



GROUP MUSIC THERAPY AND MINDFULNESS TOWARDS SELF-AWARENESS AND EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN: A MIXED METHODS PILOT STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this pilot study was to determine what effects, if any, participation in a 10-week music and mindfulness program had on a group of school-aged children, by measuring: mood, cooperation, confidence, helpfulness, perceptions of empathy and bullying, and feasibility. This preliminary study implemented a mixed methods design in which baseline data was collected, pretest and posttest surveys were compared, and participant feedback and observational reports were incorporated. The authors propose that a powerful and effective space is created for expression, awareness, and compassion at the intersection of mindfulness practice with group music therapy. The study was conducted at an afterschool program located in a suburban school-district in a mid-sized city. Participants were 8 children ranging in age from 7-12 with no prior music therapy or mindfulness experience. The group was conveniently sampled due to clinical setting. The study examined a program consisting of ten weekly 45-minute mindfulness-based music therapy groups co-lead by music therapists. Typical interventions included instrumental improvisations, self-regulatory check-ins, songwriting, verbal processing, creative movement, mindfulness meditations, and specifically designed instrumental activities. The quantitative findings reveal positive trends in mood, cooperation, confidence, and kindness. Results for hypothetical bullying situations were not valid. In the qualitative analysis, themes of increased confidence and learned techniques for mood expression, a meaningful understanding of empathy, and an increased awareness of how to positively treat others emerged. Additionally, there was an overwhelming interest reported by participants regarding participation in future music groups. Despite the limited rigor in this preliminary pilot study, the data suggests that this program is feasible and potentially beneficial for elementary-aged children. Recommendations for further research including generalization of results are discussed, as well as the program's growth and evolution into a community organization. [The author can be reached at msmith7@naz.edu]