

Let the body talk: preliminary data of an open trial of dance movement therapy for eating disorders.

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Background: There is growing support for considering Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) as an effective approach to improving physical and psychological symptoms in eating disorders (ED), but additional evidence is needed. The current study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a DMT intervention for inpatients with ED during an in-hospital rehabilitation program for ED in reducing emotion dysregulation and alexithymia and improving interoceptive awareness.

Methods: Forty-nine consecutive inpatient young women with ED (aged between 18 and 34 years) recruited from a clinical center for the rehabilitation of obesity and ED received four group sessions of DMT intervention. All participants completed the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS), and the Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness Scale (MAIA) before (Time 0) and after the intervention (Time 1). Paired-sample t-tests were run to assess differences between Time 0 to Time 1.

Results: From pre-to-post interventions, there was a significant reduction in the means of all of the subscales of DERS, suggesting an improvement in emotion regulation competencies, with the only exception for difficulties in awareness that increased ($p = 0.016$). We also found a significant reduction in alexithymia, as proved by significant differences in all of the subscales and the total score of TAS ($p < 0.001$), and significant improvements in interoceptive awareness as suggested by increased scores of the noticing ($p = 0.043$), emotional awareness ($p < 0.001$), body listening ($p < 0.001$), and trusting ($p < 0.001$) subscales of MAIA.

Conclusion: Overall, our results point towards the efficacy of dance/movement in reducing symptoms of eating disorders. Our findings also suggest that dancing can be considered a useful intervention to increase emotional regulation, reduce alexithymia, and enhance interoceptive awareness.

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