

Dance away the blues: dance movement therapy in depression

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ABSTRACT

Depression, also identified as “clinical depression” or a “depressive disorder”—is a mood disorder that causes distressing symptoms that affect how you are feeling, thinking, and handling daily activities, like sleep, eat, or work. Depression today has become very common among all the age groups across the world. There are, however, many ways to treat and reduce depressive symptoms. Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) has been profoundly used in the treatment of depression. It involves in use of movement and dance to support intellectual and emotional functions of the body. Often, DMT looks at the correlation between movement and emotion. DMT uses certain basic principles and has proven to be highly effective in treating depression and its sessions have been found effective in many other disorders and physical illnesses too. Being a very recent trend, this therapy has not reached people yet. There is a need for promotion for DMT. Since there are no side-effects for the same, DMT and Treatment of Depression often go hand in hand.

Keywords: *Depression, Dance Movement Therapy, Expressive Therapy*

“That's the thing about depression: A human being can survive almost anything, as long as she sees the end in sight. But depression is so insidious, and it compounds daily, that it's impossible to ever see the end.” — Elizabeth Wurtzel.

Depression today is a very common mental illness across the world. More than 264 million people have fallen victim to Depression. Depression is a more serious disorder than people perceive it to be. It is something more serious and intense than anxiety or mood swings in general. The most frequently asked question is that “What exactly is Depression and how do we identify it from just feeling sad or upset?” Depression is categorized as a mood disorder. It may be described as feelings of sadness, loss, and/or anger that interfere with a person’s everyday activities. If explained in simpler words, depression can be the most intense form of a feeling of sadness or anger, so intense that it prevents a person from living a normal lifestyle. Depression can restrict and disrupt the course of daily life, a person’s life can come to a halt. We differentiate Depression from just feeling sad or angry on the same basis. It is normal for an individual to feel low or sad under certain unfortunate conditions/ environment. If this feeling of low or sad becomes very regular and increases to the level where the individual feels sad at even the smallest of things and where he/she cannot continue the course of daily life, that’s the cue for depression.

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Depression, while being a psychological disorder, can have abundant negative effects on an individual's biological and physical health.

Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) is a recent form of expressive therapy that is widely used today. "DMT is a type of therapy that uses movement to help individuals achieve emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration." Often used for stress reduction, disease prevention, and mood management, it is beneficial for the physical and psychological state of an individual. DMT offers increased muscular strength, coordination, mobility, and decreased muscular tension. Dance/movement therapy is often used with all populations and with individuals, couples, families, or groups. In general, dance therapy promotes self-awareness, self-esteem, and secure space for the expression of feelings. Dance therapy has also been used to improve an individual's body image issues. The base for DMT is on the ideology that motion and emotion are unified. The expression of Dance Therapy is seemed to encourage communication skills and enhance dynamic relationships. DMT is widely used in treating various Physical, Psychological, Cognitive, and Social issues. DMT is said to be very effective in the treatment of Depression, Anxiety, and Eating Disorders. DMT focuses on embodied experiences emerging through body movements, expressions, and interactions with the environment (Koch and Fischman, 2011)

DEPRESSION

Depression is a mood disorder and feelings of sadness and anger. Depression can be more than a state of just feeling sad. As stated earlier, depression can bring a halt to a person's daily life. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defined Depression as, "a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act."

Major depression can induce a variety of symptoms. The symptoms vary greatly for men and women and children. For men, the symptoms may include feeling of anger, aggressiveness, restlessness, feeling empty, sad, hopeless, reduced sexual desire, Restless sleep, insomnia, etc. The symptoms for women include feeling of irritability, loss of interest in activities, difficulties sleeping through the night, waking early, etc. And for children, the symptoms may be mood swings, crying, Intense sadness, despair, difficulty concentrating in school, declining grades, loss of energy, digestive problems, etc. Akandere and Demir (2011) highlighted that depression is determined by a lot of symptoms that contain unhappiness, feelings of valueless, irritability, changes in sleep and desire to eat, not to enjoy from fun activities, and psychomotor retardation¹. Depression is twice more prevalent in females than males and the risk of a recurrence can be as high as 50–90%. In a study by Hyvönen, Pylvänäinen, Muotka & Lappalainen, (2020), depression was identified as a psychiatric syndrome that is described by 10 symptoms: low mood, a loss of interest or pleasure, fatigue, decrease in self-confidence or feelings of worthlessness, excessive feelings of guilt and self-blame, thoughts about suicide or self-harm, self-harming behavior, decreased concentration, either slowed or agitated movement, sleep disturbances, and changes in appetite or weight. According to William et al. (2002), the diagnosis of major depression requires five or more of these symptoms, including depressed mood or a loss of interest or pleasure in most activities, which have been present during the same two-week period and cause significant distress or impairment of functioning.

DANCE MOVEMENT THERAPY

Psychodynamic theory influenced Dance Therapy in the 1940s. Within the 1960s, research on non-verbal behaviour and the role of the body in psychological state issues also

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influenced the practice. In 1966, the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) was established and the development of the event of coaching and certification standards for the field of dance in therapy came into being. Today, dance therapy is influenced by an extensive grouping of theoretical frameworks including psychodynamic theory, Gestalt theory, and humanistic theory. All dance therapists must pursue graduate training to become certified dance/movement therapists. They earn either the R-DMT (Registered Dance/Movement Therapist) credential or the BC-DMT (Board-Certified Dance/Movement Therapist) credential.

Research has shown that Dance Therapy has immense effectiveness when it comes to treating mental disorders. However, there are certain basic principles of DMT, which if followed increases its effectiveness. The phases of the therapy include observation, assessment, warm-ups, interventions, verbal processing, and warm-down phases focused on closure. The principles are:

1. Body and mind are interconnected so that a change in one impacts the other.
2. Movement can express aspects of the personality.
3. Part of the therapeutic relationship is communicated through non-verbal means.
4. Movements can be symbolic and can represent unconscious material/processes.
5. Movement improvisation/experimentation can bring about new ways of being.

The most common question to come up is “How is DMT different from normal dancing?” The benefits of normal dancing are that it improves the condition of hearts, increases muscle activity and strength, helps in weight management, improves mood, etc. DMT takes the therapeutic dance to next level. The difference arises when the dance movement becomes something way more than just a form of exercise. People who employ Dance Therapy start communicating conscious and unconscious feelings through their dance and the dance therapist (qualified) responds accordingly. Dance therapists help people work on issues through the utilization of a “movement vocabulary” that's centered around physical expression rather than words.

Dance movement therapy and depression

Dance movement therapy is said to be highly effective in treating a wide variety of mental illnesses and disorders. However, DMT is most widely used in treating depression and shows quite an extent of effectiveness. Dennis and Hodnett (2007) found that psychological and psychosocial interventions were more effective than usual care for women with postnatal depression. Jeong et al. (2005) participants had mild depression at baseline assessment. Toward the end of the DMT intervention, all the studies with moderate severity of depression at baseline showed a reduction to either mild (Punkanen et al., 2014) or minimal depression (Pylvänäinen et al., 2015). Karkou, Aithal, Zubala and Meekums (2019) studied participants with symptoms of depression and there were no restrictions in terms of the age, severity of depression or gender. A total of 817 participants were studied and it was seen that DMT proved to be effective for adults with depression. The highest effectiveness of the DMT was seen when the participants received their treatment as usual along with sessions of DMT. People with depression who just received the DMT sessions did not show much improvement with their depression. As depression has become a globally recognized problem in society, it is crucial to investigate alternative treatment methods and choices available for clients to engage in as therapy. The same has been studied by Hyvönen et al. (2020). The participants in the study received treatments as usual, some received DMT sessions plus their usual treatment. The results of the study revealed that people who attended the DMT sessions along with their usual treatment showed a reduction in their

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depressive symptoms as well as other psychological and physical symptoms. Participants who were just exposed to their treatment as usual, did not show much effectiveness in reduction of the depression. The results are in line with recent studies that have been exploring the benefits of DMT intervention among people with depression. Depression is an irresistible state of mind distorting our perceptions and feelings. The effect of depression appears in the way of slowing down in movements due to energy decline. Dance and rhythmic movement have been used to develop expression and different emotions for centuries. Dance movement therapy has been used as a form of art rehabilitation in the Western world since the early 1950s. Akander & Demir (2011) studied the effects of DMT – dance over depression. After providing 12 sessions of DMT to the participants, depression levels of both the males and females had profoundly decreased than before the sessions were provided. Dance effects on the depression had more positive outcomes than expected. DMT also helped in treating physical trauma, nervous breakdown, and heart disease for some of the participants involved. In society, the depressed are thought of as an outsider, someone who is unable to be in line with the norms of the society. DMT can be useful for people with depression in the sense that it allows them to feel like a part of the society. Tavormina & Tavormina (2018) highlighted this in their study. DMT becomes more like a rehabilitation tool to express emotions. People in treatment with DMT communicated their conscious and unconscious feelings through dance. Socially accepted dance form of Bachata helped the patient to feel accepted in the society, despite dealing with depression. As and when the patient got comfortable with the DMT sessions, she reported having decreased depressive symptoms.

Suggestions

There is no doubt that Dance Movement Therapy is the most uprising therapy. It is therapeutic and helps in treatment of all kinds of disorders and illnesses. To add on to the benefits of this, DMT does not have any side-effects, so there is no harm in trying out DMT sessions. The need of the hour is to promote the therapeutic qualities of DMT. It is a very recent development in the field, so there is a large number of populations who don't know what DMT is, the benefits of DMT and how therapeutic it can be. Awareness for the same can do good to a lot of people who actually need it. It is suggested that DMT sessions should be performed in groups. A group of people with similar issues tend to motivate each other throughout the course which indirectly improves a person state. This also promotes better communication and allows people to express themselves better, a process of growth which is very important for people with depression. It is also suggested that the DMT sessions should be more of an intervention with an individual's usual treatment. DMT sessions along with the usual treatment has proved to be the most effective way of treating depression and other kinds of disorders. The amalgamation of both techniques is more beneficial since there is a medical as well as emotional and cognitive growth in the individual. To practice DMT, one does not need to be a dancer. One can simply put on a music of their choice, raise their hands in the air, and start swaying to the music. This is just as therapeutic as the formal session of DMT. This is also helpful for people who are not financially stable to actually pay for formal sessions of DMT.

CONCLUSION

Depression is a very serious and sometimes even a fatal disorder. It is not only limited to just feeling sad or bad. It can be so worse that one might not even feel like getting up when the sun rises. It is important to spread awareness about the same. It is also important to normalize the stigma running around Depression. It is of utmost importance to let people with depression feel a part of the society and not neglect or abandon them. Dance Movement

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Therapy (DMT) as a form of expressive arts therapy has been highly effective for people battling depression. The use of movements, expressions, and exercises allows a person to freely express their most insecure feelings of depressed people. DMT has been emerging as a therapeutic intervention in recent times. Of all the studies that have been conducted in the past and in the recent times show consistent effects in treating Depression. Along with depression, DMT has served well in treating various other kinds of mental as well as physical illnesses and disabilities. One major factor that makes DMT highly recommended therapy is because of the limited time it shows results for every kind of illness.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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