A COMPARISON OF A MUSIC-BASED AND VERBAL-BASED REMINISCENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAM IN ENHANCING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG ELDERLY NURSING HOME RESIDENTS

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RATIONALE

Long-term care residents are among the most depressed in the developed world (Stones et al., 1995a). They experience a deep sense of loss as they must leave the familiar surroundings of home and become accustomed to living in an environment where everyone around them is old and unhealthy. It is understandable that this experience has profound effects on their sense of independence, dignity and self-identity.

Often, nursing home residents find more comfort in memories than in their present situation and search for opportunities to regress to the past (Rattenbury & Stones, 1988). Erik Erikson proposed that an essential aspect of later adulthood entails the evaluation of one's life through a life review process (Erikson, 1963). Reminiscence, or the reviewing of one's past, has become an increasingly popular activity in the nursing home context. Reminiscence programs have had success in alleviating depression (Rattenbury & Stones, 1989), increasing self-esteem (Lappe, 1987), self-identity and self-worth (Baker, 1985) and life satisfaction (Cook, 1991). A recent long-term study of the effects of a reminiscence intervention program reported that participants had significantly higher psychological well-being scores and postponed morbidity and mortality (Stones et al., 1995b).

Music therapy has also become an increasingly popular activity with the aged. Music has had success in improving the self-esteem of the elderly (McCloskey, 1985); increasing social interaction (Wylie, 1990); and reducing maladaptive behaviour (Gibbons, 1988). Music is also effective in creating an atmosphere of the past and is often capable of rousing various emotions within us (Karras, 1983). Familiar music can be used as a powerful stimulus for invoking memories of the past for the elderly, particularly songs from their young adult years (Clyburn, 1994). We have a tendency to relate certain songs to different aspects or periods of our lives and music from a particular era is often aligned with certain historical events. It would seem reasonable, therefore, that music would be an effective means of stimulating reflections of the past among the elderly.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Only one known study has investigated the beneficial effects of a musical intervention program with the elderly (Bennett & Maas, 1988). They reported that a reminiscence program using familiar memories to invoke memories was more effective in promoting life satisfaction and ego integrity than a program that elicited memories through verbal questions. The present study extended Bennett and Maas' (1988) evaluation of the music-based evaluation program by including no-treatment control groups that had not been used in Bennett and Maas' (1988) design. Fourteen residents (mean age= 82.4 years) at each of two nursing homes were randomly assigned to either a no-treatment control group or a reminiscence group. At one nursing home, popular music selections from the residents' young adult years were played throughout each session. Memories and thoughts invoked by these musical selections were discussed. At the other nursing home, a general-questions approach was adopted. Prior to and following a six-week intervention period, subjects completed the Memorial University of Newfoundland Scale of Happiness (MUNSH), the Life Satisfaction Index A (LSIA), and the Memorial University Mood Scale (MUMS). In accordance with findings of Bennett and Maas (1988), there were greater positive changes in the MUNSH (happiness) scores for those in the music-based group (5.0) than for the verbal-based group (1.4); MUNSH scores did not increase for either control group (0.0 and -0.9). The interaction approached significance (p>.09). The average enjoyment rating was also slightly higher for the music-based group (4.5) than the verbal-based group (3.5), indicating that the music seemed to add a more entertaining, sociable atmosphere. In general, the results of the present study were consistent with the view that music is effective as a catalyst for reminiscence in therapeutic contexts.

Note: This research is based on an honours thesis by Leah Clyburn entitled A Comparison of a Music-based and Verbal-based Reminiscence Program in Enhancing the Personal Well-being of Elderly Nursing Home Residents. Dept. of Psychology, U.P.E.I., 1995.