

Songwriting to explore self-concept following acquired neurological injury

Tamplin, J¹, Baker, F¹, Roddy, C², Ponsford, J², Rickard, N.²

1 The University of Melbourne, 151 Barry Street, Parkville, VIC 3010, jeanette.tamplin@unimelb.edu.au

2 Monash University, Wellington Road & Blackburn Road, Clayton VIC 3800

Theme: Research and Quality Improvement

Background: People in rehabilitation following a brain injury or spinal cord injury often experience significant emotional upheaval as they begin to process and acknowledge the long-term implications of their injuries. Songwriting is a method that enables people to tell their story - past and present - and explore options for the future. However, the literature lacks clear description for how songwriting experiences impact on clinical outcomes such as transformed identity, life-satisfaction, coping, depression, and anxiety following traumatic injury or illness.

Methods: This feasibility study examined the effects of a targeted songwriting intervention (12 individual sessions over 6 weeks) for 10 inpatients undergoing rehabilitation following an acquired brain injury or spinal cord injury. The intervention was designed to support participants to create songs that explore issues of identity – with the aim of integrating aspects of the past pre-injured self with that of the new injured self. Measures of self-concept, depression, anxiety, emotion regulation, affect, satisfaction with life, and flourishing were collected pre-, mid-, and post-intervention, and compared with repeated measures of flow and meaningfulness of songwriting.

Results: Medium effects were found for changes in self-concept ($d=0.557$) and depression ($d=0.682$) and approached a medium effect for negative affect ($d=0.491$). Improvements in self-concept over time were associated with decreases in depression ($r_p = -0.874$, $n=9$, $p<0.01$), anxiety ($r_p = -0.866$, $n=9$, $p<0.05$), and negative affect ($r_p = -0.694$, $n=10$, $p<0.05$), and an increase in flourishing ($r_p = +0.866$, $n=10$, $p<0.05$) and positive affect ($r_p = +0.731$, $n=10$, $p<0.05$).

Discussion: The findings of this small pilot study suggested that the targeted songwriting intervention was positively associated with improvements in self-concept and well-being outcomes. Further research with larger samples is required to explore the mechanisms through which this songwriting intervention effects change in self-concept and wellbeing.