

Knowledge and Evaluation of Alternative Therapies

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The need for alternative therapies for patients living with a chronic disease is overwhelming due to the psychological toll that medical treatments and knowledge of one's prognosis can have on the mind. Alternative therapies are psychologically beneficial rather than physically beneficial, and evidence that these therapies can relieve stress, encourage self expression, increase social activity and benefit social relationships, and increase a patient's self esteem is extensive (Kupst & Patenaude, 2016; Tortora, 2016; Councill, 2012; Kupst & Patenaude, 2014; Herrmann, 2015; Urbanski & Lazenby, 2012). Though there is research that gives evidence for which therapies are and are not effective for a wide range of chronic illnesses, there is little research that provides insight to people's perception and understanding of those therapies. Given the importance of an individual's psychological well being while undergoing treatment for and learning to cope with a chronic condition, this study investigates the relationship between how people perceive alternative therapies for chronic conditions compared to their true effectiveness or lack thereof, and whether or not they would choose to use alternative therapies for themselves and for others. It is our hope to understand people's perception of various alternative therapies, and to set up future research that explores people's decision making thought processes when choosing alternative therapies when they or a loved one is chronically ill.

Methods

Ninety-five participants were recruited from a regional public university for this experiment. Participants were asked to complete a consent form, and then administered a three part survey. Before coming to this study's survey, the participants completed survey questions about a textbook excerpt that they had been asked to read and questions pertaining to ADHD, and were exposed to a mood manipulation question before answering whether or not they would choose to do a series of tasks. At the conclusion of the three part survey, participants were asked to rate a series of alternative therapies from most effective to least effective, and then asked to indicate which alternative therapies they would engage in if they were diagnosed with a chronic illness, and to indicate which alternative therapies they would choose for a loved one if he or she was diagnosed with a chronic illness. At the conclusion of the survey, participants were thanked and dismissed. Average participant age was 19.53 (SD = 4.56), 67.3% were female.

animal	**	***	***	***	NS	NS
0.35	herbal	**	*	NS	NS	NS
0.53	0.29	art	***	**	NS	NS
0.54	0.24	0.58	music	***	NS	NS
0.40	0.13	0.35	0.57	dance	NS	NS
0.06	0.01	0.01	-0.04	0.11	group	***
0.10	-0.00	0.11	0.08	0.15	0.79	family

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Results

Multiple chi square tests were conducted to reveal if participants favored the therapy significantly higher than chance. The chi square test for animal therapy produced a significant correlation ($p > .05$) in favor, while the chi square test for herbal therapy produced a significant correlation as well ($p > .05$), not in favor.

Correlations

- Participant ratings of research based effective therapies like animal, music, and art therapy were not significantly different than chance.
- Participant ratings of lesser effective therapies like group and family counseling were highly correlated, as were ratings of herbal therapy.
- Approximately half of participants would engage in herbal therapy, but would not recommend herbal therapy for children.

Discussion

The relationship between people's perceptions of alternative therapies and whether or not they would recommend them for themselves and/or others is quite interesting. Analysis of research shows that participants ratings of statistically effective therapies like art and music therapies were positively correlated and largely significant. Participant ratings of less effective therapies like animal therapy were not significant, but group and family counseling therapies were highly correlated. Herbal therapy was rated least effective by a large number of participants, but it appears there is controversy over the choice to utilize herbal therapy. 51% said they would not consider herbal therapy for themselves, and only 18% said they would recommend it for a child. Though people seem picky about what therapies they would engage in if they had a chronic illness, they often recommend multiple therapies (except herbal therapy) for children with a chronic illness.

Limitations in this experimental study included a small sample at a regional public university, a significant gender skew, and few participants currently living with a chronic illness. After analyzing research results it seems that people perceive alternative therapies as how the therapies may be beneficial to themselves, and are largely unaware of the research supporting or denying certain therapies' effectiveness. No reason as to why children should be exposed to more alternative therapies than perhaps themselves was investigated, but it would be beneficial to study if the number of alternative therapies a child is exposed to increases or decreases their psychological well-being. Additionally, further research should investigate whether or not people would implement alternative therapies if they knew of its' effectiveness and long-term effects, or if they would choose alternative therapies based on personal preference.

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