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Establishing an understanding of group dynamics and process within single-session music therapy groups open to both adolescents with mental illness and mental health staff.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of group dynamics and process within single-session music therapy groups open to both adolescents and mental health staff. The study investigated factors that influenced group dynamics; how existing understandings of group process were evidenced within the sessions and how the groups could best be facilitated. A qualitative, exploratory method was used. Secondary analysis of clinical data from seven group music therapy sessions was carried out. A process of thematic analysis was applied to the narrative data and recordings of group improvisations were analysed using an adapted version of the Music Therapy Group Improvisation Analysis Model (MTGI-AM). It was found that developmental group process was evident within single sessions of music therapy. For example, a process of moving from disconnection, to establishing common ground, developing musical cohesion, then taking risks and negotiating closure, was audible within group improvisations. Group dynamics were affected by the physical environment and wider institutional contexts; by the leadership styles and structures implemented; the contributions of group members; the quality of existing and emerging connections between individuals; and aspects of the individuals themselves. The structure of music provided stability, mediated energy levels and presented opportunities for individuals to develop leadership and autonomy. Groups became more autonomous and took more risks as musical and interpersonal cohesion was established.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Anhedonia – the loss of the ability to gain pleasure from normally pleasurable experiences.

Avolition – lack of initiative, motivation and goal-directed behaviour.

Crescendo – gradual increase in volume of a musical passage

Decrescendo – gradual decrease in volume of a musical passage

Giant Weta – native New Zealand insect. There are many species of weta, 11 of which are called ‘giant weta’.

‘Jam’ – informal term for improvisation or improvise.

Kalimba – an African musical instrument made of a wooden box and metal bars of various lengths that are plucked by the fingers or thumbs.

Kaupapa Maori – Frameworks and principles that are indigenous to Maori.

Maraca – A Latin-American instrument made of a hollow gourd rattle, filled with pebbles or beans.

‘Noodling’ – informal term for playing around and exploring instrumental sounds.

Paranoia – an extreme and irrational distrust of others.

Tangata Whai Ora – people seeking wellness

Whanau – broad term for family, including extended family and close friends. Who is ‘whanau’ is defined by the individual.

Whanaungatanga – strength of relationships and interconnection. Similar to kinship, connecting as one people.

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