

Music As A Healing Methodology Amongst Adolescents In A Disadvantaged Community, In South Africa

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Abstract

Music is one of the most relatable things for adolescents. They listen to music almost every day without realising its therapeutic potential. This study aimed to investigate music's healing properties and its usefulness in helping adolescents with psycho-social challenges. Listening to music is an activity that provides a range of physical and psychological advantages (e.g. stress reduction, relaxation, depression reduction) to people of various cultures and ages. It is a type of healing methodology that everyone, regardless of financial status, can obtain. The study explored the use of music as a healing and developmental intervention with adolescents from troubled backgrounds. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach with 15 adolescents from Sweetwaters, a disadvantaged community in Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. The study followed the process of thematic analysis. Themes that emerged from the data focused on the personal meaning of music in adolescents' lives and the benefits of music. The findings from the study revealed a multitude of benefits for distressed adolescents who were dealing with a variety of psycho-social issues.

Keywords: music, therapeutic, adolescents

1. Introduction

Music has been described as a collection of coordinated sound or sounds that when drawn together have tremendous healing potential (Victor, 2021). Mohan and Thomas (2020) asserted that music can act as a powerful emotional tool which has a myriad of invigorating benefits for adolescents. Consequently, music therapy emerged as a form of music interventions to accomplish individualised goals within a therapeutic context to address the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals (Odell-Miller, 2019). Gilroy and Lee (2019) added that the use of music therapeutically is an interpersonal process that engages music in all its facets to restore an individual's wellbeing. Music therapists have increasingly begun to work with whole communities. They do not only work with individual problems but focus on systemic interventions. These include how music can build networks, provide symbolic means for underprivileged individuals, or be used to empower less privileged adolescents (Ruud, 2014).

Music has its strongest relevance during adolescence. Music consumption by adolescents is enormous, and so is the devotion that adolescents have for the music that they listen to. The clearest marker of adolescence is a passion for popular music (Rodríguez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). The meaning and importance of music to young people is tied to their psychosocial development. Music is an important resource for improving adolescent coping and mental health due to its unique characteristics (González, 2020). One of the primary qualities is its ability to enhance their moods. This is especially meaningful for adolescents, because their everyday experience is often emotionally intense and restless. Sounds and words of music mirror the emotional turbulence of adolescent life (Saarikallio, Randall and Baltazar, 2020). Sedikides, Leunissen, and Wildschut (2022) added that music can improve behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal performance among adolescents. They added that formal music-based interventions, which can be categorised as active interventions (such as music making, playing an instrument, singing or improvising music) or receptive interventions (such as listening to music), are commonly used music therapy interventions.

Archambault, Vaugon, Deumié, Brault, Perez, Peyrin, Vaillancourt, and Garel (2019) found that music therapy yielded immense benefits for children and adolescents with psychopathology, particularly for behavioural and developmental disorders and emotional disorders. DeDiego (2015) added that music has been used as a tool for emotional control in counselling. Welch, Biasutti, MacRitchie, McPherson, and Himonides (2020) suggested that song lyrics can be used by therapists and counsellors as a processing tool, as they convey a powerful emotional story through the artists' theme. In fact McFerran (2020) opined that the growth and development of adolescents, are aided by the therapeutic use of music, as it creates the opportunity for intimate emotional exploration. Tervo (2001) asserted that music provides the opportunity

for teenagers to express, be in contact with, and share amongst themselves feelings of anger, rage, grief, longing, and psychological disintegration through music.

The literature reflects that young people's relationships with music has been explored from sociological, emotional, and wellbeing perspectives (Ros-Morente, Oriola-Requena, Gustems-Carnicer, and Filella Guiu, 2019). Sociological research indicates that music is used to claim cultural space, while emotional engagement is an important part of the relationship between a teenager and music. Adolescents' preference for certain types of music is dependent on the mood they are in and the emotions they are feeling due to the situations they are currently going through (Gustavson et al., 2021).

Music has been noted to form a practical resource that can be used by listeners to enhance cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and psychological aspects of their life (Maloney, 2017). Laukka (2017) reported that some adolescents preferred listening to spiritual songs when they experienced sadness, while others preferred listening to happy and joyous songs, which triggered them to dance, as this helped them forget about what they were experiencing. Ruud (2019) opined, that adolescents use music for various reasons which ranged from suppressing negative emotions, coping with stress, reasoning, expressing anger, and grieving for the loss of loved ones. Other writers such as Parker (2020) asserted however that while music is a popular leisure activity among adolescents, little is known about its relationship to their wellbeing. Wellbeing has been defined as embracing positive emotions and positive psychological and social functioning, and is protective against suicidal behaviour, academic impairment and mental illnesses amongst adolescents (Miranda, 2019). It is against this backdrop that this paper explores how adolescents use music as a healing methodology, in a disadvantaged community in South Africa.

1.1. The current study

This study explored the use of music as a healing and supportive methodology, among adolescents from a disadvantaged community in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The objectives of the study were to understand how adolescents in this community used music to affect their well-being and bring about healing and transformation in their lives. The study was particularly relevant, as this was a poverty stricken community, which has little infrastructure and where social services are absent.

2. Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used to guide the methodology. According to De Vos *et al.*(2011), qualitative approaches seek answers to a question and use a predefined set of processes to address the research question. Qualitative research methods provides a lens through which to learn about non-quantifiable phenomena such as people's experiences, languages, histories, and cultures (Bhangu, Provost and Caduff, 2022). Qualitative researchers employ a number of techniques to gain a better understanding of how people perceive their social realities and how they act in the social world as a result of these experiences (Hennick, Hutter and Bailey, 2020).

2.1. Participants

This study was carried out in the Sweetwaters area in Pietermaritzburg, in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. The population for this study included those adolescents who lived in this area. Non-probability sampling methods, specifically purposive sampling were selected to recruit adolescents who were known to have had difficult experiences and were presenting with emotional distress. An initial sample of twelve adolescents was selected, but data was continued to be collected until saturation was reached. The eventual sample size was therefore fifteen participants in total. The sample consisted of twelve females and three males, who were between 15 to 18 years old.

2.2. Procedure

The researcher received full ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Durban University of Technology (number IREC 121/21) prior to data collection. A gatekeeper's letter requesting permission to conduct the study was drafted to the head of the Sweetwaters community. The head was also approached to recruit participants on behalf of the researcher. The head of this village, was responsible for providing support to troubled families, and through his assistance the researcher was able to recruit adolescents who voluntarily agreed to participate. He provided the researcher with the names of the participants, after securing permission from their parents for them to participate. A letter of information and consent for parents and assent letters for the adolescents respectively were used to secure approval and permission for the data collection. Semi-structured interviews guided by an interview guide which was pilot tested, were used to collect data, in the homes of the participants. Arrangements for these home interviews were facilitated through the head of the community. In addition to the use of interviews, participants were asked to write reflections which the researcher collected from the participants after a month.

2.3. Method of analysis

This study used thematic analysis to guide the data analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data. It provides accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative data (Terry, Hayfield, Clark and Braun, 2017). Data collected from the study were broken down into smaller units and grouped according to shared themes and sub-themes. Data were transcribed verbatim, as accurately as possible by the researcher and verified by the participants.

2.4. Rigour in qualitative research

Trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research, since the findings should accurately reflect the experiences of participants. Inaccuracy and misinterpretation of findings in research detracts from the value of a study (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen and Kyngäs, 2014). To ensure trustworthiness, credibility, dependability and confirmability was considered. Credibility was maintained through member checking. Confirmability was ensured through an audit trail of audiotapes, field notes, transcriptions, and the reflection notes related to the study, which were thoroughly examined. Dependability was ensured by maintaining and storing data verbatim in transcripts from audio recordings. The following sub-section contains an analysis and discussion of the research findings.

3. Analysis and discussion

There were four themes and eleven sub-themes that emerged from the data. The first theme, which focused on the personal meaning of music in adolescents' lives is discussed in the sub-section that follows.

3.1. Theme: Personal meaning of music in adolescents' lives

The first theme that emerged was the meaning of music for adolescents. Participants described the personal meaning that music had played in their lives saying:

"Often when I get overwhelmed by emotions, I listen to music and immediately I feel a sense of relief. I can say that music has helped me to overcome my inner battles. Deep lyrics give me insight and perspective at times when I need it. Music gives me an escape when the world overwhelms me. In times when I'm uncertain/angry, music calms me down and I'm able to reason and think rationally. I can literally go from being down to feeling very happy after listening to music." (P1)
"I truly believe that music is important, judging from my own personal experience and how I have been using music to help me better cope with the challenges I face. I also think that music can be used to heal past trauma or any problem you might have... Music is enjoyed by almost everyone, so I think it can really work as a way to find healing." (P1)

These participants reflected that music provided them with emotional relief during times of distress. They shared that lyrics often provided insight into their challenges and also helped them cope better with past trauma. Moreover, music was found to elevate their mood, dispel negative emotions and create optimism regarding the future.

"Music helps to lift my mood when I am down. Music is a way for me to express myself when words fall short. I am not good at expressing myself and music helps do that for me. I find music as a way of healing, mostly when I'm having a gloomy/bad day and I'm not feeling well... I remember there was a time when I felt like I am in a dark space...I felt so hurt and powerless. I was even depressed; I would always stay indoors and avoid to meet up with people...But music became my happy pill every day. I can say it healed me and it was very important in my life during that time, and even now it is still important." (P14)

As evidenced, music helped this adolescent deal with her hurt and depression and helped her find solace and comfort. The participant expressed that music comforted her and restored hope in her life, when she listened to music. She felt like everything would be well. Another participant similarly shared:

"Music is my healer; music is my comforter. Music is important to me, and I didn't see that I have been using music all the time to help me cope with my challenges...I listen to music when I am not okay emotionally. I always play and listen to it. The most important thing for me is the lyrics of the song, they have to have a strong message. ...Music is really powerful...It is able to make you feel better; music is able to make you accept things you never wanted to accept. Music is able to take you to a perfect world that is peaceful and full of hope. If I had to choose between going for counselling or playing music to heal, I would choose music. Music makes me feel comfortable, and I am able to express myself without the fear of being judged by a person." (P8)

The most common music genre that was found to be used and enjoyed by adolescents was Amapiano. Most of the adolescents reported that they listened to it when they were feeling down, stressed, or when they were studying for an exam. A participant shared:

"My big brother introduced me to the Amapiano music genre, and I usually notice that every time he is not okay in his room, you would always hear him play Amapiano music loudly and he always says 'Amapiano hits different'. ...I think music can heal and that people can use it to heal" (P3)

Further describing the healing potential of music, another participant shared :

"I really believe that music can be used to help people to heal. If it helped me heal from the pain of losing a parent, then imagine what it can do for someone else...I still listen to it even now and feel better; when sad thoughts of my father come

into my head, all I do is take my earphones and jam to any hip-hop or Amapiano song... trust me, I do feel better. I stand in front of the mirror and start dancing, and picture myself as the one singing the song or imagine myself in the song, and I end up laughing at my dance moves and I forget what was hurting me.” (P9)

As evidenced in the data, participants used music for various personal reasons. Music became meaningful to them in times of emotional distress, loneliness and even to process grief over the loss of a loved one.

As a result, it appears to be an effective strategy for lowering depressive symptoms (Mrazova and Celec, 2010). When people listen to self-selected music for 30 minutes, they experience endocrine changes, including a decrease in the stress hormone cortisol (Ing 2010). According to McFerran and Roberts (2015), this process is mostly unconscious for teenagers, and they actively utilise music to control their feelings, picking what they need to hear at the time.

According to DeLucia-Waack and Gellman (2017), listening to music might help reinforce coping abilities. Listening to songs with coping messages might act as a reminder of coping skills to use in stressful times. McIntyre (2019) stated that music can be considered a skill, because it can be utilised to help adolescents regulate and relax their emotions. As a result, individuals may more easily find the happy medium between over-arousal and numbness, boosting their emotional stability.

Bettmann and Jaspersen (2012) stressed the significance of these self-regulation tactics, pointing out that adolescent clients frequently lack awareness of physiological responses and underutilise de-escalation abilities. Baker and Bor (2008) shared that music can be used as a temporary escape from thoughts or feelings, to validate current thoughts and feelings, or to release pent-up emotions, including anxiety and anger. The researchers go on to state that listening to music can also have a purgative or cathartic effect on adolescents, and that listening to preferred music was associated with a positive change in their emotions.

3.2. Theme: Common music intervention techniques used by adolescents

This theme highlighted some of the music intervention techniques that participants have been using. The most common ones emerging in the data were singing, listening to music, and song writing.

3.2.1. Sub-theme: Singing

One participant shared that she enjoyed singing as follows:

“I sing loudly when I am hurting, and I feel much better afterwards. It is really calming to listen to music and sing loudly while dancing in front of the mirror... I really feel better ...it is so healing. I do it every time when I am really feeling sad, angry, or even when I am happy or excited.” (P11)

As evidenced in the aforementioned excerpt, this participant found that singing had a calming effect on her, especially when she experienced sadness or anger. She also shared that she sang when she was happy. A study by Gutgsell *et al.* (2013) also documented that singing reduced stress, promoted confidence and healthy voice use, and was linked to positive self-esteem and ability to communicate.

Stott and McFeran (2018), opined that singing to music is a way of discovering oneself, of who we really are and how we feel. They added that it can be used as a form of catharsis to release negative emotions. Another participant echoed this sentiment :

“I enjoy singing when I listen to music, it makes me feel like I am the one singing the song, and the lyrics of the song... I feel them speaking to me. I end up crying, but in a good way. Even when I wasn't feeling well, after singing and listening to music I feel much better.” (P2)

Recent research also suggests that music-related activities such as singing, bring about a wealth of positive benefits in terms of human behaviour, health, and psychological well-being in both non-clinical and clinical populations, including the elderly, adults, children and adolescents (Kreutz and Nater, 2021; Grebosz-Haring and Thun-Hohenstein, 2018, 2020). This is linked to evidence that music-related activities are capable of inducing emotional-affective phenomena and can generate and regulate emotions (Grebosz-Haring *et al.*, 2022), improve mood (Grebosz-Haring and Thun-Hohenstein, 2018), relieve stress (Linnemann *et al.*, 2015, 2017), and encourage social behaviours (Grebosz-Haring *et al.*, 2022). According to Orton and Pitts (2019), adolescents have recognised the psychological benefits of singing for expressing emotions, achieving relaxation and feeling positive.

3.2.2. Sub-theme: Listening to music

Listening to music was the second sub-theme that emerged. Even with this form of music activity, participants reported many benefits, such as dispelling negative thinking, and coping with depression and stress as follows:

“When I listen to music and sing each song, I feel so happy and in a good mood all the time.” (P1)

“I don't think I would survive without music. Music really helps me to cope with losing my father in 2021, even now. I listen to music every day.” (P11)

“I do listen to music. Every time after I have listened to a song, I find that the message in it speaks to me. And I just feel relieved because someone feels like me, so it's not the end of the road..., I will listen to a song and relate to it .” (P7)

Stott and McFeran (2018) added that listening to music promotes positive relationship building, modifies emotions and cognitions, and promotes emotional immersion. Listening to music can also strengthen adaptive coping abilities, especially for adolescents, as it acts towards regulating emotions (Olsen, Terry and Thompson, 2023). Miranda (2019) further opined that listening to music can help adolescents develop a sense of self, connection and belongingness, and act as a supportive system in troubling times, by dispelling loneliness and increasing emotional sensitivity.

3.2.3. Sub-theme: Song writing

Song writing emerged as the third sub-theme. Stott and McFerran (2018) wrote that song writing creates a pathway where people can document their feelings and thoughts creatively and independently. Participants in the study shared how they used song writing in their personal lives, as follows:

"I write and listen to a lot of music when I have suicidal thoughts. It has really helped me to calm down and be happy again." (P5)

"Music helps me release all the pain I feel... when I want to express how I am feeling, I just create a song and write it down and sing it. I love music so much. I just write songs about how I feel... I have a song book that I keep, and I write music about how I feel." (P14)

As evidenced, song writing was another common practice in the sample. One participant shared that she had a song book, which served as a journal within which she could write down her feelings. Similarly, another expressed that by writing songs, she could feel a sense of calm as song writing helped her to feel happy when she felt suicidal. Kimbel and Protivnak (2010) argued that song writing can increase adolescents' self-esteem and self-expression. In a study conducted by Myers-Coffman, Barker, Daly, Palisoan and Bradt (2019), song writing was found to enable adolescents a way to safely express grief-related emotions and experiences nonverbally and created opportunities for strengthening music and coping skills. Findings from their study, suggest that engaging in collaborative therapeutic song writing with grieving peers, can decrease levels of grief, enhance creative expression, and provide social support. Moreover, song writing improves emotional well-being as adolescents who choose to participate in song writing activities experience positive mood benefits (Arbuthnott and Sutter, 2019).

3.3. Theme: Benefits of music

Music was found to have several benefits that promote wellbeing and healing amongst the participants. The benefits of music were described by participants as follows:

3.3.1. Sub theme: Calming effect

Some participants shared that listening to music, produced a calming effect in the following ways :

"Every time when I'm anxious, I just listen to Amapiano and I feel calm afterwards." (P1)

"When I was told at home about the history of my father, after that I just took my phone and started listening to music. And I found myself calm, I really felt okay afterwards. My father has been in jail ever since I was a child. I don't really know him; I only know his pictures. When I was told about this, I just listened to music, and I felt okay after." (P5)

As evidenced one participant reported that after learning about his dad, who had been imprisoned, he had turned to music to help him process his emotions and feel better. Juslin (2016) agreed that listening to music can enable positive emotional changes. Amapiano is a South African genre characterized by its use of piano riffs and deep bass (Piza, 2023).

Bradt and Dileo (2010) described receptive music therapy as the process of listening to music for relaxation or mood change. Plotkin (2003) defined the receptive technique as "listening to music live or recorded and responding to the experience silently, verbally, or through another modality." Dalcoze (2019) added that the listening experience is typically focused on physical, emotional, intellectual, artistic, or spiritual components of music, and that a person's responses are tailored to the event's therapeutic aim. It can be used to either relax or to trigger a certain emotional or physical reaction. Relaxation and/or listening to music, song lyric discussion, song remembrance, music appreciation exercises, and music collages are some of the responsive music therapy strategies described and supported in the literature (Kelvin *et al.*, 2018). They show promise in relation to the use of music for several daily benefits.

3.3.2. Sub-theme: Connects one with a higher power

The study also found that adolescents used music in a spiritual context, saying that it helped them to connect with God or any higher power. Most adolescents reported that they used gospel music to connect with God and tap into their spiritual realm as follows:

"When I am faced with tough situations. I use music to connect with God. I don't go to church, so when I need to feel closer to God or when I am going through something, instead of praying to God I just listen to gospel songs. I always feel better and feel God's presence...it feels like God is there at that time." (P3)

"I listen to gospel music when I want to connect to God and have that moment with God. I don't usually pray or go to church often, so every time when I want to be closer to God I just listen to gospel music." (P4)

“I also use music to connect with God or to communicate with God through worship songs. When I feel down or feel like everything is not going according to my plans, I just listen to gospel music and pray. And I feel light afterwards.” (P12)

Participants reported experiencing a deeper connectedness with God and believed that music also served as a form of prayer. Jensen (2015) posited that spiritual music is healing and restoring and can draw a person closer to God. Similarly, Moore (2018) asserted that music can lift our spirits, comfort us, serve as a place of refuge during difficult times, encourage us, express what is in our hearts, and touch us deeply. Finally, Dos Santos and Brown (2021) asserted that religion and spirituality are no strangers at the intersection of music and healing throughout the ages and throughout a wide range of cultural contexts. They believe that music can play an integral role in facilitating physical, psychological and communal healing.

3.3.3. Sub-theme: Coping with bereavement

The third sub-theme emerging in the data focussed on how the participants used music to cope with their bereavement. They shared:

“When my dad passed away, it really felt like it was the end of the world for me... I felt like I was going to die as well... I couldn't imagine life without my dad. But music kept me sane. I always wondered what I could have done or what I could have used to help me cope with losing my dad if there was no music ... Music was my go-to, every single day. I would sometimes listen to some of the songs my dad enjoyed, and it felt like he is there in the room with me. Music gave me so much hope and peace.” (P9)

“When I lost my mom, I would listen to music every time when I missed her and when I was feeling down. I used music to cope with the loss of my mom. It was so hard for me to accept that she was no more. Nothing seemed to make sense besides music.” (P4)

As evidenced in these excerpts, participants struggled with the loss of their loved ones and found tremendous comfort in listening to music. Listening to the songs that their lost loved one had enjoyed, also enabled them to connect with them and find acceptance of their loss. Bruin-Mollenhorst (2018) wrote that music acted as a means of evoking the memory of a deceased loved one. Referring to several research studies Jensen (2015) also asserted that music is a useful methodology in helping people to transition from depression to acceptance. In a study conducted by Perkins, Mason-Bertrand, Fancourt, Baxter, and Williamon (2020) music was used explicitly to cope with the specific circumstances of loss and coping with grief. Research by Smeijsters and van den Hurk (2019) found that music had proven successful in helping adolescents in particular, to deal with their grief. Used therapeutically, Iliya (2015) also reported that people who experienced eight to ten sessions of music therapy, demonstrated greater improvement in grief symptoms. Music is of huge significance, in relation to death and farewell ceremonies as part of human experience. According to Viper, Thyren, and Bojner-Horwitz (2022) music, particularly songs, can articulate sentiments that help close relatives cope with the sadness of their loss.

3.3.4. Sub-theme: Promotes a happy mood

The fourth sub-theme emerging in the data provided evidence of music as a mood enhancing activity. Participants referred to music as a mood booster in the following ways:

“After listening to it, I feel so much at ease and I feel happy, with a lifted mood. Sometimes when I wake up feeling so down and sad, I will just put on my earphones and listen to music and dance.” (P8)

“I listen to Amapiano (house music) when I am in a happy mood, and I want to maintain the mood. So, I will just play Amapiano, and I become happier. Music makes you happy when you are sad and happy when you are happy. I hope you understand what I am saying. Like, music is really good.” (P14)

“Music boosts my mood when I feel down, it helps me sleep when I am restless, it makes me feel good. Maybe at night when I can't sleep and am just thinking a lot, I take my earphones and just play happy music. Like my happy music is Amapiano, deep house and RnB sometimes. Amapiano is a mood booster.” (P14)

As reflected in these excerpts, participants believed that music enabled a happy mood and bolstered their spirits especially when they were low. Most participants reported that Amapiano music was their go-to music genre, when they wanted to uplift their mood. In this vein, Moore (2018) reported that music can promote a happy mood as it causes the brain to release dopamine, known as a feel-good hormone, which activates our brain pleasure and reward system. Moreover, several researchers have demonstrated that people use music to improve their mood daily (Saarikallio, 2007; McFerran et al., 2015; Papinczak et al., 2015).

3.3.5. Sub-theme: Depression and suicide

Some of the participants also reported that music acted as a distraction from negative thoughts. The study showed that through music, the participants were able to divert negative thoughts and feelings. They said:

“When I am sad, I listen to music a lot, it really helps distract the negative thoughts I have. I remember there was a time when I wanted to commit suicide, like I had suicidal thoughts...Listening to hip-hop music really helped me a lot with distracting my thoughts.” (P14)

“I remember, I had something that I was going through, I can't share it. ...It ended up making me suffer from depression. I would always think about ending my life and I would sit alone in a quiet room and think about negative things... But I remember, I used to listen to a lot of Tupac music (hip-hop) and they gave me so much hope... To me it is more than the music, but the lyrics or the message the song carries is important.” (P15)

“Hip-hop really helps me think clearly and helps me not think about negative things... it really helps me stay positive... When I think, I am going to fail my exams and panic... I usually listen to music and its usually hip-hop music and sometimes RnB.” (P1)

Every minute of the day, I also write and compose a song based on how I am feeling. Music has helped me forgetif it wasn't for it, maybe I would have committed suicide, because every time I would start having negative thoughts, something in me would just say go listen to music, and I just play it loudly and sing very loud...

Participants reported that music helped them divert their intense negative thoughts and cope with their depression too. Participants shared that whenever they felt suicidal, music acted as a source of hope and shifted their negative emotions into positive ones. Writers such as Theorell, Kowalski and Horwitz (2019) have also suggested that listening to music can help a person cope with their difficulties. Theorell, Kowalski and Horwitz's (2019) study was carried out to examine the capacity of music to distract individuals from thinking about negative things. Their study found that music had a positive outcome in helping participants to distract negative thoughts. Another study by Avramova (2019) reflected that the lyrics of the song were also important. The study showed that when participants listened to music it had a positive message, and was effective in dispelling negative thoughts and changing their mood, to more positive and happier states. A study by Woolgar *et al.* (2005) found significant improvements only for participants who reported suicidal ideation. Currie *et al.* (2012) further found that percussion therapy significantly reduced depression in adolescents with aggressive behaviour.

3.3.6. Sub-theme: Reduces school related anxiety

The study also found that participants used music to reduce school related stress and anxiety. They said:

“Exams make me so anxious and stressed, so I always have to listen to music. And also when I have to go write the paper in the morning, on my way to school I listen to music. When I get to school, I sit alone and put my earphones on and play music loudly, it reduces my anxiety.” (P12)

“I suffer from anxiety, like I panic a lot, to a point where it feels like I can't breathe. Exams make me so stressed, and I become anxious... I use music to calm my anxiety down, and also use it to relieve the exam stress. I can't study without music; it helps me think properly and I am able to remember most of the things I study when I listen to music.” (P15)

Participants explained that music also helped them to remain calm when they faced academic related stress. One participant reported that she was able to recall her subject matter if she studied while listening to music. Most importantly, however they were able to cope with their anxiety by listening to music, which acted as their stress buffer. Akin and Iskender (2011), also reported that music countered stress-related emotional states, such as subjective worry, anxiety, restlessness, or nervousness.

Music can reduce stress and anxiety, enhance positive mood, and facilitate social bonding (Granot *et al.*, 2021). It is therefore not surprising that mood regulation, venting negative emotions, maintaining positive mood, immersion in heightened emotion, energizing or relaxing, is repeatedly cited as one of the most important reasons for listening to music (Lonsdale and North, 2011; Baltazar and Saarikallio, 2016). Music therefore has been a popular activity that people may employ to alleviate stress and anxiety and to boost their emotional and mental wellbeing (Granot *et al.*, 2021).

3.4. Theme: Community-based music interventions

Music has been utilised as a tool for improving public health, reducing inequalities and promoting the wellbeing of young people (Francilion and Williams, 2018). A study carried out with disadvantaged young people from Scotland showed that community-based music interventions achieved a positive outcome on the self-confidence, wellbeing, and engagement of disadvantaged young people. In the United Kingdom, community-based music interventions have gained prominence as a potential means to positively influence individuals' physical and psychological health (Brunton *et al.*, 2017).

Recently, music therapists have come to realise that the mental health of an adolescent must be seen within its totality and as part of other social systems. Music therapists are now on the way to using music to bridge the gap between individuals and communities, to create a space for common music-making and sharing of artistic and human values (Juslin and Sloboda, 2013).

3.4.1. Sub-theme: Creating a sense of belonging

The participants believed that community-based music activities could be of great value to adolescents in the community. One participant emphasised that if music is introduced in the community, it could create a sense of belonging and could connect people in the community. He further expressed that it could make a person feel better knowing that he/she was not the only one going through a situation. He/she said:

“Maybe have a place where we play and listen to music, and be part of people, it will make you feel good. I think music can really make you feel like you belong, it will connect us as a community... like, seeing other people who are going

through the same thing you are going through can really make you feel like you are not alone, but you have other people who are going through what you are going through.” (P6)

“If music is introduced in the community, it can really connect us in the community. I mean if we all come together in one space to listen and play music, it can really bring us together. We can be like a family.” (P4)

Participants expressed that music could strengthen community relationships as it has the ability to bring people together in one space and make them feel like they are family. Oberle, Ji, Guhn, Schonert-Reichl and Gadermann (2019) opined that music helps in building and managing social relationships, including practicing social skills, cooperating, and communicating with peers and community

3.4.2. Sub-theme: Create a safe space

Participants stated that community music-based activities could create a safe space for them within the community. They said as follows:

“We can have a place where young people meet and go there when they not okay, where they can listen to music or compose music and write it, because music is healing, and it helps you express yourself and feel better after. I think this will make them feel safe and think that you know what, I am not alone... and because we are all going through the same thing, no one is going to judge me.” (P12)

“Just like playing sport, we can have a safe space in the community where we play music and musical instruments, so we distress and to help us calm down.” (P3)

“Introducing community-based music can really help in our communities, because our communities are not safe... there is a lot that is going on in our communities. If they could create a safe space where we can all participate in music as youth...we can use that space for music, whenever one is feeling down, they can go there for healing or when they need to distress, and so many other things.” (P7)

Music can be a healing modality for emotional as well as physical pain (Gutgsell *et al.*, 2013). According to Norman (2017), South African communities are unsafe due to the violence that happens both at the homes of adolescents and in the community at large. As participants shared, community-based groups or meetings can be used to develop interest in music and can be used to create a safe space where adolescents feel free to express themselves in whatever way they wish to, whether by playing, listening to live music or through recorded music, or by singing.

4. Conclusion

Music is a powerful and universal medium that can have positive effects on the well-being of adolescents, especially those who face psycho-social challenges. This study revealed how music can be used as a healing and developmental tool for adolescents from a disadvantaged community in South Africa. The study showed that music can help adolescents cope with stress, express their emotions, enhance their self-esteem, and foster their social skills. The study also highlighted the personal meaning and significance of music in adolescents' lives, as well as the diverse ways they engage with music. The study recommends that music-based interventions be integrated into the existing programmes and services for adolescents in the community, and that further research be conducted to explore the potential of music as a healing methodology for adolescents in similar contexts.

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