

The Role of Music in Promoting Health and Wellbeing: A Commentary

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DESCRIPTION

The possible burden of disease and its costs, resulting from a rapidly aging population, could place huge pressure on healthcare systems worldwide in the future. The World Health Organization highlights the important role that art, culture and music have in promoting health and wellbeing. Since music, both in its passive consumption and active performance, has been shown to contribute to the maintenance of health and wellbeing among the population, we conducted a systematic review in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement in order to assess biopsychosocial effects of music on healthy adults aged 40 years and older.

A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed articles up to April 2021 was conducted on six electronic databases (i.e., Cochrane, MEDLINE, PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science and Scopus). Regarding the keywords, considered both highly inclusive terms related to culture and music, as well as terms related to health and wellbeing. We reviewed eleven Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) that investigated the relationship between participation in musical activities and physical and psychosocial wellbeing. The interventions implemented in the RCTs included active (n=2 singing in choir, n=6 playing an instrument) or passive (n=3 listening to music) use of music.

The results show that the majority of the participants in these activities are women (77.6%). We could observe 80 effects concerning the physical (n=7), psychological (n=38 cognitive; n=34 affective) and social (n=1) dimensions. 65% of the effects were positive (of which 30.77% statistically significant); 31.25% were negative (of which 12% statistically significant); only one physical result showed a non-significant improvement. In terms of physical well-being (balance, gait), no statistically significant improvements emerged. However, in terms of cognition (attention, verbal fluency, memory, executive functions) statistically significant improvements were observed in most of the studies considered. Specifically, playing a musical instrument

can act as a protective factor against aging-related cognitive decline. The effectiveness of musical participation also extends to the emotional level, reducing anxiety or depressive symptoms and enhancing mood, although not always in a statistically significant manner. Finally, with regard to quality of life, it has been observed that active musical participation generally has a positive effect on all its various dimensions. Therefore, despite the heterogeneity of the methodologies used in the selected studies, our findings suggest that active musical participation can have beneficial effects on both cognitive and psychosocial functioning. On the other hand, the positive impact of listening to music appears to be mostly associated to the cognitive domain.

These findings highlight the critical role that active and passive enjoyment of music can play as a promising tool in promoting healthy aging. Although our results support the notion that both active and passive music activities contribute to the health and well-being of individuals aged 40 and above, future prospective RCTs, employing more uniformed and sensitive measurements, would enable us to better assess the role of music participation in healthy aging and longevity, particularly in countries with a high population density of elderly individuals.

CONCLUSION

The role of music in promoting health and wellbeing is a rich and multifaceted field that continues to captivate psychologists and researchers. Through emotional regulation, stress reduction, cognitive enhancement, coping mechanisms, social bonding, and therapeutic applications, music wields a profound influence on human psychology. As our understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying music's effects deepens, incorporating music-based interventions into various psychological settings can offer innovative and accessible approaches to enhancing mental health and overall wellbeing. Whether actively engaging in music-making or simply listening to preferred tunes, the power of music to positively impact our psychological landscape is undeniable.

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