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Effect of an Indian Percussion Music Instrument on the Oral Health, Motor Skills and Social Skills of Children with Autism

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ABSTRACT

Background: Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are characterized by deficit in social skills. Motor skill impairments and poor oral health are also consistent with these individuals. These shortcomings are largely associated with malfunctioning of the neurological command centres like basal ganglia, frontal cortex and cerebellum. A multimodal intervention that increases the activity of these areas is music therapy. This study aimed to improve the oral health status, motor skills and social skills of children with autism by a form of music therapy that involves self-playing a percussion music instrument.

Methods: This study employed a randomized controlled trial design where children with autism between 4-12 years of age were divided into a control (n=12) and an experimental (n=12) group. The control group received only oral hygiene instructions whereas the experimental group received a music therapy intervention along with the oral hygiene instructions. Music therapy involved training in playing the Tabla. Standardized scales were used for measuring the oral health status, motor skills and social skills. Descriptive independent t-test was done for intergroup comparison and paired t-test was done for intra group comparison.

Results: There was a significant change in the plaque index, motor skills, social participation and social reciprocation of the participants in the experimental group.

Conclusion: This study showed that music therapy for children with autism through playing the Tabla shows potential for improving their oral health, motor skills and social skills.

Keywords: Autism, Tabla, Oral health, Motor skills, Music therapy, Social skills

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