Student led research in medical sociology: Developing a typology for the use of music in dementia care

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Introduction

Research has suggested that music has an effect on people's wellbeing and quality of life, and helps them to cope with living with dementia. However, recent reviews of evidence conclude that research has often been of poor quality. In this project, we therefore revisited the evidence to look for underlying theories that support using music in dementia care and appropriate outcomes to explore in future evaluation. This will enable us to design better research about using music in dementia care in the future.

Aim

- To carry out a meta-review of existing evidence on the effect of music in dementia care, focusing particularly on aspects associated with individual wellbeing.
- To develop a typology of music interventions in dementia care.

Methods

- In depth literature search
- Meta-review of systematic reviews (quality appraisal)
- Data extraction from the primary studies included in the reviews
- Data synthesis
- Developing a typology for music intervention

Literature Search

Meta-Review

Data Extraction

Data Synthesis

Typology development

Literature Search & Appraisal

A range of health and social care resources was searched to identify published reviews on music interventions for people with dementia (PWD). The quality of all relevant literature reviews (n=6) was assessed using a quality criteria tool adapted from The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). In addition, the overall quality of reporting was assessed in accordance with PRISMA guidelines. To do this I designed an excel spread sheet to input the data. Evaluation of the reviews was done to ensure the quality of studies for final inclusion.
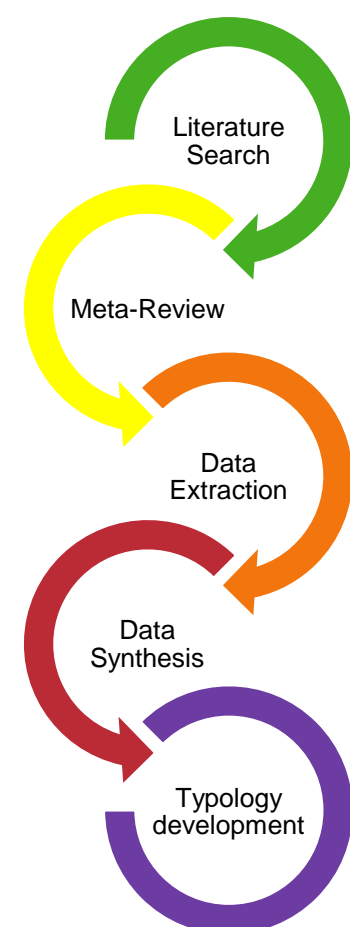
Changing methods

Due to the poor quality of the reviews, we had to re-examine the available evidence ourselves by extracting data from the primary studies used in the reviews. Therefore instead of using the reviews to develop a typology, we decided to investigate further and use the primary studies from the systematic reviews for data extraction purposes to develop the typology.

Data Extraction

- I designed Excel spreadsheets to be used to manage data extraction. We first did a trial run of the spreadsheet which included extracting data from 2 studies that were different in their methods and outcomes to ensure the spreadsheet would include sufficient information for data synthesis, and to exclude the possibility of extracting irrelevant data.
- The final design of the spreadsheets was divided into subthemes including background information; intervention used; participant characteristics; and outcome reported in the papers.

Data Synthesis

To develop a typology for music intervention, we examined the data extracted and discussed the evidence. We synthesized the data by re-organizing the data and categorized them into possible dimensions which could then be used for the typology. These dimensions were session delivery (group/individual); involvement in session (active/receptive); timing (one or more than one session per week); session length (under or over 30 minutes); deliverer of intervention; type of music used; music therapy (description).

Results

The strongest evidence is in relation to the type of music (generic/individualized; listening/playing) and music delivery (group/individual; active/receptive). As one would hope, interventions of this type, particularly when active and targeted rather than passive and generic, improve different symptoms commonly expressed by dementia patients, which thus improves the quality of life in PWD. Also, group therapy seems to be better than individual therapy, possibly on the basis of human need for socialization. Lastly, active music may be better than receptive music, one of the reasons being that it enables PWD the opportunity for self-expression.

Evaluation

As we unpicked the evidence, we discovered the reason why current research could not come to a consistent conclusion about the use of music in dementia care. Our findings suggest that studies have used music interventions in a variety of ways, and in particular, how the music was delivered. The inconsistency in intervention methods and the poor quality of reporting creates a gap in evidence that suggests the need for further research.

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