

Abstract

In the United States, the agricultural industry is dependent on men and women from Mexico who migrate throughout the country to participate in the care and harvest of crops. They often migrate independently of their families and leave loved ones behind. Separation from families and difficult working conditions create high frequencies of mental health issues. When available, the farmworkers seek out treatment for the somatic symptoms such as high heart rate, upset stomachs, and difficult breathing often associated with depression and anxiety. Mental health counselors and facilities often are not able to meet the needs in culturally sensitive ways presented by this population.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of music therapy on Mexican farmworkers' levels of depression, anxiety, and social isolation. In addition, this study sought to examine how the migrant farmworkers used music-making sessions between music therapy sessions as a coping skill to further improve their overall mental health. Finally, this study sought to examine how migrant farmworkers engaged in the research process and how they valued their relationship with the researcher.

This study utilized a mixed methods approach incorporating a randomized control trial with repeated measures and participatory action research. A total of 125 farmworkers participated in this study over the course of two distinct phases. Farmworkers in Phase I were randomly assigned to music therapy, English as a second language classes, and a stress education (control) group. Farmworkers in Phase II were randomly assigned to music therapy or a comparison stress education group. Farmworkers in the music therapy condition participated in 6-10 music therapy sessions during which time they learned how to play an instrument, engaged in song writing and lyric analysis, and group music-making.

Results indicated that participants in the music therapy condition across both phases

did not significantly improve their depression, anxiety, and social isolation scores compared to the control/comparison group. The farmworkers who did participate in group music-making between sessions did improve their scores more so than participants who did not engage in weekly group music-making. The farmworkers identified helpful and impeding aspects of the research through focus group interviews. They also identified components of their relationship to the music therapist/researcher that were helpful in establishing and developing a relationship with her.