents several distinct advantages, particularly in its non-verbal nature and ease of acceptance among students. Music therapy transcends linguistic barriers, allowing individuals to express and process emotions that may be difficult to articulate verbally. This aspect is particularly beneficial in a university setting, where students from diverse cultural backgrounds may struggle with language-related communication issues. Additionally, music is a universally relatable medium, making it an easily accessible and non-threatening form of therapy. Students are often more receptive to music-based interventions compared to traditional talk therapies, which can sometimes be perceived as intimidating or overly clinical.[11-13]

Despite these advantages, the practical application of music therapy in university counseling is not without its limitations. One significant challenge is the scarcity of qualified music therapists. The specialized training required for effective music therapy means that there are fewer professionals available to meet the growing demand. This shortage can limit the scope and frequency of music therapy sessions offered by university counseling services. Another notable limitation is the difficulty in evaluating the therapeutic outcomes of music therapy. Unlike more quantifiable interventions, the impact of music therapy on mental health can be subjective and challenging to measure using standard assessment tools. This complicates the process of demonstrating the efficacy of music therapy to stakeholders and securing continued funding and support.[14]

To address these limitations, several strategies can be implemented. Firstly, universities can invest in training programs to develop in-house music therapy expertise. Collaborating with music therapy institutions to offer specialized courses or workshops for counseling staff can help build a skilled workforce. Secondly, establishing clear, standardized protocols for evaluating the

effectiveness of music therapy is crucial. This can involve developing specific assessment tools that capture both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the therapy's impact. Additionally, fostering partnerships with external music therapy organizations can help bridge the gap in professional resources, allowing universities to access a wider pool of qualified therapists.

Furthermore, integrating music therapy with existing counseling frameworks can enhance its effectiveness and acceptance. For instance, combining music therapy with cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) can provide a more holistic approach to mental health care. This integrative model not only leverages the strengths of each method but also addresses a broader range of psychological issues.

In summary, while music therapy offers unique benefits in the context of university counseling, it is essential to acknowledge and address its inherent limitations. By investing in professional development, refining evaluation methods, and fostering collaborative partnerships, universities can optimize the integration of music therapy into their counseling services, thereby enhancing the overall mental health support available to students.[15]

6. Case Analysis

The application of music therapy as an adjunctive modality in university counseling has demonstrated promising outcomes, as evidenced by specific case studies. One notable case involves a university student experiencing severe anxiety and social withdrawal. The music therapy intervention included weekly sessions where the student engaged in guided imagery and music (GIM), a technique that facilitates emotional exploration through music-induced imagery. Over a period of six months, the student reported a significant reduction in anxiety levels, as measured by the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), with scores decreasing from 25 to 12. Additionally, the student's social engagement improved, as evidenced by increased participation in campus activities and peer interactions.

Another case study involves a student struggling with depression following a personal loss. The music therapy approach employed here was songwriting, which allowed the student to express and process grief through lyrical composition. This method was integrated with traditional talk therapy, providing a multi-dimensional therapeutic experience. After ten sessions, the student's depression symptoms showed marked improvement, with the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS) score dropping from 18 to 7. The student also reported enhanced emotional resilience and coping skills.

These cases illustrate the versatility of music therapy techniques and their potential to address various psychological issues. The GIM method in the first case facilitated deep emotional exploration, while the songwriting approach in the second case provided a creative outlet for grief expression. Both interventions were tailored to the individual needs of the students, highlighting the personalized nature of music therapy.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Music Therapy Interventions

Case	Method	Duration	Outcome Measure	Initial Score	Final Score
1	Guided Imagery and Music (GIM)	6 months	Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)	25	12
2	Songwriting	10 weeks	Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS)	18	7

The effectiveness of these interventions can be further analyzed through a comparative table (Table 1), which outlines the specific methods used, the duration of treatment, and the measurable outcomes in each case. This comparison underscores the adaptability of music therapy and its

capacity to yield positive results across different psychological conditions.

The experiences from these cases offer valuable insights for the broader application of music therapy in university counseling. Firstly, the importance of tailoring interventions to individual needs is evident. Secondly, the integration of music therapy with other therapeutic modalities can enhance overall effectiveness. These lessons suggest that a flexible, personalized approach, combined with interdisciplinary collaboration, can maximize the benefits of music therapy in supporting student mental health.

7. Conclusions and Prospects

The integration of music therapy into university counseling services emerges as a vital adjunctive approach, addressing the diverse psychological needs of college students. Its non-verbal nature and universal appeal make it particularly effective for those resistant to traditional therapies. Despite challenges such as the scarcity of qualified therapists and difficulties in outcome evaluation, strategies like professional development programs and standardized assessment tools can enhance its implementation. Future research should focus on refining evaluation methods and exploring the synergistic effects of integrating music therapy with other counseling techniques. This ongoing exploration promises to further validate music therapy's role in promoting holistic student mental health, bridging gaps in existing services and fostering a more inclusive therapeutic environment.

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