

**Music therapy in mental health***Musicoterapia en salud mental**Musicoterapia na saúde mental***Fabiano Rocha Pereira^{1*}**

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Music therapy is an artistic-therapeutic intervention that promotes culture, inner peace, emotional well-being, and quality of life, standing out as a relevant tool in therapeutic plans for patients with mental disorders, particularly in the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This descriptive study, carried out through an integrative literature review (2018-2023) in the LILACS and SciELO databases, sought to analyze the contribution of music therapy to mental health care. The results show that the multidisciplinary approach, when integrated with music therapy, enhances therapeutic results, promoting greater adherence to treatment and overall development of autistic patients. Music therapy intervention demonstrates effectiveness in emotional regulation, communication, and social interaction, constituting an essential complementary modality for comprehensive mental health care.

Descriptors: Music Therapy; Autism Spectrum Disorder; Multidisciplinary Team; Mental Health; Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

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Resumén

La musicoterapia es una intervención artístico-terapéutica que promueve la cultura, la paz interior, el bienestar emocional y la calidad de vida, destacándose como una herramienta relevante en los planes terapéuticos para pacientes con trastornos mentales, particularmente en el Trastorno del Espectro Autista (TEA). Este estudio descriptivo, realizado mediante una revisión bibliográfica integradora (2018-2023) en las bases de datos LILACS y SciELO, buscó analizar la contribución de la musicoterapia a la atención de la salud mental. Los resultados muestran que el enfoque multidisciplinario, al integrarse con la musicoterapia, potencia los resultados terapéuticos, promoviendo una mayor adherencia al tratamiento y el desarrollo integral de los pacientes autistas. La intervención con musicoterapia demuestra efectividad en la regulación emocional, la comunicación y la interacción social, constituyendo una modalidad complementaria esencial para la atención integral de la salud mental.

Descriptores: Musicoterapia; Trastorno del Espectro Autista; Equipo Multidisciplinario; Salud Mental; Trastornos del Neurodesarrollo.

Resumo

A musicoterapia configura-se como uma intervenção artístico-terapêutica que promove cultura, paz interior, bem-estar emocional e qualidade de vida, destacando-se como ferramenta relevante nos planos terapêuticos para pacientes com transtornos mentais, particularmente no Espectro Autista (TEA). Este estudo descritivo, realizado mediante revisão integrativa da literatura (2018-2023) nas bases LILACS e SciELO, buscou analisar a contribuição da musicoterapia no cuidado em saúde mental. Os resultados evidenciam que a abordagem multidisciplinar, quando integrada à musicoterapia, potencializa os resultados terapêuticos, promovendo maior adesão ao tratamento e desenvolvimento global de pacientes autistas. A intervenção musicoterapêutica demonstra eficácia na regulação emocional, comunicação e interação social, constituindo-se como modalidade complementar essencial para o cuidado integral em saúde mental.

Descritores: Musicoterapia; Transtorno de Espectro Autista; Equipe Multiprofissional; Saúde Mental; Transtornos de Neurodesenvolvimento.

Introduction

Music therapy works on cognition and involves the assimilation and adaptation of internal schemes, which necessarily takes time. Using these internal plans and not simplifying them, repeating what becomes audible, consists of consolidating the established teaching¹.

Comprehensive music education becomes engaging which makes music happen "through two axes: elaboration and reproduction, which strengthens the action: composition and interpretation are characteristics included in the holistic therapeutic content. Music therapy sessions must be conducted by a qualified music therapist, and can be individual/group and individualized treatment^{1,2}.

Musicians, despite their intellectual and artistic capacity at the time of treatment in which the patient is the highlight, during the therapeutic action involving musicality guides the cognitive capacities of the individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder to have an interpersonal relationship with the other people in the group as soon as the nursing professional with his musical instrument develops musical and therapeutic methods together with the multidisciplinary team, inserting the development of empathy and companionship towards the professional and the care agent³.

The reference for identification was established through musicality, which emphasized that individuals in social life communicate through audible means that express themselves both personally and collectively, transforming

into a form of communication where art is conveyed in their daily social interactions. Human beings do not know how to live alone without a companion. In this view, creating groups in individual or group music therapy activities can help people with mental disorders who tend to live in groups to get closer to the reality they will face, in the most musical environment possible⁴.

In art therapy, there tends to be a mix of art and therapy so that it is stimulated in a group form for another individual. In terms of therapy, we highlight that we can reiterate art therapy, music therapy and performing arts, by their outlines, implements that the singular "significance" of the phrase, separated in the directive in which it is corroborated intertwined; in which it is composed of those junctions where there is correlation during the given moment and situation^{4,5}.

Another aspect that is proposed to these patients with neurological and psychiatric pathologies is the factor in which music stimulates the auditory nerves that connect to the brain branches and music has its previous healing function at the moment in which the musician plays his instrument and in the scores and chords there is the moment in which the sound is healing and allows the individual to travel through the lyrics of the song feeling the emotion⁵.

In current times, enormous advances have been made in the use of collaborative therapeutic practices for the rehabilitation of the population, among them: water aerobics, acupuncture, yoga, meditation, massages, and



music. Techniques that would highlight the benefit to the individual's health, a child with the disorder consists of directly organizing the same number of toys in the same configuration, which happens daily, and even imitating being the protagonist of a television station during a retentive function in the fictional skill. In the brief concept about this disorder, which is called Autism Spectrum Disorder, according to the author, it denotes that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological development disorder, which is defined as occurring by alterations in speech and psychosocial connection and is agreed upon under the knowledge of behaviors and/or idealizations of an impersonal or blocked nature only for oneself⁶.

Weight changes, which intensify and intersperse with changes in sleep patterns and eating patterns, stand out as a form of "bribery", among others; the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) is one of the tools available to seek to identify behavioral disorders, such as ACHENBACH, in 1991, which is an investigative content cataloged in two parts. The initial item highlights the social valences of individuals. The second item is arranged by 113 components, highlighting neuropsychological dysfunctions in children and adolescents aged 4 to 18 years, the second archetypes provided by family caregivers, applicability seeks children who communicate and others who do not speak; children with social apathy and others with atypical coexistence; but, children tend to develop the psychic disorder or another intellectual quotient within the data considered normal average⁶.

Having the erudition as the link, music therapy was highlighted according to the study as well as, know-how being the interpolation and where it is undertaken in the search to change or weaken the obstacle of autism, in which it is complementary to the cognitive action and the deficit of interlocution; it is stated that the age factor of the family members and the perpetuation of any disorder of a maternal psychiatric nature, in addition to that connoted, however, to the high probabilities of the autistic disorder. A psychosocial thesis of interpretation in the human context was elaborated, encompassing the human being as a socialized being and, beforehand, a collective being, and experiencing the combination and influence of this. With the coming of the adolescent's maturation process, a new biopsychosocial journey corresponds. In it, it is considered as a factor of several modifications in which it incubates of constant value of the agreement of the adolescent, in the dissimilarity and magnitude it raises in analogy in the usability cognitive and neuropsychological nature^{3-5,7}.

Given the above, the objective was to describe music therapy in mental health.

Methodology

This descriptive and exploratory study was developed through a bibliographic review of current literature, with the aim of mapping and analyzing the available scientific evidence on the topic under investigation. The bibliographic search was conducted in electronic databases of academic relevance, with emphasis on SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) and LILACS (Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences),

considered strategic sources for health research. The time frame covered publications indexed between 2018 and 2023 to ensure that the discussions were up to date. Original articles, systematic reviews, and case studies that addressed the application of music therapy in the context of mental health, with an emphasis on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), were included. Exclusion criteria included works without peer review, opinion articles, and studies outside the delimited period.

Data analysis followed a qualitative approach, allowing for critical synthesis of evidence and identification of patterns relevant to clinical practice. The methodological strategy adopted sought to ensure scientific rigor, internal validity, and reproducibility of results, in line with the principles of reviews in the health field.

Results and Discussion

Music therapy is characterized as a therapeutic approach that aims to prevent, develop and rehabilitate the individual's cognitive, emotional and social processes. As highlighted by the Chilean music therapist, during the therapeutic interaction, the patient's cultural context is considered, building a musical base that integrates sound elements in a holistic and pedagogical way. This practice acts on multiple levels, promoting benefits that encompass sociocultural and individual aspects. Music therapy establishes a deep connection between the musical experience and human life, integrating social, emotional and cognitive aspects in a unique way. The practice of listening to and interpreting music in the therapeutic context promotes synchronization between action, inspiration and thought, creating harmony between the physical and emotional responses and the individual's identity essence. Sound stimuli, when properly applied, offers a rich field of clinical observation, attracting the interest of psychologists and researchers who investigate the effects of musical training on intellectual development and nervous system responses. Studies demonstrate how the strategic use of melodies and musical elements can simplify complex processes and enhance significant therapeutic results⁴⁻⁷.

In addition to its clinical function, music maintains its fundamental role as a form of entertainment and universal cultural expression. Its ability to calm restless children, facilitate social interactions, enrich liturgical practices, and serve as a vehicle for emotions and desires confirms its status as an irreplaceable artistic language. The musical experience transcends rigid definitions, manifesting itself as a dynamic cultural phenomenon that resists simplistic categorizations. At the core of musical feeling lies a unique form of understanding and expression of the human condition, consolidating music as one of the most powerful and culturally relevant artistic manifestations⁵.

According to the World Federation of Music Therapy, this therapeutic practice consists of the systematic use of music and its fundamental elements - sound, rhythm, melody and harmony - by a qualified professional in conjunction with the patient. This approach is developed through various forms of interaction, including dialogue, body expression, symbolic representation, and pedagogical



activities, always aiming to meet the physical, cognitive and emotional needs of the individual undergoing treatment. Followers of this therapy recognize its potential to promote comprehensive well-being, cultivating feelings of inner peace, contentment, and gratitude².

When applied in clinical settings such as hospitals and psychiatric units, using instruments such as the guitar, music therapy reveals its remarkable therapeutic power. Music has the unique ability to bring back emotional memories from different stages of life - from childhood games to youthful romances or memories of maturity. This therapeutic universe is particularly comprehensive, requiring from the professional not only technical competence in instrumental handling, but also artistic sensitivity. Musical chords, combined with vocal expression, become a true balm for the soul, promoting a state of serenity that transcends symptomatic relief to reach deep levels of emotional healing. The sound experience thus conducted generates a comforting sensation of tranquility that permeates the patient's entire being⁸.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by significant challenges in communication, social interaction, and behavioral flexibility. Individuals with ASD often have difficulty with imaginative processes, adapting to routine changes, and tending to restrictive and repetitive behaviors. In the therapeutic context, the health team - including nursing professionals - employs creative and innovative psychosocial strategies, with playful activities that aim not only at socialization, but also at effective integration into social life. The term "autism" was initially coined in the second decade of the 20th century by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler (in 1911), in his studies on schizophrenic manifestations in adults. In the specific case of ASD, it is crucial to understand that, although many patients have learning difficulties, symptomatic variability is broad. Some individuals may demonstrate a preference for isolation, while others may perceive social environments as hostile, requiring personalized approaches that sometimes include strategies for gradual engagement and building trust through positive reinforcement. Music therapy emerges as a valuable tool in this process, offering alternative channels of communication and emotional expression⁶⁻⁸.

Music therapy is an effective approach to stimulate individual expression, social interaction, and emotional regulation in patients with ASD. Through structured musical exercises, which use sound and musicality as therapeutic tools, it is possible to create an environment conducive to the development of communication and socialization. Musical practice offers a safe and organized means for patients to express themselves freely, while also working on aspects such as discipline, concentration, and emotional reciprocity. Even individuals on the autistic spectrum demonstrate the ability to engage musically and interact socially when adequately stimulated. The music therapist's ability to develop personalized inclusion strategies is fundamental to the success of the intervention, allowing patients to build trusting relationships and actively participate in community life. It is important to emphasize

that the manifestation of ASD varies significantly between individuals, with unique symptom profiles that require individualized therapeutic approaches^{2,4,6}.

Music therapy, even when conducted by talented musicians, transcends artistic performance to focus on the patient's cognitive and socio-emotional development. During sessions, the therapist uses structured musical strategies to promote social interaction, stimulating the capacity for interpersonal relationships with both the professional and other participants. Group work, mediated by musical instruments, favors the development of empathy and cooperation, fundamental elements in the therapeutic process. From a neurophysiological point of view, music acts as a powerful brain stimulant, activating auditory pathways that connect to multiple regions of the central nervous system. This unique characteristic explains its therapeutic effect, especially when the patient allows themselves to become emotionally involved with the melody, harmony, and lyrics of the compositions. In the case of ASD, chronic neurodevelopmental conditions often associated with comorbidities such as epilepsy, depression, anxiety, and ADHD, music therapy has proven to be particularly beneficial. Although ASD has no cure, appropriate music therapy interventions can significantly improve patients' quality of life, working on their central difficulties in communication and social interaction³.

The practice of listening to and interpreting music in a therapeutic context establishes a unique bridge between body, mind, and emotions. The act of singing synchronizes attitude, inspiration, and thought, creating an integrative experience that enhances body awareness, emotional expression, and, fundamentally, the recognition of one's own identity. This process is based on the concept of Collective and Cultural ISO, a music therapy principle that recognizes the unique musical matrix of each social group as an immutable element and a powerful vehicle for communication and community cohesion. Musical construction in therapy transcends simple technical execution - it is an act of understanding and ephemeral documentation of human experience. As a living and dynamic cultural manifestation, music proves to be extraordinary in its ability to connect individuals, starting from the human essence, to achieve significant transformations. In the context of ASD, music acts as a mirror that reflects and modulates the particularities of the disorder, allowing the creation of melodies that respect and celebrate neuropsychological diversity, while promoting measurable therapeutic changes⁴.

In the context of public health, music therapy interventions demonstrate versatility when applied in both individual and group formats, showing particular efficacy in promoting social skills in patients with ASD. Actively involving family members in the therapeutic process often enhances the results, establishing a relational resonance that enhances the benefits of the intervention. This collaborative approach not only strengthens therapeutic bonds but also optimizes the transformative power of music as an instrument of comprehensive care. However, the effective practice of music therapy faces the constant



challenge of balancing technical protocols with the singularities of each clinical case. This dialectic between methodological structure and creative adaptation constitutes the core of the therapeutic process, where the professional-patient relationship emerges as a catalytic element. It is crucial to highlight that the lack of clear parameters of communication or adequate musical expression can invert the therapeutic potential into barriers to development, emphasizing the need for careful planning and flexibility in the application of music therapy techniques^{3,4}.

Implementing music therapy with children on the autistic spectrum requires a unique approach that combines spontaneity and methodological rigor. The selection of appropriate strategies must consider not only the particularities of each child but also their level of engagement and response to interventions. Two complementary axes emerge as fundamental in this process: the careful evaluation of sensorimotor response patterns during sessions and the analysis of tonic-affective dynamics established through musical contact. It has been observed that the exploration of body rhythms and musical patterns, when conducted respecting the autonomy of children with mild autistic traits, can generate significant results. The creation of investigative contexts during structured rhythmic activities, especially in inclusive educational environments, favors both individual development and socialization with peers. This artistic-therapeutic approach demonstrates effectiveness in promoting social skills, configuring itself as a valuable complement to traditional interventions in the autistic spectrum^{7,9}.

Recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the music therapy approach for patients with Asperger's Syndrome, demonstrating how musical reinvention can promote significant advances in the development of these individuals. The methodology applied incorporates parental reports, such as the mother's testimony in this case, associated with specific musical intervention techniques. The results observed reinforce the potential of music therapy clinics in the treatment of children with autism, evidencing positive behavioral changes that were carefully documented both by family perception and by the researcher's analysis. The therapeutic process is based on the dynamic interaction between the patient, the therapist, and the musical elements, with personalized approaches that consider the particularities of everyone on the autistic spectrum⁷.

In the context of Primary Health Care (PHC), the Ministry of Health has implemented specific guidelines for monitoring child development, providing standardized instruments for early assessment and intervention. Among the recommended tools are the Communication Development Questionnaire (QDC), the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT), and the Preaut Signals, which allow health professionals to identify possible changes in neuropsychomotor development early. These protocols, when applied systematically during well-child visits, enable the timely detection of developmental disorders and the

implementation of specialized interventions, such as music therapy, at crucial stages of child growth⁹.

Music therapy is consolidated as a transformative practice when the professional, combining musical and clinical expertise, composes interventions that generate joy and hope, particularly through improvisation - a powerful tool for connecting with diverse audiences. By adopting an analytical and critical stance, the therapist enhances the development of autistic children through playful methods that integrate musical education in school and clinical contexts. However, there is a significant shortage of these specialists in public education systems, a gap that needs to be filled. The musical therapeutic process, by harmonizing affective and sociocultural dimensions, proves to be a powerful instrument for humanizing care. In this unique therapeutic encounter between patient and music therapist, a therapeutic alliance is established that provides safety and effectiveness to the intervention, creating a privileged space for the global development of individuals on the autistic spectrum^{6,9}.

Music therapy emerges as a transformative practice, especially when conducted by qualified instrumentalists and musicians, capable of creating therapeutic events that deeply touch participants through the emotional power of music. The essence of this intervention is based on therapeutic dialogue, established both through musical elements and through emotional bonds, aiming to build meaningful interpersonal relationships. In this process, music transcends its artistic aspect to become a tool for human connection, where each note and each silence compose a unique language of acceptance and transformation. Clinical observation reveals that children on the autistic spectrum often demonstrate remarkable organizational capacity, manifesting a preference for structured environments and a tendency to reorganize spaces when they encounter disorder. As highlighted by Tustin (1981), these characteristic challenges the mistaken notion about supposed cognitive limitations in autism. What occurs is a difference in the way of processing and organizational strategies, where these children develop ordering systems that reflect their unique way of interacting with the environment. This understanding highlights the importance of therapeutic approaches that value and work with these intrinsic organizational skills, transforming them into tools for the development of adaptive skills⁸⁻¹⁰.

The work of the multidisciplinary team is essential in the reception and personalized treatment of individuals on the autistic spectrum, who often experience a deep need for recognition and understanding of their uniqueness. By establishing a genuine connection, these professionals can calm the emotional universe of these patients, offering the necessary support for their development. Music therapy emerges as a particularly effective intervention in this context, especially due to its non-verbal approach - a crucial aspect that has proven effective in clinical practice with autistic individuals. Musical auditory training, based on psychological principles, has consolidated itself as a historical therapeutic method, whose effectiveness remains current in various hospital and clinical contexts. This century-



old approach continues to offer autistic patients not only measurable therapeutic benefits, but also intangible elements such as hope, serenity, and confidence in the care process, reaffirming its value in the contemporary treatment of autism^{8,9}.

The integrated therapeutic approach recognizes the complementary value of various artistic expressions, such as dance and artistic drawing, which, together with music, offer alternative development pathways for individuals on the autistic spectrum. Although all arts have undeniable therapeutic merits, musical intervention stands out for its unique ability to break patterns of social isolation characteristic of autism. This method has demonstrated proven effectiveness in stimulating communication (both verbal and non-verbal), reducing repetitive behaviors, and releasing expressive potential. Music acts as a therapeutic catalyst, creating sensory and emotional bridges that facilitate connection with the outside world, while respecting and valuing the particularities of everyone on the spectrum^{6,10}.

Conclusion

Music therapy has established itself as an effective therapeutic approach in the care of patients with ASD,

promoting not only the relief of tension and depressive symptoms but also acting comprehensively on the individual's overall development. Music and its elements — rhythm, melody, and harmony — have a transformative effect, capable of stimulating expressiveness, communication, and social interaction. The multidisciplinary team must adopt a holistic view, integrating music therapy with other interventions to enhance results, always prioritizing the patient's well-being and acceptance.

When using creativity and innovation, healthcare professionals should encourage recreational activities that go beyond simple socialization, promoting more meaningful interactions. Music therapy, combined with structured nursing planning and multidisciplinary work, contributes to improvements in areas such as concentration, memory, language, emotional regulation, and behavior. In this way, music therapy intervention not only facilitates the connection between therapist and patient but also strengthens the autonomy and quality of life of individuals on the autistic spectrum, reaffirming its value as an essential practice in the field of mental health and neurodevelopment.

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