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The Effectiveness of Music Therapy on Psychological, Cognitive, and Physical Health Outcomes: A Narrative Review of Contemporary Research

Shanaya Ghai¹, Resham Jain²

¹The Shri Ram School Aravali, Gurugram, Haryana, India

²Pangea Society, Mumbai, India

Abstract

Music therapy is a growing health care approach in psychological, neurological, and rehabilitation medicine. This narrative review critically examines the effectiveness of music therapy in various health and care contexts from the years 2015 to 2026. The keywords related to music therapy, mental health, cognition and rehabilitation were used to search in relevant literature using various databases. The review compiles the results of empirical studies, randomized controlled trials, systematic reviews and meta-analyses on the therapeutic role of music-based interventions. The results suggest that music therapy has a positive effect on the reduction of anxiety, depression, stress, emotional distress, memory recall, communication, attention, motor rehabilitation, pain management and physiological regulation. Importantly, this review makes clear that the evidence is not consistent across the domains, with the strongest and most consistent empirical support for psychological outcomes, but with methodological limitations. This review also explores the cross-disciplinary relevance of music therapy in integrative healthcare. The consistent research bias from the western perspective and the growing use of digital and AI-aided music therapy. The methodological diversity, the scarcity of longitudinal research, the low number of participants in many studies, the lack of clarity in intervention procedures, and the absence of many studies that address null or mixed results limit the generalizability and standardization of conclusions. Overall, the current evidence is good in supporting music therapy as a legitimate complementary intervention. However, it is necessary to have methodologically standardized research in order to implement music therapy as an intervention in evidence-based practice.

Keywords: Cognitive Rehabilitation, Integrative Healthcare, Music Therapy, Narrative Review, Psychological outcome