The effect of improvisation-assisted desensitization, and music-assisted muscle relaxation.

Posted At: July 23, 2008 1:30 PM | Posted By: Tim Brunson, PhD
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The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of two music therapy approaches, improvisation-assisted desensitization, and music-assisted progressive muscle relaxation and imagery on ameliorating the symptoms of music performance anxiety (MPA) among student pianists. Thirty female college pianists (N = 30) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: (a) improvised music-assisted desensitization group (n = 15), or (b) music-assisted progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) and imagery group (n = 15). All participants received 6 weekly music therapy sessions according to their assigned group. Two lab performances were provided; one before and one after the 6 music therapy sessions, as the performance stimuli for MPA. All participants completed pretest and posttest measures that included four types of visual analogue scales (MPA, stress, tension, and comfort), the state portion of Spielberger's State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), and the Music Performance Anxiety Questionnaire (MPAQ) developed by Lehrer, Goldman, and Strommen (1990). Participants' finger temperatures were also measured. When results of the music-assisted PMR and imagery condition were compared from pretest to posttest, statistically significant differences occurred in 6 out of the 7 measures-MPA, tension, comfort, STAI, MPAQ, and finger temperature, indicating that the music-assisted PMR and imagery treatment was very successful in reducing MPA. For the improvisation-assisted desensitization condition, the statistically significant decreases in tension and STAI, with increases in finger temperature indicated that this approach was effective in managing MPA to some extent. When the difference scores for the two approaches were compared, there was no statistically significant difference between the two approaches for any of the seven measures. Therefore, no one treatment condition appeared more effective than the other. Although statistically significant differences were not found between the two groups, a visual analysis of mean difference scores revealed that the music-assisted PMR and imagery condition resulted in greater mean differences from pretest to posttest than the improvisation-assisted desensitization condition across all seven measures. This result may be due to the fact that all participants in the music-assisted PMR and imagery condition followed the procedure easily, while two of the 15 participants in the improvisation-assisted desensitization group had difficulty improvising.

J Music Ther. 2008 Summer;45(2) Kim Y.
International Hypnosis Research Institute: The effect of improvisation-assisted desensitization, and music-assisted muscle relaxation.