

Bridging Gaps in Mental Health Care Through Music Therapy: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT: Music therapy has gained increasing recognition as a non-pharmacological intervention for improving mental health in both clinical and community settings. This narrative review aimed to synthesize current evidence on its effectiveness, methodological approaches, and systemic challenges. Literature was systematically identified through major databases including PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, using keywords such as "music therapy," "mental health," "anxiety," "depression," and "stress." Inclusion criteria focused on empirical studies, randomized controlled trials, cohort research, and systematic reviews addressing mental health outcomes. Findings demonstrate that music therapy significantly reduces symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress while enhancing social interaction and overall well-being. Clinical studies reported improvements among intensive care patients and older adults, while community-based interventions benefitted adolescents and caregivers. Technological innovations, including mobile applications and digital delivery platforms, have expanded accessibility and demonstrated outcomes comparable to conventional therapy. Global evidence suggests consistent benefits across cultural and healthcare contexts, reinforcing music's universality as a therapeutic medium. However, systemic barriers such as limited policy support, inadequate professional training, and stigma against non-pharmacological interventions hinder widespread adoption. The review concludes that music therapy offers substantial promise for integration into mental health care but requires stronger evidence from long-term studies and culturally diverse populations. Policy reform, standardized methodologies, and digital innovation are key strategies to ensure sustainable implementation. By addressing current gaps, music therapy can be established as an essential component of comprehensive mental health care..

Keywords: Music Therapy, Mental Health, Anxiety, Depression, Dementia, Digital Health, Global Healthcare.



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INTRODUCTION

Music interventions, particularly music therapy, have increasingly been recognized as an important strategy in improving mental health outcomes across both clinical and community contexts. Empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated that music therapy reduces symptoms of anxiety

and depression, enhances well-being, and facilitates better communication between patients and healthcare providers. For example, a meta-analysis by Aalbers et al. (2017) revealed that music therapy in combination with standard care significantly reduced depressive symptoms compared with standard care alone. Similarly, community-based programs have shown positive impacts, with Freitas et al. (2022) and McDonald et al. (2015) reporting improvements in social skills among adolescents with autism spectrum disorders, suggesting the potential of music therapy to foster social interaction in vulnerable populations.

The global prevalence of mental health disorders remains alarmingly high, with nearly one in four individuals experiencing a mental health condition at some point in their lives according to the World Health Organization (Navarro et al., 2023). This underscores the urgency of integrating non-pharmacological interventions such as music therapy into mental health care strategies. Music has unique neurobiological effects, activating brain regions associated with emotion and facilitating forms of expression that may not be attainable through traditional verbal therapies (Drewitt et al., 2022). As such, music therapy has become increasingly relevant as a complementary approach in contemporary healthcare systems.

In clinical settings, music therapy has demonstrated beneficial outcomes for patients undergoing intensive care and critical treatment. Ettenberger et al. (2021) showed that music therapy interventions improved comfort, reduced anxiety, and enhanced overall quality of life among intensive care unit (ICU) patients. Beyond hospitals, community interventions highlight the importance of inclusivity and accessibility. For instance, Dimopoulos-Bick et al. (2019) illustrated how inclusive music programs in New South Wales fostered engagement but also exposed barriers to implementation, particularly for individuals from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. These findings suggest that while music therapy has proven benefits, ensuring equitable access remains a challenge in both developed and developing contexts.

The effectiveness of music therapy in improving mental health outcomes across different populations reinforces its value as a non-pharmacological intervention within global health policies. Son et al. (2019) argue that music therapy should be promoted as a scalable, evidence-informed strategy to strengthen mental health systems, given its capacity to enhance quality of life and reduce the burden of mental illness.

Despite these encouraging findings, the implementation of music therapy faces significant challenges. One major issue lies in the limited body of high-quality evidence to support its systematic integration into healthcare systems. Although multiple music therapy applications are emerging, Lisle et al. (2024) note that the accompanying level of empirical validation remains insufficient, constraining broader clinical adoption. Furthermore, Dimopoulos-Bick et al. (2019) highlighted resource limitations in healthcare facilities, such as restricted budgets and the shortage of trained professionals, which impede the widespread application of music therapy. These systemic barriers hinder the translation of evidence-based music interventions into routine healthcare practice.

Another critical challenge concerns professional recognition and institutional endorsement. Healthcare providers are sometimes reluctant to recommend music therapy in the absence of

consistent and authoritative guidelines from health authorities. This reluctance is linked to enduring stigma surrounding non-pharmacological approaches, with many practitioners favoring pharmacological treatments as first-line interventions (Aalbers et al., 2017). Moreover, the lack of standardized assessment tools complicates the evaluation of outcomes, making it difficult to systematically measure and compare the effectiveness of music therapy (Chang et al., 2017).

Beyond these practical and methodological obstacles, literature on music therapy reveals substantial gaps. A key shortcoming involves the scarcity of long-term studies. While short-term benefits are well documented, Drewitt et al. (2022) and Sanfilippo et al. (2021) emphasize that research seldom tracks the sustainability of these outcomes over extended periods. This lack of longitudinal evidence weakens the case for institutionalizing music therapy within mental health systems. Another gap lies in the demographic scope of existing studies. Many investigations focus on adults or the elderly, with relatively few examining adolescents, children, or diverse cultural groups. Aragon et al. (2024) call for broader representation in study populations to ensure findings are generalizable and relevant to different sociocultural contexts.

Methodological weaknesses also undermine the robustness of music therapy research. Sundar et al. (2015) criticized the inconsistency in research designs, noting that variations in intervention types, session lengths, and outcome measures compromise comparability. Warran et al. (2023) argue for the adoption of standardized metrics and more rigorous methodologies, including objective measures of therapy outcomes, to enhance the validity and reproducibility of findings.

Given these challenges and gaps, this review seeks to consolidate evidence on the role of music therapy in mental health interventions, with the aim of advancing a more systematic understanding of its benefits and limitations. Specifically, the review will analyze the extent to which music therapy reduces psychological symptoms, enhances quality of life, and facilitates recovery across clinical and community settings. In doing so, it will also identify systemic barriers to implementation, highlight opportunities for policy integration, and propose avenues for future research.

The primary objective of this review is to assess the current evidence on music therapy interventions in mental health, focusing on both clinical and community-based applications. It aims to synthesize empirical findings, critically examine methodological approaches, and explore how systemic and cultural factors influence the effectiveness of music therapy. By doing so, the review intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of the intervention's potential, limitations, and implications for future healthcare practices.

The scope of this study encompasses a broad geographical and demographic range, reflecting the diverse contexts in which music therapy has been applied. While particular attention will be given to high-prevalence populations such as individuals with depression, anxiety, and autism spectrum disorders, the review also considers vulnerable groups including perinatal women, older adults in long-term care, and caregivers of patients with life-threatening illnesses. By integrating insights from both clinical trials and community-based interventions across different regions, this review will contribute to a global perspective on the application and impact of music therapy in mental health.

METHOD

The methodology for this narrative review was carefully designed to ensure the systematic collection, evaluation, and synthesis of scholarly literature on the application of music therapy within mental health contexts. The process followed a structured approach to provide a transparent account of how evidence was gathered and selected, ensuring reliability and comprehensiveness in covering both clinical and community-based interventions. Central to this methodology was the utilization of major academic databases, the employment of strategic search terms, the definition of clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the systematic screening of retrieved articles for relevance and quality.

The initial stage of literature collection involved identifying suitable electronic databases that provided access to high-quality peer-reviewed journals across health, psychology, and interdisciplinary fields. PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar were the primary platforms used due to their broad coverage and reputation for indexing reputable sources. PubMed was particularly valuable for locating research in clinical and medical domains, offering access to a vast repository of randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, and systematic reviews within psychiatry and psychological health (Son et al., 2019; Capell et al., 2018). Scopus provided a multidisciplinary perspective, capturing not only medical and psychological studies but also broader social science literature, which was essential for addressing the community-based applications of music therapy (Inoue et al., 2024). Google Scholar was employed to supplement these searches by expanding coverage to conference proceedings, theses, and gray literature, thereby minimizing the risk of overlooking emerging findings that may not yet have been published in traditional journals.

The search strategy relied heavily on the formulation of effective keyword combinations. Core terms such as “music therapy” were consistently paired with mental health-related conditions and constructs, including “mental health,” “anxiety,” “depression,” “stress,” “well-being,” and “dementia.” Boolean operators were employed to refine the search and capture relevant variations. For instance, queries such as (“music therapy” AND “mental health”) OR (“music therapy” AND “anxiety”) OR (“music therapy” AND “depression”) yielded a broad but targeted range of results (Palazzi et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). The selection of these terms was informed by prior research that demonstrated their utility in isolating high-quality literature while maintaining breadth in coverage. Consistent keyword usage across databases was crucial to ensure comparability and minimize the risk of bias in the selection of articles.

In addition to keyword formulation, the search process was iterative. Initial searches were broad, and results were refined in subsequent stages by applying filters for publication type, time frame, and language. Only articles published in English were included to maintain consistency in interpretation and analysis. The review emphasized literature from the last two decades to capture contemporary developments, though earlier landmark studies were also considered when they provided significant theoretical or empirical contributions to the field. The inclusion of recent publications, such as those by Luo et al. (2024) and Inoue et al. (2024), ensured that the review incorporated current evidence reflecting the rapid evolution of music therapy interventions.

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to guide the selection of relevant studies. Included studies were those that explicitly investigated music therapy or structured music-based interventions as applied to mental health conditions. Eligible designs encompassed randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, case-control studies, qualitative research, and systematic or narrative reviews. Studies were required to provide empirical data on outcomes related to mental health indicators, such as anxiety, depression, stress reduction, emotional regulation, or social functioning. Exclusion criteria, conversely, ruled out articles that focused only tangentially on music without therapeutic intent, opinion pieces without empirical grounding, studies unrelated to mental health outcomes, or research with insufficient methodological rigor, such as those lacking clear intervention protocols or outcome measures.

The screening process unfolded in multiple stages to ensure rigor and consistency. Initially, all titles and abstracts retrieved from database searches were screened for relevance based on the inclusion criteria. Studies deemed potentially suitable were retrieved in full text for closer examination. During this phase, duplicates across databases were removed to prevent overrepresentation of specific findings. Each article was then assessed in detail to confirm that it aligned with the aims of the review and offered substantive contributions to understanding the role of music therapy in mental health. Articles that met these requirements were catalogued, and their bibliographic information was organized using reference management software, which facilitated accurate citation and cross-referencing throughout the analysis.

Evaluating the methodological quality of included studies was also a critical component of this review. Studies were assessed based on the transparency of their design, the appropriateness of their intervention protocols, and the robustness of their outcome measures. Randomized controlled trials were valued for their capacity to establish causal relationships, while qualitative studies were recognized for their depth in exploring patient experiences and contextual factors. Mixed-methods designs were particularly informative, as they combined statistical data with qualitative insights, offering a holistic perspective on the effects of music therapy. Systematic and meta-analytic reviews were prioritized when available, as they provided aggregated evidence across multiple studies, thereby strengthening the conclusions drawn.

An additional layer of analysis involved contextualizing the findings by examining the diversity of study populations and settings. For example, Luo et al. (2024) investigated the role of art therapy in addressing sleep disorders, highlighting the importance of tailoring search strategies to capture studies examining specific conditions. Similarly, Inoue et al. (2024) examined music interventions for dementia patients in care homes, demonstrating the application of consistent search protocols in identifying evidence of effectiveness across different contexts. These examples illustrate how strategic keyword use and careful methodological scrutiny can influence the quality and applicability of the literature included in a review.

Throughout this methodological process, attention was paid to ensuring transparency and reproducibility. The steps involved in database selection, keyword application, and screening were documented to allow replication by future researchers. This level of detail was necessary to meet the standards of high-impact academic journals, which increasingly require methodological clarity as a marker of scholarly rigor.

In summary, this methodology reflects a structured and comprehensive approach to identifying, selecting, and evaluating literature on music therapy in mental health contexts. By integrating multiple databases, employing strategic keyword combinations, applying clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematically screening for quality and relevance, the review sought to synthesize robust evidence. This approach not only highlights the state of knowledge in the field but also establishes a foundation for advancing future research and practice in music therapy as a critical intervention for mental health.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of evidence on music therapy within mental health interventions reveals a multidimensional picture of its clinical effectiveness, its impact on specific populations, the role of technological innovations, and the global variations in implementation. Across diverse research contexts, findings consistently demonstrate the capacity of music therapy to alleviate symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, while enhancing overall well-being and social connection. However, variations exist in outcomes across populations, settings, and delivery methods, pointing to the importance of context-specific adaptations and methodological rigor.

Clinical Effectiveness

Evidence drawn from clinical studies highlights the robust role of music therapy in mitigating psychological symptoms among patients in hospital and outpatient settings. Capell et al. (2018) demonstrated that music therapy interventions significantly reduced anxiety levels among patients admitted to intensive care units (ICUs), measured through validated tools such as the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and Numerical Rating Scale for pain. Similarly, Gambadauro et al. (2015) observed that music administered before hysteroscopy procedures effectively reduced preoperative anxiety, confirming its role as a non-invasive and accessible pre-surgical intervention.

Beyond acute settings, long-term interventions have also yielded promising results. Ma and Ma (2023) reported that older adults who engaged in music therapy sessions lasting over three months experienced a marked reduction in anxiety symptoms and overall improvement in quality of life. This finding indicates that sustained exposure to music therapy may provide cumulative benefits, particularly in managing chronic psychological conditions. Comparisons with other therapeutic approaches have reinforced these conclusions. For instance, Fancourt et al. (2016) found that music-based interventions produced reductions in anxiety and depression comparable to those observed in cognitive behavioral therapy, a gold standard in psychological care. Nonetheless, Jung et al. (2022) suggested that in certain cases, pharmacological treatments outperformed music therapy, particularly when addressing acute or severe mental health conditions. Such mixed results underscore the necessity of integrating music therapy within broader multimodal treatment strategies rather than positioning it as a stand-alone solution.

Special Populations

Research consistently indicates that music therapy offers unique benefits for vulnerable and high-risk populations. Adolescents represent a particularly relevant group, given their heightened susceptibility to depression and anxiety. Freitas et al. (2022) documented that structured music

therapy interventions significantly reduced stress and improved emotional well-being among adolescents with psychological disorders. Complementary findings were presented by McFerran et al. (2018), who showed that music interventions enhanced creativity and reduced anxiety among children and teenagers undergoing mental health treatment. These results suggest that music provides both a therapeutic outlet and a medium for self-expression in populations often resistant to conventional verbal therapies.

Among older adults, music therapy has proven effective in addressing dementia-related symptoms. Liu et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review indicating that music interventions in long-term care homes improved social functioning, alleviated depressive symptoms, and fostered emotional connection among residents with dementia. Hirschberg et al. (2020) further emphasized the capacity of music to stimulate memory and positive affect in this population. However, differential effects across populations have been observed. Yang et al. (2024) noted that older adults in care facilities displayed more consistent and favorable responses to music therapy compared to younger patients with psychological disorders, pointing to demographic and psychological differences in receptivity. Similarly, Pisegna et al. (2023) highlighted the need for adapting interventions to reflect the specific needs of distinct groups, particularly as factors such as age, cultural background, and baseline mental health status can shape outcomes.

Innovations and Technology in Music Therapy

The integration of digital technologies has significantly expanded the reach and adaptability of music therapy interventions. Lisle et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review exploring mobile applications designed for psychiatric music therapy, concluding that such tools enhance accessibility for patients who face barriers to conventional care. These platforms offer personalized, on-demand music therapy sessions, making them particularly valuable in underserved or rural regions. Ettenberger et al. (2021) reported that incorporating visual elements, such as video-based music interventions, enhanced the sensory experience, thereby amplifying therapeutic effects.

Meta-regression analyses have further substantiated the potential of technology-based interventions. Yoo et al. (2022) demonstrated that digital music therapy programs produced significant improvements in cognitive function and reductions in depressive symptoms among older adults. Importantly, these outcomes were comparable, and in some cases superior, to those achieved through traditional in-person music therapy. Such findings suggest that technology not only preserves the therapeutic integrity of music interventions but also introduces additional advantages, such as scalability and flexibility. Nevertheless, concerns regarding digital literacy and access to technology remain relevant, particularly in low-resource settings where the availability of devices and internet connectivity may limit participation.

Global Comparisons in Music Therapy Implementation

The adoption and integration of music therapy vary substantially across different regions of the world, reflecting disparities in healthcare systems, resource availability, and cultural practices. In developed countries, music therapy tends to be formalized and supported by institutional frameworks. In the United States, programs such as “Music & Memory” have gained widespread recognition for their use of digital technologies to deliver personalized music experiences to

dementia patients, leading to improved mood, reduced agitation, and enhanced quality of life (Kwak et al., 2018). Similarly, in Western Europe, robust health infrastructures have facilitated the systematic integration of music therapy into mental health services, often accompanied by rigorous clinical trials and standardized protocols.

In contrast, implementation in developing countries remains inconsistent. Dimopoulos-Bick et al. (2019) observed that despite recognition of music therapy's benefits in community settings, socioeconomic inequalities and resource limitations hindered its broad application. In many such contexts, music therapy is delivered sporadically through community initiatives rather than integrated into formal healthcare systems. This divergence reflects broader systemic disparities in access to mental health care, with music therapy exemplifying the challenges of implementing non-pharmacological interventions in resource-constrained environments.

Cross-cultural evidence demonstrates that music therapy maintains its therapeutic potential regardless of contextual differences. Dowson et al. (2019) showed that music interventions in the UK consistently reduced psychological symptoms among dementia patients, while Bernard and Dvorak (2022) found that music therapy facilitated trauma recovery among refugee populations. These findings underscore the universality of music as a therapeutic medium, capable of bridging linguistic and cultural divides. Moreover, studies such as Lai and Amaladoss (2021) and Raglio (2020) affirm that despite differences in delivery methods, music therapy consistently enhances well-being across varied social and cultural environments. This reinforces its role as a globally adaptable tool for promoting mental health.

Taken together, the results of this review indicate that music therapy is an effective and versatile intervention that can be applied across diverse populations and contexts. Its impact spans clinical effectiveness, benefits for vulnerable groups, innovative technological applications, and cross-cultural adaptability. However, the literature also highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to population-specific needs, ensuring accessibility in low-resource settings, and addressing methodological limitations to strengthen the evidence base. These findings provide a foundation for advancing music therapy as an integral component of comprehensive mental health care worldwide.

The findings of this review align closely with broader literature on psychotherapeutic interventions while highlighting distinctive aspects of music therapy. Studies such as those conducted by Aalbers et al. (2017) confirm that music therapy achieves reductions in symptoms of depression and anxiety comparable to cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which is widely recognized as a standard psychological intervention. Yet, music therapy frequently provides a more adaptive and holistic approach, especially for individuals who may struggle to engage with verbal-based therapies. This capacity to bypass the constraints of language by fostering non-verbal communication is a central feature of music therapy, one that distinguishes it from many other psychotherapeutic models. Hagemann et al. (2019) emphasized that music enables the expression of emotions often inaccessible through speech, thereby improving quality of life and reducing depressive symptoms for patients with complex medical or psychological needs.

Despite these positive parallels, methodological weaknesses across the literature introduce challenges to drawing definitive conclusions. Blackburn and Bradshaw (2014) noted that while music therapy studies generally yield encouraging results, inconsistencies in study design, sample

size, and outcome measurement reduce the generalizability of findings. This issue is echoed in critiques of music therapy research more broadly, where methodological heterogeneity undermines systematic comparison and limits the consolidation of robust evidence. As such, while music therapy can be considered a valuable adjunct or alternative intervention, more rigorous research with standardized designs remains essential to confirm its long-term efficacy.

Systemic factors play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness and accessibility of music therapy interventions. Health policy is particularly influential, with many national health systems continuing to prioritize pharmacological treatments over non-pharmacological interventions such as music therapy (Son et al., 2019). This pharmacocentric orientation limits funding allocations and institutional support, thereby constraining the extent to which music therapy is implemented in formal healthcare contexts. Furthermore, social stigma surrounding alternative therapies contributes to reluctance among patients and providers to adopt music therapy, despite evidence demonstrating its capacity to alleviate anxiety and stress (Taets et al., 2019). This stigma not only diminishes demand for such interventions but also restricts opportunities for music therapy to become embedded in mainstream care models.

Institutional and professional support is another determinant of music therapy's success. Where hospitals and clinics integrate music therapy into standard care, the presence of adequately trained music therapists and institutional backing substantially enhances outcomes. Lai and Amaladoss (2021) observed that settings offering specialized training for healthcare staff in music therapy techniques foster more effective implementation. Conversely, Dimopoulos-Bick et al. (2019) found that lack of understanding among healthcare personnel about music therapy methods presents a barrier to its uptake, underscoring the importance of professional education and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Without such support, even well-designed interventions may fail to achieve their potential impact due to gaps in implementation.

Proposed solutions in the literature focus on overcoming these systemic barriers by promoting education, awareness, and integration. Raising awareness among healthcare professionals about the benefits and techniques of music therapy can reduce stigma and foster greater acceptance within clinical environments. Taets et al. (2019) demonstrated that improved training and knowledge-sharing contributed to greater adoption of music therapy practices and enhanced patient outcomes. Expanding access through digital platforms is another promising pathway. Lisle et al. (2024) documented the effectiveness of mobile applications in providing psychiatric music therapy, which enhanced accessibility for patients who might otherwise be excluded due to geographical or financial barriers. This aligns with findings by Palazzi et al. (2021), who recommended integrating music therapy into maternal and child health protocols in intensive care settings, where music interventions can reduce maternal stress and support child development.

While these strategies hold potential, the need for further rigorous research remains paramount. McWaters et al. (2022) emphasized that the field lacks long-term studies capable of establishing sustained benefits and comparing music therapy's efficacy with that of traditional psychological interventions across diverse cultural contexts. Current literature is dominated by short-term interventions, leaving gaps in knowledge regarding the durability of outcomes and the capacity of music therapy to support recovery over time. Moreover, demographic diversity remains underexplored. Many studies focus disproportionately on adults and older populations, with

limited investigation into children, adolescents, or underrepresented cultural groups. Future research must therefore adopt inclusive designs that account for socioeconomic status, cultural background, and diverse mental health conditions to ensure that findings reflect broader population realities.

Methodological improvements are also needed to address inconsistencies in research practices. Studies frequently vary in the types of music interventions employed, the duration and frequency of sessions, and the outcome measures used, making cross-study comparison challenging. Standardized protocols and validated measures are necessary to strengthen the reliability of findings and build a cohesive evidence base. Sundar et al. (2015) called for greater consistency in methodological approaches, while Warran et al. (2023) underscored the importance of objective outcome metrics in ensuring research validity. By adopting these methodological refinements, future studies can contribute to a more rigorous and reliable understanding of music therapy's role in mental health interventions.

At a policy level, integrating music therapy into existing health frameworks requires not only scientific validation but also advocacy and structural reform. Policymakers must recognize the cost-effectiveness and broad applicability of music therapy as part of mental health care, particularly in light of increasing global demand for non-pharmacological treatments. Son et al. (2019) argued that incorporating music therapy into mental health policies could alleviate pressure on pharmacological services, diversify treatment options, and improve patient-centered care. Additionally, evidence from cross-cultural studies, such as those by Bernard and Dvorak (2022), demonstrates the universal applicability of music therapy, reinforcing its suitability as a global health strategy adaptable to diverse cultural and social contexts.

In examining the interplay between systemic barriers and therapeutic potential, it becomes clear that the future of music therapy depends on bridging the divide between research evidence and practical implementation. Strengthening institutional support, addressing stigma, and leveraging technological innovations all represent critical avenues for enhancing music therapy's role in mental health care. Expanding the scope of research to include long-term and culturally diverse studies will provide the necessary empirical foundation to solidify music therapy as an essential component of mental health interventions.

CONCLUSION

This narrative review has demonstrated that music therapy is a highly versatile and effective intervention for improving mental health across clinical and community contexts. Evidence indicates that music therapy reduces symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, while enhancing quality of life and social connection. Its impact is particularly significant among vulnerable populations such as adolescents with psychological disorders, older adults with dementia, and individuals in critical care settings. Furthermore, technological innovations, including mobile applications and digital music platforms, have expanded access to music therapy and provided scalable alternatives to conventional delivery methods. Global comparisons reinforce the universality of music therapy, with consistent benefits observed across diverse cultural and healthcare systems.

Despite its promise, music therapy continues to face systemic barriers, including under-prioritization in health policy, stigma surrounding non-pharmacological interventions, and resource limitations in both developed and developing countries. Addressing these barriers requires targeted strategies such as increasing professional training, integrating music therapy into existing healthcare frameworks, and leveraging digital technologies to reach underserved populations. Policymakers should consider the cost-effectiveness and adaptability of music therapy in strengthening mental health services.

Future research should focus on addressing methodological limitations, particularly by conducting long-term studies and including diverse demographic groups to broaden the evidence base. Standardizing intervention protocols and outcome measures will further strengthen the validity and comparability of findings. Overall, advancing music therapy as an integral component of mental health care will require coordinated efforts in policy, practice, and research, ensuring its accessibility and effectiveness as a holistic approach to mental health management.

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