

Hip-hop therapy: An approach to work with young offenders with severe mental health conditions

Kim A Dilati Western Sydney University, Australia

Forensic Hospital, Australia

Rap music emerged over four decades ago as a struggle for self-determination following North American slavery and oppression. The hip-hop culture was founded on this adversity and illustrates a form of social protest, promoting messages of social awareness, personal consciousness, activism, pleasure and power (Miller et al., 2013). Research to date has supported the therapeutic efficacy of rap music for at-risk young adults (Levy, 2012; Alvarez, 2011; Elligan, 2000). Although, hip-hop therapy is a relatively novel and unconventional mode of therapy for young people, engagement with rap music programs have found to be increasingly high compared to treatment-as-usual (TAU; Elligan, 2000). As such, hip-hop therapy remains an effective but underutilized treatment approach targeting at-risk youth and currently, there are few similar programs in the community or correctional settings in Australia or worldwide. The rhythm & rhymes adolescent/adult program (RRAP) or hip-hop therapy is a therapeutic group program for young and adult offenders with severe mental health disorders. The objectives of the group is to utilize rap music and song writing to increase pro-social activities, facilitate positive behaviour change, increase engagement in therapeutic programs, improve coping skills, depression, anxiety and hopelessness in young people with severe mental health disorders. Thirty-five adolescent and adult patients from a high secure Forensic Hospital in Sydney, Australia completed a voluntary 12 week hip-hop therapy group. A mixed methods study design was utilized. Pre and post group measures were collected, individual lyrics were qualitatively analysed and post group interviews were conducted. Results found that there were improvements in pro-social behaviours, engagement in therapy, depression, coping skills, anxiety and hopelessness. Overall, this study illustrates how rap music has the potential to promote pro-social behaviour, increase engagement in treatment, improve empowerment, self-efficacy and distress tolerance skills in correctional and forensic settings.

Biography

Kim A Dilati is a Clinical and Forensic Psychologist with the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (JH&FMHN), Australia as well as in private practice. She has worked with young offenders and at-risk youth in various Australian Government organizations for 12 years. She is currently undertaking her PhD at Western Sydney University where she is examining the effects of hip-hop therapy in young/adult offenders with mental health disorders. In 2016, she was the recipient of the NSW Health Award for the Rhythm & Rhymes Program (Hip Hop Therapy) and continues to present nationally on the therapeutic effects of hip-hop therapy in young people.

kim.dilati@gmail.com