Brief Summary of Research on the Effectiveness of Dance/Movement Therapy

Here we present four systematic reviews of dance/movement therapy effectiveness, each of which includes meta-analysis:

Two independent reviews:


Thirteen studies of 469 participants total, analyzed for anxiety, self-concept, body awareness, and separately for all psychiatric patients.

Finding: Effect size values were comparable to those published for CBT, at the time.


An update of Cruz and Sabers, using 23 studies of 1078 participants total. Findings as excerpted from the Abstract, with emphasis added:

“Results suggest that DMT and dance are effective for increasing quality of life and decreasing clinical symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Positive effects were also found on the increase of subjective well-being, positive mood, affect, and body image.” © 2013 Elsevier Ltd.

Two reviews for the Cochrane Collaboration of Systematic Reviews:


Findings: Three randomized controlled trials, of 130 participants total, SMD of -7.3 favoring the DMT intervention for reduced depression. In review, with publication expected before the end of 2014.


Findings: Two randomized controlled trials of 69 participants total. M-A of body image outcomes possible but SMD of -.13 did not find support for an effect.

This systematic review is currently (August 2014) being updated (by Bradt, Goodill & Shim) with new studies included.
Overall, there has been DMT outcome research conducting using various forms of clinical trials to demonstrate benefits with the following outcomes and populations. A reference list of the studies from which this list was drawn follows below. It suggests the breadth of application and utility of this therapeutic approach, **when provided by a trained professional clinician.**

- Mood (depression, anxiety, vitality)
- Self-concept/esteem, body-image (cancer, children)
- Social/relationship skills (anti-violence/bullying)
- Capacity for empathy (e.g., staff caregivers)
- Stress management, self-regulation (trauma)
- Academic performance (e.g., reading fluency)
- Readiness for parenting (e.g., pregnancy support)
- Medical, psychomotor, neuro-functioning (PD, fibromyalgia)

**Selected studies and publications on DMT effectiveness:**

**Randomized controlled trials, controlled clinical trials, pre-experimental designs and meta-analyses**


National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (2010). Core interventions in the treatment and management of schizophrenia in adults in primary and secondary care (Updated edition). National Clinical Guideline Number 82. London, UK: The British Psychological Society & The Royal College of Psychiatrists. [Note: This government publication in the UK recommends dance/movement therapy and other creative arts therapies in treatment for adults with schizophrenia.]


ADTA/DMT research summary prepared July 2014 by:

Sherry W. Goodill, Ph.D., BC-DMT, NCC, LPC
Past-President, American Dance Therapy Association

Parts of this summary was prepared for and presented at the 2013 Expressive Therapies Summit, New York City, November, 2013 for the National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapy Association’s Research Panel.