

The Role of Music Therapy In the Healing Process of Traditional African Society: A Case Study of Igbo Area of Nigeria

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Abstract. Music had been one of the most important and expressive human activities in all cultures around the world for thousands of years. It has been effectively coupled with words in chants and songs, and vocal music has been an important accompaniment to worship, work, recreation, and a broad spectrum of other activities. A major advantage of music is that it can reflect and enhance human moods, emotions and activities, even though it cannot communicate specific ideas or thoughts without the help of words. This is actually the main objective of this work which was centred on the ability of music (therapy) to improve on the mental, physical, emotional, social, aesthetic and spiritual health of patients. Music in Nigeria essentially derives its origin and versatility from the oral traditions or the folklore of the different ethnic groups that make up the Nigeria nation. The Igbos are one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Music

Music has been defined (Sadie, 1993) as “organized sound”. A musical tone is the product of regular vibration in the air and is perceived when an inner part of the listener’s ear is made to vibrate in sympathy. Music has also been called both the most mathematical and the most abstract of the arts. Grolier (1997) therefore emphasized that “Music is born of emotion”.

Music Therapy

The New Harvard Dictionary of Music (Will, 1986) defines Music therapy as “the clinical use of music in the treatment especially, though not exclusively of mental illness or disability. Spender (1980) simply defined music therapy as “the use of music to cure, alleviate or stimulate”. In the same vein music therapy can be defined as “the art of using musical sounds in bringing changes from undesirable unhealthy conditions to a more comfortable one in a person’s life” (Aluede, 2006:311). Comprehensively the American Music Therapy Association (2013) defined it “as the clinical and evidence based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program”.

Music therapy is an allied health profession and one of the expressive therapies, consisting of an interpersonal process in which a certified therapist uses music and all of its facets – physical,

emotional, mental, social, aesthetic and spiritual to help clients to improve or maintain their health. Music therapists primarily help their clients to improve on their health across various domains which include effective functioning of the cognitive, motor skills, emotional and affective development. Included also are behaviour and social skills and quality of life by which they use musical experiences such as free improvisation, singing, songwriting and listening to, discussing and moving to music to achieve treatment goals and objectives.

Music therapy is considered as an art and also as a science. It has a wide qualitative and quantitative research literature base that incorporates clinical therapy, biomusicology, musical acoustics, music therapy, psycho acoustics, embodied music cognition, aesthetics of music and comparative musicology.

Uses

Music therapists are found in nearly every area of the helping profession and they include development work (communication, motor skills etc). Others include individuals with special needs orientation work for the elderly, processing and relaxation work and rhythmic entertainment for the physical rehabilitation of stroke victims. Generally it is used in some medical hospitals, cancer centres, schools, alcohol and drug recovery programmes, psychiatric hospitals and centres with correctional facilities.

2. History of Music Therapy

Music has been used as a healing force for many centuries ago. Appollo is the ancient Greek god of music and of medicine. Aesculapius was said to cure diseases of the mind by using song and music and music therapy was used in Egyptian temples. Plato said that music affected the emotions and could influence the character of an individual. Aristotle taught that music affects the soul and described music as a force that purified the emotions. Also Aulus Cornelius Celsus advocated the sound of cymbals and running water for the treatment of mental disorders (Mistic, Arandjelovic et al 2010).

Music therapy was practiced in the Biblical times with reference to when David played the harp to rid King Saul of an evil spirit (I Samuel 16:23). As early as 400B.C., Hippocrates played music for his mental patients. In the 19th century, however, Arab hospitals contained music-rooms for the benefit of the patients. According to Antrim (2011):

In the United States, Native American medicine men often employed chants and dances as a method of healing patients. The Turco-Persian psychologist and music theorist al-Farabi (1872-950), known as Alfarabius in Europe, dealt with music therapy in his treatise "Meanings of the intellect", in which he discussed the therapeutic effects of music on the soul (p.409 – 410).

Music therapy as we know it today began in the aftermath of World Wars I and II, when particularly in the United Kingdom, musicians would travel to hospitals and play music for soldiers suffering from war-related emotional and physical trauma (Degmeci, Durija, et al (2005).

In the United Kingdom, presently music therapists collaborating with other specialist teams in special schools, child and family centres, child development and assessment units are increasingly contributing to the multi-disciplinary assessment and treatment of children and young people with emotional or psychiatric problems including autism (Davis, Gfeller and Thaut 2008; Heal and Wigram 1993; Bunt 1994 and Wigram, 1995).

Music therapy is employed in the rehabilitation of ex-convicts, drug-addicts and juvenile delinquents. It has gained steady acclamation and recognition in various capacities as diagnostic medium and also as a therapeutic tool for various ailments.

3. Can Music actually heal?

To this question, McClellan (1988), observes:

...Music affect our individual bodies through the principle of resonance, but music's primary advantage is that it works with the personal (emotional) level as well as the transpersonal (spiritual) level. The basic premise upon which healing through music operates is that a primary cause of disease is emotional stress and negative mental attitudes that create energy imbalances and blockages (p.109).

The above is true because research reports abound which give evidences of music therapists working on individuals with behavioural – emotional disorders who were returned to normalcy – (Deka, 2012).

4. The Music Therapist in African Society

Research has shown that in many parts of Africa, during male and female circumcision, bone setting or traditional surgery and bloodletting, lyrical music related to endurance has been used to reduce the anticipated pain, therapeutically. In 1999, the first programme for music therapy in Africa opened in Pretoria, South Africa. Research has further shown that in Tanzania patients can receive palliative care for life threatening illnesses directly after the diagnosis of these illness. This is different from many Western countries; because they reserve palliative care for patients who have an incurable illness. Music is nevertheless viewed differently between Africa and Western countries.

In Western countries and a majority of other countries throughout the world, music is traditionally seen as entertainment whereas in many African cultures, music is used in recounting stories, celebrating life events or sending messages (Stone, 2005). This is the functionality of music in the African society.

Clinical music therapy is so widely applied in contemporary times that one is strongly reminded of the ubiquitous presence of music in African traditional healing interventions. One could imagine music to be an appropriate treatment or therapy for emotional ailments since it is the language of emotion. Schools, hospitals and churches especially the African Independent churches have been identified as institutions where music therapy is applied in the healing process of children and adults who are mentally retarded. According to Aluede (2006):

The curative properties of music are not just known in the religious circles alone. In the ordinary social lives of the Africans this belief is held and explored but what amazes one who is research minded is the rarity of documented facts to rely upon.

The present scarcity of materials is obviously hinged on the fact that until very recently, records in African societies were not written down.

In African societies there are many pointers which indicate their firm belief in and practice of music therapy. Music therapy was one of the major aspects of the Bori religion in Northern Nigeria. A major one of such is that music can be used to revive a dying person or animal. There is also this notion that a dying person needs absolute silence (perfectly peaceful atmosphere) to expire. The belief is that the process through which the soul detaches from the body is cumbersome and requires quiet moments. To resuscitate a dying person, a single tone wind instrument (oja) is sounded into the person's ears. For little chicks and other birds, a bowl is turned upside down encircling the animal while a healing song with intense drumming on the bowl is carried out. This practice has quite often yielded results.

In Asaba society, Delta State music and dance play a utilitarian role and covers social, political and religious events. To the Asaba people, bankruptcy, barrenness, failures in marriages and other life problems are viewed beyond psychosomatic. Hence, Skeef (1997) talks of healing as making whole, striving for balance, repairing out-of-tuneness with one's self and with the environment. The "Iche-Ulor" festival of Asaba is basically a music and dance festival where the cleansing of their homes, streets and the entire town is done with chants, music and dance. Through music and

dance, the community and individuals are healed. This idea is depicted with the burning faggot which is indicative of all their lives' problems. The dumping of the faggots in the river portrays the extinction of all their problems. The faggots which are taken to the river by the participants is representative of all the troubles, pains and diseases in their lives. This act is a form of exorcismal therapy carried out through music and dance. According to Iyeh and Aluede (2005):

The music, dance and its associated ritual in the river give the members of the society an air of rejuvenation. The ceremonies involved in the festival create room for total healing from tension (tensolytic music therapy) from physical pain (algelytic music therapy) from fear and anxiety (axiolytic music therapy) and from the grip of evil spirits (psycholytic music therapy).

Therefore, the major essence of Ulor festival music is to provide a release of tension and grief.

5. The Igbo Area of Nigeria

Presently, the origin of the Igbo people has remained contentious among historians, archeologists, anthropologists, ethnographers and even the lay man in the community. This matter has generated stimulating debates and controversies as researchers make serious efforts to reconcile the two major schools of thoughts on the origin of the Igbos. These schools are the externalists and internalists.

The externalists conceive the Igbo origin to have migrated from other places to occupy their present territory. The second school of thought, the internalists believe that the origin of the Igbo people could be located within but however, dispersed from the Igbo centre that is the Awka-Nri and Isuama (Orlu) area to other areas they now occupy. This assertion support the fact that the Igbo origin is not traceable to anywhere else outside the Igbo land and that through the process of migration, the Igbo people have dispersed from the so called core Igbo centre. Describing the above Onyeke (2009) explained that the Igbos dispersed from "Nri-Awka, and Isuama Orlu areas to other parts of the Igboland covering Nsukka – Udi highlands, Uratta, Ikwerre, Etche Asa, Ndoki Ngwa, Umuahia, Ohafia Arochukwu, Edda, Item and Abakaliki to various places they occupy today".

Currently, the Igbos are domicile in Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi States of Nigeria. There are also pockets of Igbo people in Asaba area of Delta and Ikwerre of River States respectively. In some of the areas mentioned above, music therapy sessions take place during male and female circumcision, bone setting, traditional surgery and blood-letting exercises.

Areas identified by the researcher include two homes at Agbani road/Garriki area (Enugu-South L.G.A), one centre at Obiagu road (Enugu-north L.G.A), one centre at Amodo-Awkunna (Enugu-west) and a prominent centre at Agbogugu (Aninri L.G.A).

There are other centres at Abakaliki (Ebonyi State) Mbaise (Imo State) and Ohafia in Abia State. Here music is copiously made to reduce the pains associated with the surgical treatment being administered. The texts of the music in this realm are usually on perseverance and endurance to enable good result to be achieved.

In the olden days, the musicians and the healers possess a repertoire of traditional folk songs with soothing words to calm one' nerves and emotion. Correlating the above assertion, Aluede (2006) said that all the musicians referred to above go through one prescribed course of training or the other and the training techniques can be summarized under apprenticeship system with role imitation, rhythmic memorization dramatic sketches, voice training and care giving as core courses.

However, the researcher wish to note that the practice of male and female circumcision is presently being discouraged by the various state ministries of health and development partners such as United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and several Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's).

6. The Practice

Traditionally, illness in Igbo society is seen as being caused by evil spirits, enemies, misbehavior or sin. The use of music in the healing of sickness in Nigeria (Igbo) has a scope. Not all sicknesses or disorders require music therapy, hence music as a curative agent is primarily used in the treatment of psychological and emotionally induced disorders.

The major areas where music therapy has proved very successful in Nigeria are:

a. During the death of family members, calamity befalling a community and reviving a patient in coma. A typical example is the cleansing of homes, streets and the whole community of evil deeds during "Ichu-Ulor festival of Asaba people using music and dance.

b. Healing of people tormented by evil spirits and faith healing by traditional religious groups. Faith healing in Nigeria is purely a religious (African orthodox churches) and traditional affair devoid of herbal treatment. In traditional and many other African indigenous (orthodox) churches in Nigeria, they believe that sin opens the door for God's chastisement. It is either that God punishes one by Himself or permits satan to torture the sinner.

This practice is also found in Bori cult of Northern Nigeria, the Igbe uku and Iyayi cults of the South. They base their strength on religious prayers and confession of sins to release the mentally deranged. The faith healing has serious reliance on music which is a major vehicle in the healing process.

c. Healing patients of general disabilities through music and dance. This is paramount in all African indigenous churches. However, it has been discovered that the dance associated with this type of healing has immense value in the healing of ailments like dizziness, excess fat, arthero sclerosis and coronary thrombosis, constipation that makes one sweat profusely and be duly exercised.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In traditional Igbo society, music carry messages, inculcate virtues and discourages vices. Parents living in urban areas should endeavour to take their children home to learn these musics which can also be applied in modern times. Universities, hospitals and churches all over the country should endeavour to establish music therapeutic centres in their institutions to enhance the practice of music therapy.

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