

Integrating Music into Pediatric Physical Therapy: A Survey of Attitudes Among Physical Therapists in Israel

Michal Alper PT, M.Sc.¹, Dorel Shapira MA, PT², Nilly Waiserberg PhD, PT³

1 Department of Physical Therapy, Gray Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Tel Aviv University.
Phone: 050-4607141,
Email: michalper3@gmail.com

2 Shmaya Rehabilitation Center, Bnei Brak, Israel;
Pediatric Special Interest Group, Israeli
Physiotherapy Association.
Phone: +972-54-9982194,
Email: dorel280802@gmail.com

3 Department of Physical Therapy, Gray Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Tel Aviv University;
Pediatric Special Interest Group, Israeli
Physiotherapy Association. Phone: +972-52-2923756,
Email: nillyw@post.tau.ac.il

Abstract

Background: Numerous studies highlight the beneficial impact of music on patients' physical, emotional, and cognitive states. Music has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety by lowering heart rate and cortisol levels, and to enhance motivation and facilitate skill acquisition in various pediatric neurodevelopmental conditions (such as cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, and prematurity). Despite these benefits, little is known about physical therapists' perspectives and real-world patterns of music use in pediatric physical therapy. This survey aimed to assess the attitudes of physical therapists in Israel toward integrating music into pediatric treatment and to describe how music is used in practice as a therapeutic tool.

Methods: The survey included 215 pediatric physical therapists with at least one year of professional experience. Data were collected via an anonymous digital questionnaire during 2020. Statistical analysis was conducted using χ^2 and Fisher's Exact tests, with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Results: Seventy-four percent of participants ($n = 159$) reported integrating music into their treatment sessions. Most therapists utilize music to boost motivation, provide rhythm, reduce stress, and encourage cooperation. In contrast, the use of music for pain management or cognitive enrichment was rarely reported. The most prevalent genre used was children's songs. A trend was identified suggesting that older physical therapists are less likely to use music in their practice. Furthermore, while therapists typically adapt the music to the child's age, they seldom change the selection between sessions.

Conclusions: The findings indicate that while physical therapists recognize the potential of music as a therapeutic tool, a gap exists between this recognition and their clinical and theoretical knowledge. There is a clear need to enhance awareness and structured training regarding the evidence-based use of music within physical therapy practice in Israel.

Keywords: Physical therapy, children, music, motivation, rhythm, therapists' attitudes